

ACU opens entries for 2026 poetry prize

Entries are now open for Australian Catholic University's annual Prize for Poetry, one of the nation's richest awards for a single poem.

Sponsored by ACU's Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Catholic Mission), this year's ACU Prize for Poetry invites established and emerging poets to submit new and unpublished poetry on the theme of Witness.

The 2026 competition takes inspiration from the powerful words of Nobel laureate and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, engraved at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: "For the dead and the living, we must bear witness".

The ACU Prize for Poetry has supported Australian-based poets, writers and artists since 2013.

Local and national poets have competed alongside internationally recognised names such as Judith Beveridge, Mark Tredinnick, Stephen Edgar, Geoff Page, and Anthony Lawrence.

Blind-judged by Emeritus Professor Margot Hillel OAM and Professor Robert H F Carver, the ACU Prize for Poetry offers a total purse of over \$20,000, as well as the chance for short-listed poems to be published in the competition anthology.

Professor Hillel said the concept of witness was not new to the history of poetry, and in many ways, defined poetry.

"As the oldest literary form, predating widespread literacy, poetry has been used to preserve and pass on history and designate meaning to the world," Professor Hillel said.

"The concept of 'witness' – of giving testimony to the knowledge and observations of experiences, phenomena, and truth – is precisely what poets do.

"While it has nuanced meanings in psychology, philosophy, the law, and religion, it is nevertheless underpinned by a desire to make space for and draw attention to the realities of our world.

"The poet bears witness, but the reader also participates by gaining the knowledge of events and persons.

"We look forward to discovering the many different ways this year's entrants have responded to this year's theme of 'witness'."

As Australia awaits the appointment of the first national Poet Laureate in October, Professor Carver said it was possible that a winner of the ACU Prize for Poetry takes the position.

"Over the past thirteen years, thousands of Australian poets have embraced the opportunity to create new works for the ACU Prize for Poetry, adding to the nation's long and vibrant poetic tradition," Professor Carver said.

"Poets new and old have found their voice and won awards; others continue to have their vision and craft affirmed by publication in the anthology. There may even be a Poet Laureate among the submissions.

"Poetry has never had a more vital role to play than it does today. As AI threatens to usurp the powers of speech and reason that set us apart from the rest of creation, the poetic act of making bears witness to the essence of our humanity and our relation to the divine."

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Catholic Mission) Fr Gerald Gleeson said ACU was proud to continue the Catholic Church's longstanding tradition as patron of the arts.

"The history and life of the Church is deeply intertwined with poetic form and expression, particularly in our liturgy and sacred texts. And the faith of the Church is reflected in numerous masterpieces from Dante's *Divine Comedy* to Shakespeare's Tragedies to T. S. Eliot and Gerard Manley Hopkins", Fr Gleeson said.

"The ACU Prize for Poetry is proud to support and encourage a new collection of inspiring literary works."

Entries for the ACU Prize for Poetry close 1 July 2026.

Winners will be announced at the official Awards ceremony on 4 November 2026.

Visit the [ACU Prize for Poetry](#) website for full details on how to enter.

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