

AUSTRALASIAN Catholic Press Association Awards
Adelaide
8th September, 2011

Aurora was awarded:

Best Social Justice Coverage for Tracey Edstein's story on Donna Mulhearn – *Just Stop Having Babies?*

Most Improved Publication (Newspaper or Magazine)

Best Regional Publication

Bishop Philip Kennedy Memorial Prize – Magazine: Highly Commended (which is basically runner-up to the 'gold logie' of ACPA Awards)

Below are comments the judges made about *Aurora* in each of these categories.

7. Best Social Justice Coverage

Winner

Publication: *Aurora*

Author: Donna Mulhearn

Title: "*Just Stop Having Babies?*"

Comments:

This article invites readers to imaginatively place themselves in a community discovering the real costs and consequences of war. It challenges us to consider how the struggles and concerns of mothers and children in Fallujah should be our concerns too. The article is an engaging and accessible treatment of a complex issue, which has received scant attention in the mainstream media: namely, the potential long-term harmful effects on human beings and the environment from the use of depleted uranium weapons. It draws upon various strands of the Christian tradition's thinking about issues of war and peace to remind us that moral laws are not suspended with the outbreak of war; that all is not fair in war; and that building up arms does not ensure peace. It invites readers to consider joining with Pax Christi and others in the campaign to ban these weapons which continue to have devastating effects long after hostilities have formally ended.

16. Most Improved Publication (Newspaper or Magazine)

Winner

Publication: *AURORA* (Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle)

Editor: Tracey Edstein

Comments:

The complete cover-to-cover makeover of *Aurora* magazine sets a new standard for others, far beyond the boundaries and often punitive purse-strings of diocesan publications.

All that remains of its forerunner is the distinctive masthead tweaked to sit comfortably across the near-tabloid-size cover with its attention-commanding photo and contents teasers.

Aurora has also become monthly supplement in the Newcastle Herald and several other regional newspapers delivering a circulation of 70,000 and broad readership any regional magazine would covet. This is a quality book chasing general popularity with its willingness to take on the hard issues, even at the Church's expense, while continuing to honour its diocesan role. Their biggest challenge will be to maintain the high standards of editorial and picture content set by their first new-look issues.

17. Best Regional Publication

Winner

Publication: *Aurora*

Editor: Tracey Edstein

Comments:

The mark of any newspaper or magazine is to reflect the community it represents; and none did this better than *Aurora*. By focusing clearly on the people who make up its community – as opposed to some of the other publications, which appear to rely on overwritten columns, scattered layouts and listings – *Aurora* showed it understands its readers, their hopes and aspirations. It was also the (easily) best designed publication, with clean open pages, solid display of strong images and creative use of white space.

23. Bishop Phillip Kennedy Memorial Prize – Magazine

Winner

Publication: *Kairos Catholic Journal*

Comments:

This is a significant fortnightly publication produced by a small team, covering a wide range of issues - relevant and important to its market. Apart from being very well produced and cleanly designed it is the real focus on consistent, quality content which makes it the stand out winner.

Highly commended

Publication: *Aurora*

Comments:

This is a substantial, professionally produced publication by a small team. It is not afraid to confront important issues, innovative production methods and vibrancy not common in church publications.

Here is the link to the full list of winners -

<http://www.cathnews.com/uploads/doc/2011/09/Summary%20of%20ACPA%20Winners.doc>.

This is a wonderful result for all involved in deciding to take *Aurora* on the journey she has been taking over the past year and for Tracey Edstein and the *Aurora* editorial team for bringing the new-look *Aurora* to life!

AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE 2011

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AWARDS AND JUDGES' COMMENTS

Category 1

Best news item

Gold Award: NZ Catholic – Quake-hit parishes rally – 12 – 25 September 2010

In the year of Wiki Leaks, the Haiti Earthquake, the Chile Mine Miracle, the International Economic Meltdown, North Korean Attacks and Iran's Nuclear Defiance this page 1 story captured many facets of the trauma people encountered as a result of the New Zealand Earthquake on 4 September – published just a week later. The death of their parish priest a few days before and the shattering of their parish church of St Paul in Dallington in the Diocese of Christchurch made people "want to come together as a parish to share their grief". Comments from the Bishop of Christchurch, and members of other parishes and schools offer a broader aspect to the story.

