

Journalism: an education and educational

Here is the text of Ana Rodriguez-Soto's talk while accepting the Miami Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women's 2023 award for her support of Catholic education. The award was presented at the MACCW's annual scholarship luncheon, held Feb. 25, 2023 at the Embassy Suites in Fort Lauderdale.

I truly appreciate this honor because I am most certainly a supporter of Catholic education – and a product of it – and I made sure my son and daughter also graduated from Catholic elementary and high schools – Our Lady of the Lakes and Chaminade-Madonna – 13 years in all!

My son William and his wife Christine are here. My daughter, Mary and her husband, Sean, live in South Carolina and couldn't make it. She's also expecting our first grandchild in April.

I would like to introduce other family members who are here: my husband, Tony; my mother, Carmen; my sister, Maria; and my lifelong friends from Catholic school: Diana, Josie and Maria.

I met Diana in elementary school at Immaculate, we both went to Pace and then to Barry.

Josie also went to Pace but we knew each other from before: my mother and her father were members of Juventud de Acción Católica – a nationwide Catholic youth movement in Cuba.

And Maria I met at Pace. She had attended Gesu before that. Her father also worked for Catholic Charities for many years.

I also got into this business, and the archdiocese, through my counselor at Pace, Carmen Zabalegui. I was looking for a summer internship before my last year of college, and she let me know the editor of La Voz Catolica, Araceli Cantero, was going to be stepping away for a while. The rest is the "history" you heard from Mary.

So Catholic schools, as you can see, gave me a great education, great friends, great memories and a very rewarding career.

I am very grateful for that Catholic education, and having paid for one myself, I know it was quite a sacrifice for my parents 50 years ago.

Most of us who have paid for a Catholic education know that it can certainly strain a family's finances.

Which is why I was happy to hear, 24 years ago, that the MACCW was sponsoring this scholarship for eighth grade girls who want to continue their Catholic education in high school. It's a great and much needed initiative. And that's why the Florida Catholic has covered this luncheon almost every year: People need to know about this so they can support it.

Going back to what Mary told me in that email, I am being honored for "your continued support of our efforts in fostering education in the Archdiocese of Miami."

That brings me to the other reason I am very grateful for this honor, because I consider what I do – journalism – to be a type of education.

Journalists cover the news, yes. But what does that mean?

That means going where most people can't go:

- to our sister diocese in the poorest part of the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, Haiti;
- to World Youth Day in Poland;
- to Cuba when a pope visits – 3 times!;
- to Germany when Pope Benedict returns to his homeland;
- to Rome, when archbishops get their palliums – 2 times!
- And to Surfside when a building collapses.

As you can see, unlike in the secular world, it's been mostly good news, but not always.

And what do journalists do when they go to those places – or any place – and cover those events? They talk to people. They take notes. They ask questions.

In a word, they learn. They learn as much as they can as quickly as they can.

And then they turn around and do their best to share that knowledge with their readers.

Isn't that education?

So in a sense, journalists are both learners and teachers. The old adage is we write the "first draft" of history.

And history is an important subject to learn. Without history, we have no context for the things we see happening in our world.

And that's why journalism is important.

Journalism has been, for me, a way of providing an education to others while continually learning myself.

This job has afforded me the opportunity to learn so much about my faith. I have covered talks by Vatican experts on the liturgy, by prominent scholars and theologians, by amazing preachers.

I consider myself so fortunate to have had those opportunities and those experiences.

So journalism is an education and journalism is educational.

And that's why journalism is important.

People say that journalists tend to be liberal. Well, if that means we are liberal in our learning, yes, that's true. If that means we're open-minded about learning, yes, that's true.

Good journalists are curious people. They want to know why and how and who and what. And of course, we want to share what we learn with others.

I tell my freelancers that if they're curious about something, chances are a whole bunch of other people are curious about it as well.

Go do that story!

Go educate yourself and then go educate others!

And that's why journalism is important.

That's why newspapers – whether you read them in print or online – are important. That's why reading more than the headline is important.

The history of the world – and very much so the history of this archdiocese – is written in volume after volume of printed and online news stories.

If you don't believe me, I invite you to come down to the Pastoral Center and start reading our clip files. Believe me, it's an education!

That's why it's so important to preserve newspapers and to support the work of journalists, both in the secular world and in the Catholic Church.

As the song asks in the musical Hamilton: "Who lives, who dies, who tells your story?"

We all have a story. As I also tell my interns and freelancers: There's always a story, no matter how boring the event might seem.

If there are people there, and you're a good journalist, you will come back with a story.

Mary [Weber of the MACCW] asked me to mention all the awards our newspapers have received. Those are good and I'm proud of them because it means our colleagues in the Catholic press recognize that we find and tell good stories.

But it hasn't been just me. I have a fantastic staff and freelancers who make me look really good. They help me cover the whole diocese. They come up with great ideas for stories. They take fantastic pictures.

My job is to let them loose!

So as long as I have the chance today, I want to thank all my freelancers, all my mentors and colleagues. You all have educated me along the way. I could not do this without you.

And as long as I'm up here as someone who knows something, I would like to tell these young women what I told my children as they were looking toward figuring out a career:

Pay attention to the nudges from God.

I know it's sometimes excruciating to figure out what you want to be when you grow up.

I assure you, God will nudge you along the right path.

God will nudge you through your parents. Listen to their advice. They know you.

God will nudge you through your teachers – like all the ones who kept returning my papers with a note saying, "You write very well." It was an affirmation of what I wanted to do but felt unsure I could do.

God will nudge you through the opportunities you receive: this scholarship, an internship, acceptance at a certain university.

You just have to be attentive to the nudges.

Looking back on 40 years of a career that has given me an incredible education; a job where I never regretted coming to work; and a work-life balance that allowed me to be a journalist and raise a family: I am very grateful to God for those nudges and those people along my path who pushed me forward.

I can honestly say God has given me all that I asked for and more than I dreamed of.

May that "good news" ultimately be your story as well.
Thank you.