Silver Award: Focus – Nation pauses to remember the Centaur – April 2010

This story presented the history and honoured the people who died in the pre-dawn hours of 14 May 1943 near Moreton Island on the hospital ship, **Centaur**. It evoked the atmosphere of the people gathered to express national thanks and remembrance in an ecumenical service where civic and religious leaders joined rows of older Australians who represented the heart of this cruel loss of life.

Bronze Award: Salvation Army National Editorial – War Cry – Team Effort – 30 October 2010

A centre-spread in a monthly magazine, well illustrated and with break-out reflective quotes from local people covered the post-earthquake recovery effort of the Salvation Army in Christchurch. The coverage was well researched and written from the perspective of Australian SA people who assisted in the relief work: "We went there to support them; whatever they asked us to do, we got on and did it."

Congratulations all!

Category 2

Best feature (single author)

Gold Award: The Lutheran – Leaving Him – September 2010

The important issue of domestic violence, often hidden or underplayed in faith communities, is covered sensitively in this article, with real stories and practical information. A compelling article.

Silver Award: Touchstone – Prostitution law reform – the consequences – August 2010

An informed, well-researched and well-written coverage of a complex social and economic issue, bringing a variety of perspectives in respectful exchange to work through ethical and practical considerations in reviewing five years of prostitution law reform.

Bronze Award: Anglican Media Sydney – Southern Cross – SRE: Can we afford to lose it? – February 2010

Good research, several interviews, a clear grasp of the issues, break-out boxes of information, engaging writing and an effective layout make this an effective feature article on a topical issue of broad interest.

Highly Commended: War Cry (NZ, Fiji & Tonga) – The Long March – 25 September 2010

The Salvation Army's work on the frontline of social issues provides rich material for incisive features addressing topical social issues strongly grounded in real life events. This article is a case in point, on Maori gang members kicking methamphetamine addiction through a Salvation Army program. Well-written, good photos, and a gritty but ultimately optimistic story.

Highly Commended: The Majellan – Motherhood – October-December 2010

This first-person essay about what it has meant to be a mother as one's children grow from infancy to adulthood is humorous, whimsical, wise, poignant and deeply engaging.

General: While there were some stand-out submissions in this category – and several which I should have liked to give awards to but couldn't – overall I was a bit underwhelmed by the standard of entries this year. Mostly it was the quality of writing which disappointed. Good ideas struggled to come to life in wooden phrases and insufficient empathy or imagination to engage a reader. I'd also note that the layout – while not a central consideration in judging for this category – sometimes lets the text down, when it can play such a powerful part in drawing a reader's interest.

Category 3

Best feature (multiple authors)

Gold Award: Australian Catholics- Mary MacKillop Commemorative Issue - Christmas 2010

Feature articles in this category tend to fall into one of two types; coverage of events, or exploration of issues. The canonisation of Australia's first officially recognised Catholic Saint, Mary MacKillop, demanded event coverage on a local, national, and global scale. It also provided an opportunity to reflect on the deeper issues of contemporary faith. The coverage in Australian Catholics provided all of these. From historical reflections on Mary's life, through to the Canonisation event in Rome, and on to the impact on the lives of ordinary Australians, young and old, this big story was well covered. It is the sort of feature that serves both the search for information, and as a lasting souvenir of a significant event.

Silver Award: The Lutheran - Fear @ Home - March 2010

Here is a contemporary issue of immediate relevance, handled with appropriate directness yet sensitivity. Expert insight is presented alongside personal experience in a manner that is not 'finger-wagging' or moralising in tone. It makes clear that abusive behaviours are as likely within the community of faith as outside. The feature also avoids gender stereotyping. It is accessible and useful to a wider readership outside the church. The production values are restrained yet powerful.

Bronze Award: The Anglican Messenger - Environmental feature - September 2010

This feature on perhaps the most pressing issue of our times invites both reflection and action. The articles range across the politics, theology and personal dimensions of the environmental debate. Produced as part of the 'Sustainable September' initiative, this is a guide to liturgical and practical engagement. The variety of authorship is good. The layout is consistent with the house style of the magazine, but perhaps not as engaging as it could have been for the significance of the issue.

Highly Commended: Kairos Catholic Journal - Canonisation of St. Mary of the Cross MacKillop - 31 October 2010

This coverage of the Canonisation of Australia's first Saint, is definitely event oriented. It is full of colour and movement from Rome to Brunswick. The excitement and activity of the celebration is well presented, particularly one or two beautiful images from the Melbourne Exhibition. Essentially descriptive in nature, the feature does its job well. **Highly Commended: The Melbourne Anglican. - 'The Case for God' - March 2010**

This supplement to The Melbourne Anglican, presents a series of pieces designed to challenge the 'conventional wisdom' of the new atheism. The feature makes an issue of an event - the Global Atheist Convention. It deserves mention for its willingness to pick up the challenge. Whilst drawn from various sources to fit the chosen theme, and directed principally at thinking Christians, the range of articles - from science to suffering - may prove of wider interest.

Highly Commended: Insights - What Hath God Wrought' - October 2010

Here is an issue of contemporary church and public life which has no great immediate political import, but perhaps considerable long term social significance. The excitement, demands and dangers new technologies are explored in an attractive yet challenging manner. It is a salutary reminder of the possibilities and perils contained in Marshal McLuhan's observation, 'The medium is the message'.

Category 4

Best editorial/opinion piece

Gold Award: The Southern Cross - Dying no simple matter - October 2010

Silver Award: LinkWELL - Growing together - June 2010

Bronze Award: Anglican Messenger - Should one pay taxes to Caesar - July 2010

Published around tax time!

Highly commended: War Cry (NZ, Fiji & Tonga) - It's how we're drinking - 22 May 2010

Highly commended: War Cry (NZ, Fiji & Tonga) - Honour the Treaty of Waitangi - 30 January 2010

Overall Comments:

I found it quite a challenge to compare and judge the 31 entries in this category. As might be expected, there was a very wide range in style and format.

Essentially, this category is for editorials. The criteria state that it 'covers those opinion pieces written by the editor or commissioned by the editor. Topicality, quality of argument and writing, and presentation of a distinctly Christian perspective should be considered.'

What I therefore looked for was a concise, crisp and well argued presentation, commenting on a topical issue from a 'distinctly Christian perspective'. I presume that those entries not written by the editor were, in fact, commissioned by him/her as the criteria require, but it was not possible to verify this.

A number of the entries were somewhat discursive and anecdotal in style. One or two had a 'promotional' slant while, admittedly, making a point. One was very politically and personally slanted. Several came across more as Christian apologetics than an 'opinion piece'. Others were bordering on short theological treatises rather than comment. One was more than 50 per cent quote from an identified source. Several were pieces by senior church leaders. Some entrants did not bother to complete the Entry Coupon fully!

In the end, I decided on the following awards.

Category 5

Best layout

Gold Award: Target Magazine – TEAR Australia

Silver Award: Impact – Wesley Mission

Bronze Award: War Cry (NZ, Fiji & Tonga)

Highly commended: Signs of the Times

Highly commended: Pipeline

Category 6

Best front page

Gold Award: Target Magazine – October 2010

Silver Award: On Fire – January 2010

Bronze Award: Anglican Encounter – October 2010

Highly commended: Anglican Media Sydney – Southern Cross – September 2010

Highly commended: War Cry (NZ, Fiji & Tonga) – July 2010

Category 7

Most improved publication

Gold Award: New Times

New Times demonstrates a major re-design of a publication changing not only its format from tabloid to magazine but also from primarily black and white to full colour. The cover designs were simple in design, yet attractive. The addition of kicker lines of articles inside the issue would assist in drawing readers to stories inside the magazine.

The interior design was contemporary and of a high standard showing good use of colour. In the issues reviewed there were occasions when the design fell away i.e. pages 6 & 7 of the September 2010 edition. This was primarily when pages reverted to black only.

Overall and excellent publication showing a major improvement from its earlier tabloid format.

Silver Award: Anglican Media Sydney – Southern Cross

The cover designs showed a marked shift from the 2009 editions and were visually attractive and enticing. A magazine should say, "Pick me up now!" and the issues reviewed did this. The imagery was visually strong and relevant to the issues content. The masthead was well designed and easily identifiable. I found the size of the magazine to be a disadvantage. The small number of pages meant the publication lacked 'bulk' and was hard to handle. The publication showed an excellent mix of topical and relevant photos to content. The interior three column design showed a clean contemporary style with a good use of white space.

Bronze Award: The Record

A movement from Black and White to colour with strong pictorial cover design relevant to the editorial content. Cover kicker lines encourage the reader to open and read. Good use of colour adds to appeal of the publication. Some feature pages would benefit from opening up the design through breaking up solid text with cross heads or other design techniques.

General:

The judging was assisted through the use of a small focus group of around 10 individuals. I am aware that subjective opinions form a major part in the appeal of a publication and this was a factor in the final decisions. It would assist the judging process if each entry was accompanied by a brief background document that included the following information: What were the factors that led to the decision to re-design the publication? An indication of the editorial staff of the publication. Was the design undertaken in house or through engaging external graphic designer/s?

Category 8

Best regional publication

Gold Award: The Tasmanian Catholic

Profoundly local, but with a good seasoning of stories from beyond Tasmania. Front pages are engaging, layout is easy to follow and consistent across editions. Good use of photos, exploiting quarto layout. Gives a good view of what Catholics are thinking and doing in Tasmania.

Silver Award: The Gippsland Anglican

Strong focus on local community, greatly aided by photographs. A wide range of contributors, sensitively edited. Tabloid format allows strong use of pictures, but front page does let publication down – too texty, and better images available in some instances.

Bronze Award: Aurora

Good intentional mix of rural and city-based stories, local and national or international. Very colourful front pages, let down a little by overlong, texty stories and small photos inside. Needs to be more consistent, but good range of views – not shying away from controversy and acknowledging alternate understandings.

General:

A very challenging category to judge. These awards recognize the publications that spoke best to the worshipper in the pew, rather than to church officialdom. I was impressed by all of the Mary MacKillop editions – putting local priests'/students/members'/bishops viewpoints on celebrations of her elevation. Top three are very professionally produced publications.

Category 9**Best article, applying faith to life**

Gold Award: Anglican Messenger – Spirituality in Business – February 2010

Silver Award: Revive – Grit, Dirt and the beauty of life – December 2010

Bronze Award: Aurora – A Journey of Faith: one Woman's story

Highly Commended: Guardian – A Wounded Healer – May 2010

Highly Commended: The Record – the Real Mile High Club – May 2010

General:**Category 10****Best theological reflection**

Gold Award: Anglican media Melbourne – The Melbourne Anglican – A 'more subtle science' reveals divine reality – May 2010

An interesting overview of the life and work of a fascinating and accomplished individual, noting a key aspect of their life's contribution. This article did well to engagingly inform both on the person and a complex aspect of their thinking, in a concise and accessible manner. It is extremely well written, with complete sentences, wide vocabulary, lack of cliché, and is accessibly pitched. Enjoyable to read, even several times, and does well to cut through to the heart of the subject's essential topic and present it clearly and concisely but not superficially. I was left intrigued and keen to find out more about the subject – a sure sign of quality especially after a longer article.

Silver Award: Focus – 'What gives this story such power?' – December 2010

A clear and interesting article that ticks the primary boxes of being interesting, concise and clear. The idea flows well throughout as each sentence leads perfectly to the next. It takes great skill to make a complex and profound idea both accessible and interesting in a short article, while still revealing greater insight rather than brevity only. This article gave me a fresh picture of the incarnation, and passed pass the ultimate test: It stayed clearly in my mind hours later!

Bronze Award: Anglican Media Melbourne – The Melbourne Anglican – Hawking's 'theory of everything' leaves out God. – October 2010

An article that pitches well on a weighty topic, and makes an important central point. Though delving into matters that reveal specific expertise, it presents the information clearly and largely resists overly scientific language. The scope is large and thoughtful and while its accessibility could have been increased through some tighter phrasing, the subject matter demands a certain density. An informative article which most will find educative and interesting.

General:

I thank the nominees for their efforts and their enduring commitment to religious publication, an often underrated, yet powerful, ministry and skill. It requires time, precision and creativity.

I believe articles in our popular religious publications should be of the most concise written literature available. It is a field where huge universal themes must be wrestled into comparatively short articles. Similar to a sermon, the ordinary person's attention must be grasped and led into a discussion on some of the most important subjects written about.

Therefore the importance of clarity is paramount. Articles should have one great idea, and weave a coherent logical path through it. General bible-talk or Christian cliché are unhelpful in this – they are our equivalent of 'manager-speak' for our discipline. Unhelpful also is scriptural proof-texting on each point and paragraph. The aim is not a bible study, nor a systematic theology. Rather, I believe, we must aim for a kind of 'non-fiction narrative' - a clearly articulated, unfolding story of argument and thought. If the reader gets lost or bored, it's not their fault!

The best metaphor for this is given to us by the great master of our discipline, CS Lewis, who spoke of writing being like driving sheep down a road, making sure they don't divert off into any open gates along the way.

Most importantly, it must be interesting. If the article is to serve its purpose then the reader must discover things along the way, things they did not previously know or have not considered from a new perspective. The weight of the topics matters not if the reader switches off. Indeed, the weightier the topic, the greater the crime.

I judged the entries this year by the given criteria, but from this perspective, that is - how well the idea and message was communicated. Thus simply providing information, no matter how personal, academic or significant, entirely outweighs how it was delivered.

My last comment is one of recommendation - and for this I may get into trouble – for the best advice ever given on writing comes from George Orwell in his essay Politics and the English Language (1946) which is available for free online, and which I reread every year in an struggling attempt to do as many of you have so well – communicate pithily with commitment and care.

Category 11

Best story on social justice

Gold Award: Marist Messenger – With Joy – Filled Hearts – June 2010

Great example of the exercise of ‘responsible disobedience’ for a just cause with a clam appeal to a higher moral law and the place of passive resistance as a means to social justice

Silver Award: Pipeline – Building a bridge to belonging – May 2010

Good coverage of how the Salvation Army has adapted to embrace and include a significant Aboriginal leader and therefore enhance its capacity to engage in indigenous ministry as a pathway to reconciliation. Beautifully presented.

Bronze Award: Revive – ‘They have the right to be here’ –December 2010

Good example of how Christians in local communities can be welcoming neighbours of refugees and advocate in favour of a just approach to asylum seekers

Highly commended: The Lutheran – Here we see Jesus – November 2010

Story of encouragement for young people to engage with people who are homeless, find out more about their stories and lives and see Jesus in their midst.

Highly commended: The Spirit – Alcohol, Parenting and the family – March 2010

Good expose of issues relating to the impacts of alcohol misuse on effective parenting.

General:

This was a difficult task with the quality of entries high overall. A very diverse range of issues are covered, each with their intrinsic value to the common good and social justice. A significant focus on refugee issues was evident, as well as a balance between domestic aspects of justice and overseas aid and development moves.

Category 12

Best story by a new or non-professional writer

Gold Award: Kairos Catholic Journal - The Living Body of Christ - 21 March 2010

A colourfully descriptive personal story that makes a profound theological point.

Silver Award: The Lutheran – absolution - September 2010

A powerful story that unfolds the ‘journey’ of an anorexic young woman to her discovery of her worth in God’s eyes.

Challenges readers to discover their own ‘dark place’.

Bronze Award: Signs of the Times - church: love me and leave me - March 2010

A thoughtful piece that analyses well a current trend.

General:

As might be expected in this category, topics covered a wide range, though many were ‘personal experience’ stories.

A couple of publications entered stories written by young people or school leavers, Though these entries were not winners, the publications are to be applauded for encouraging young people to contribute to their pages.

Perhaps the definition of what constitutes a ‘non-professional’ writer may need to be clarified.

Category 13

Best headline

Gold Award: Insights – Hey Moses, you call that a tablet! – October 2010

Nice juxtaposition – especially in a church paper

Silver Award: Target Magazine – Widows’ Might – October 2010

Works all round

Bronze Award: Together – Too hot to candle – April/May 2010

Nice one

General:

I thought this was going to be easy! What I want in a headline is something to make me stop and read more. There were some beautiful puns, some very smart turns of phrase and some good, tight use of the subeditor’s craft. Well done, all of the entries, but congratulations to the standouts.

Category 14

Best original photograph

Gold Award: NCCA Act for Peace – Christmas Bowl Kit Cover - Photographer – Janet Cousens

The judges immediately responded to this shot. It serves its purpose brilliantly, sending a very positive message about health and happiness in adversity while avoiding the damaging visual clichés of ‘suffering’ that are often used to manipulate donors.

This image makes the viewer feel good about their giving and about the recipients. The relational moment captured is pure gold. The bright colours catch the eye and are well contrasted against the natural, neutral tones of the building. There is a

lovely informality about the capture. Even if the shot was set up it doesn't look that way. An excellent example of a respectful photograph that tells enough story to draw the reader in.

We note that the original print is far superior to the overly saturated and pp'd version used on the cover. This is unfortunate but the shot is good enough to survive the assault.

Silver Award: Insights – Ecumenism means you, too - Photographer – Lyndal Irons

This photograph makes good use of available light. It is technically extremely well handled. The harmonious visual relationship between the three subjects draws the eye and continues to engage the viewer. A very fine alternative to the 'three people against a wall' style of shot that pervades religious publications. The slightly 'muddy' tones of the picture could have been cleaned up in post.

Bronze Award: Impact – Dally Dog - Photographer – Jan Kuczerawy

A well conceived shot that visually lifts what could have been a very ordinary story into an immediate relational context. It reveals warmth and spontaneity and has the visual impact to stop the reader and draw them to the story. Good, simple use of lighting (flash). The story might be all about the man but the picture is all about the dog. Smart move!

Highly Commended: Voice of the Martyrs Prayer Calendar – Prayer Calendar 2011 – Photographer John Wilson

The photo has no real 'editorial punch' but is a beautiful portrait. Fine use of available light. The subject has an engaging expression. There is nothing OTT about this. We have no doubt that this photo would help sell calendars – and that's what its job is. While the print we received was extremely well pp'd that subtlety was murdered in the print run by poor cropping and clumsy contrast enhancement which do not do the subject or photographer justice.

General:

Judges:

Don Brice: Don has worked as a commercial photographer for many years, with commissions spanning the world in magazines and advertising for both the corporate world and voluntary photography for the non-for-profit sector. Don is an Australian Institute of Professional Photographers (AIPP) Master of Photography (M.Photos) and served three years on the Advertising, Commercial Media Photographers of Australia federal board. His work is regularly exhibited.

Stephen Daughtry: Stephen has extensive experience with communications and publications in a religious context. He worked for many years for an international mission agency as film-maker, journalist, photographer and storyteller. He has also worked as an editor, most recently of the Anglican Church Guardian, winning the Most Improved Publication award at ARPA 2010.

Category 15

Best original artwork

Gold Award: Anglican Media Sydney – Southern Cross – The Atheists are coming! – April 2010

Great mix of styles for maximum effect! Adds the 'whiff of clever humour' to a tricky subject. The simplicity adds greatly to the power of illustration. Effective use of negative space.

Silver Award: Jesuit Communications – Eureka Street – Kristina Keneally's Catholic Conscience – 15 October 2010

Excellent colour! Comes up well even in reduced size. Provokes one to want to read the article. Clean lines reproduce well.

Bronze Award: On Fire – Sorry, You're not my type – 17 July 2010

Not predictable in any way! Simple design is effective. (Colours do not aid the work. Design not tied to text with early clarity)

Highly Commended: Parish Connections – Seeing Christmas as an Artist's Prayer – December 2010

Lovely loose drawing! (Should have dominated the text more effectively) A few more drawings would have supported the ideas of the article more successfully.

General:

Category 16

Best news release

Gold Award: NCCA Act for Peace – Christmas Bowl Delivers Aid as Crises Loom – November 2010

Good strong opening para, and quite a good headline to grab an editor's attention. The opinion statement in the 2nd para show initiative, but could be phrased more dramatically for greater impact.

While quite well written, with well constructed use of quotes, the whole is too long, and should finish in the 7th para, and then add the call to action at the end. Continuing as it does, it brings in a new topic (Sudan) having focused on Burma. The best releases only deal with one major idea, however fully. In this one, the threads get even more frayed at the end as migration, violence, and Gaza are added to the mix. This weakens the release. These matters could be the subject of further releases which can be put out over the period of the campaign for maximum effect and extended coverage .

Silver Award: Not awarded

Bronze Award: New Times – Political Advert Offensive – March 2011

Good attention-getting headline and sub-head – it makes an editor wonder what is coming, and therefore will stand out from the others on his/her desk. There are also some very good, strong statements, and this release is potentially well constructed.

However there are a couple of matters which in my view make it fall short of being a winner. It leaves some gaps for the reader to fill, which is risky, because the human brain, like other things in nature, abhors a vacuum! So if there is a hole, it will fill it with something of its own making, and that might not be what you want to convey in your release. So don't trust an editor to join the dots! This release needs some more filling in of the reasons for the strong opinions being stated.

Also, "guessing" (para 8) is not a good thing to report in a release like this: surmise can be dangerous when the facts aren't obvious, because someone can come along with facts that shoot you down.

One other thing: while the use of quotes is important, they can be overdone. Apart from the opening sentence (in which the web site does not belong, by the way), this release consists entirely of quotes. There needs to be more non-quotes in amongst the quotes, both for information, and variety, as well as to tie the quotes together into a more readable narrative.

General:

This was an interesting process for me, and while all the entries were well written and topical, and certainly relevant for the organisations they were coming from, I did not make a Silver award because I do not believe any were outstanding as a "news release".

I took my task to be to judge the entries as a release that the author wants news medium to take up, and run as a story, but I wonder if there may have been some confusion about this (see below).

There is certainly potential in that all entries were relevant, and the authors are all committed and enthusiastic about the topics chosen. But I am concerned that a number of these releases would have ended up in the editor's "round file", because they would not have stood out from the pile that lands daily on the editorial desk.

Some were far too long for a media release, and got confusing with overuse of statistics, although all the stats were relevant to the topic. Some did not limit themselves to a single topic. In my experience, there is never a place for more than one issue in a release. Other issues, even if related, should be the subject of separate releases, which can expand the coverage of the issue in the long run. A release that is too long or confusing will be chopped by an editor, however well written it is! But if the task is to write a full story, then there is much more scope for use of multiple issues related to the overall topic.

This led me to wonder if there might perhaps be some confusion in the understanding of the task in this competition. There is a distinction between a media release, on the one hand, where the intention is to grab the attention of an editor and get the release printed, or get a journalist to follow up the issue and write a piece; and on the other, a written news item or story – usually written by journalist or guest writer, and which may include analysis and/or comment. Some of the entries seemed to fit more into the category of news article than media release as described.

Perhaps the term "News Release" is confusing and should be reconsidered. I am sure there is a place for both in ARPA, and indeed there may be other sections of the competition that encourage the writing of news stories and feature articles.

However, I understand the word "release" to imply a pithy, attention grabbing piece that is sent to an editor in the hope that s/he would find it to be something that s/he wants to include in a publication, and I judged accordingly.

Category 17

Best humorous item

Gold Award: Jesuit Communications – Eureka Street – Julian Assange Spoils Christmas - 8 Dec 2010

Very funny and topical way to look at Christmas, amidst the media storm of the Wikileaks scandal.

Silver Award: Together – Too hot to candle – April/May 2010

A great photographic contribution to the paper, well-framed by an excellent headline.

Bronze Award: Touchstone – Cartoon, editorial page – November 2010 Topical, dry and very realistic. This 'toon shows that working with youth will always take a bit of extra effort, and that being relevant doesn't just come with keeping up with technology.

Category 18

Item or feature that shows the most originality

Gold Award: NCCA – Act for Peace – Christmas Bowl Video – December 2010

A beautifully made video in two parts. Both elements are very useful for church use and online. Creative, thought-provoking and with a beautiful life within them, these two short videos are a helpful way to think through church giving.

Silver Award: Record – Unequally yoked – September 2010

Wow. A gutsy step to ask an atheist to write their thoughts about church! Pithy, articulate, thought-provoking and encouraging, this piece may not have been original in its format, but it certainly was in its authorship and style.

Congratulations on a solid piece, which was very close to taking the gold.

Bronze Award: Anglican Media Sydney – Connecting A-Z – October 2010

A well put together booklet exploring faith, life and community. It makes church accessible, and does so with plenty of friendly faces and easy suggestions.

Highly commended: The Gippsland Anglican – How will you ‘spend’ Christmas? = December 2010

An excellent, original way to ask the question of what consumerism is worth, while promoting the work of op-shops everywhere. The idea is excellent and the choice of pictures is helpful in painting the pictures. The layout was a little hard to follow however, and more lighting on the photographed subjects (in situ or in post-production) would have helped the overall cohesiveness of the piece as a ‘catalogue’ for better spending.

General:

While this was a very popular category, many of the entries would have been better suited to other categories like best photograph, editorial, applying faith to life etc. ARPA participants should be encouraged to think more carefully about this in future. To be original is to have an idea that is creative, exceptional, never seen before. Very few entries achieved this - all that did received an award. The two highest entries blew me away with their creativity, the other two were also excellent entries.

Category 19

Best review of another medium

Gold Award: Parish Connections – From My Bookshelf - Rowan’s Rule – October 2010

Maintaining good balance in a book review is a fine line, but this entry achieves it admirably. It focuses not only on the primacy of Rowan Williams as Archbishop of Canterbury, but takes us back to his days as a young priest and scholar. Insights are revealed progressively in an orderly and cohesive way. This is a lively and engaging review and leaves the reader in no doubt that Williams is “a man to be reckoned with.” A well constructed review, well written, and above all, “Well done!”

Silver Award: The Lutheran – How precious is love – February 2010

This review takes the reader on a brief but comprehensive journey through what can be expected in the film ‘Precious’, which portrays the life of an obese 16-year-old black American girl living in an inner-city slum. It skillfully reveals the depressing scenario in which the principal characters operate, and measures it all against a Christian understanding of love. While the reviewer admits this is not a film for everyone, he shows that real love can still make a positive difference. A persuasive and nicely crafted piece of writing!

Bronze Award: NZ Baptist – CD Reviews – June 2010

These are no-nonsense, talented and insightful reviews of a group of CDs, each carefully rated by the reviewer against a Christian background using a familiar five star system. They reveal a comprehensive knowledge not only of the Christian music scene but also of the broader sphere of contemporary music. They are written in an engaging and original style that will appeal to enthusiasts of the genre, while at the same time enticing enough to invite musical novices who might not know a riff from a hook to explore a little deeper!

Highly commended: ACCatalyst – Brand new Aboriginal – Bran Nue Dae – February 2010

This is a well-researched review, with a lengthy preamble providing useful background that helps the reader gain perspective before a detailed analysis of this Australian film’s story line. The setting is in and around Broome in Western Australia at the end of the 1960s, and the reviewer suggests at the outset that the Christian faith is central to understanding the experience of Aboriginal people in the film. Although the film is analyzed in considerable detail, the review is easy reading with a deftness of style and word choice that prevents it from becoming heavy going. This approach matches the general brightness of the film. The review neatly weaves a Christian perspective throughout, but not in a judgmental way. This is an enthusiastic and entertaining piece of writing!

General:

Many entries in this section were of a high standard, making the selection of awards a close call, not unlike a photo finish in a major race. Writers of reviews would do well to recognize that, to put it simplistically, people read reviews to find answers to basic questions such as: What is this particular film/book/CD etc. about? What can I expect to find as a Christian? What are its positives and negatives from a Christian perspective? What is the reviewer’s impartial and unbiased opinion of it? While most entries tackled the first question reasonably well, too many largely ignored the remaining or similar questions, and as a result lacked balance and overall effectiveness. Some revealed their personal bias early, then proceeded to find as many negative or positive aspects as possible to support their viewpoint. Some did not write their reviews from a distinctly Christian perspective as required. While these comments are not intended to be a “blueprint” for a perfect entry in this section, they hopefully indicate that there is more to a review than wordy generalizations or a parade of personal prejudices. To those who missed an award on this occasion, take heart, you were probably closer than you think!

Category 20

Best website

Gold Award: SPANZ

Silver Award: Act for Peace

Category 21

Best ecumenical story

Gold Award: Insights – Ecumenism means you, too - August 2010

Coherent oversight of ecumenical advances & opportunities, well written & constructed as a major feature article. It includes individual stories, and informed & focused comment by ecumenical leaders on a global, national, & regional level. It offers perspective & hope, including practical examples such as the National Covenant.

Silver Award: Crosslight – Through the eyes of our neighbours – September 2010

Interesting story of a progressive & ambitious interfaith project. Provides a point of perspective for Australians looking back at themselves through the eyes of an Indonesian Christian. Well laid out, interesting photo (colour) in centre spread format.

Encouraging pull out quotes in boxes.

Category 22

Best electronic publication

Gold Award: cathnews

Silver Award: Eureka

Bronze Award: The Transit Lounge

Premier Award - The Gutenberg Award 2011

(awarded by the President from member nominations and after consultation)

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