



Left: Bishop Timothy C. Senior of Harrisburg, Chairman of the CCHD Subcommittee, and Bishop Oscar Cantú of San Jose with the 2023 Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award recipient, Ivonn Rivera, at a reception during the USCCB fall plenary assembly in Baltimore, Maryland, in November 2023. (Photo: USCCB staff)

Right: 2023 Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award recipient Ivonn Rivera addresses those gathered for a reception during the USCCB fall plenary assembly in Baltimore, Maryland, in November 2023. (Photo: USCCB staff)



Faith in Action: Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award Recipient Ivonn Rivera

If anyone had the right to be frustrated with rising crime in her neighborhood, it was Ivonn Rivera. Her car had been repeatedly broken into—at least five times that she remembers—with the windows shattered time and again. Then someone crashed into her vehicle and left without taking responsibility.

BY RHINA GUIDOS

Instead of moving out, the 43-year-old mother of four decided to do something.

That something was talking. At first, she just joined others at the Silicon Valley Sponsoring Committee, a civic, faith-based organization, to vent about being fed up with the crime, the graffiti, and other conditions that affected her and her family in the Cadillac Winchester neighborhood of San Jose, California. The working-class neighborhood has been riddled with gang problems. Residents like Ivonn have long been afraid to walk freely and even more reluctant to allow their children to play or walk outside.

“After I told them about my situation, what was happening, about the needs in my community, they started supporting

me,” Ivonn said of Silicon Valley Sponsoring Committee.

The meeting didn’t stop at venting. It was a constructive listening session where the group taught her how she could do something not just to better her situation but also to help others. The committee trained her to converse with her neighbors, listen to their worries, collect that information, and ultimately take it to elected members of her local government. She started scheduling meetings with elected officials, met with city staffers, and urged them to act.

“Ivonn is incredible,” said Tom Morman, who met her through the Silicon Valley Sponsoring Committee. A member of the Diocese of San Jose’s St. Lucy Catholic parish, Tom is on the social justice



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Through the CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT (CCHD) of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Catholics and friends of CCHD

across the country help poor and low-income Americans to help themselves and their communities out of poverty.

Since 1970, CCHD has contributed more than \$462 million to over 12,000 low-income-led, community-based projects that strengthen families, create jobs, build affordable housing, fight crime, and improve schools and neighborhoods. CCHD requires that projects develop community leadership and participation so their solutions to poverty will be long-lasting and effective, and so CCHD's investment in people will help break the cycle of poverty. CCHD also educates Catholics about the causes of poverty and seeks to build solidarity between impoverished and affluent persons.



LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It is always rewarding to help communities that long have been excluded, neglected, and sometimes forgotten. In this newsletter, you will read about an exceptional wife and mother who refused to allow her struggling community in the Diocese of San Jose, California, to be ignored.

I'm also happy to share with you that Ivonn Rivera is the most recent winner of the prestigious Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award. This award from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) recognizes a young adult who demonstrates leadership in fighting poverty and injustice in the United States through community-based solutions.

Frustrated by the rising crime in her San Jose neighborhood, Ivonn—originally from Oaxaca, Mexico—talked to members of the CCHD-funded Silicon Valley Sponsorship Committee, a civic, faith-based association. The organization took her through a process to research a problem that affected her neighbors, to gather information from them, and then to hold elected officials accountable to do something about residents' worries. After receiving training from the Silicon Valley Sponsorship Committee, Ivonn took the collective concerns to city officials. And after a series of events you'll read about in this newsletter, officials responded.

Ivonn's leadership efforts at St. Lucy Catholic parish community and in San Jose's Cadillac Winchester neighborhood truly reflect the Gospel in action and the mission of CCHD. For more than 50 years, CCHD has empowered leaders like Ivonn—a mother, an immigrant, and a disciple of Christ—to work with others to address the root causes of poverty.

Sincerely in Christ,

MOST REVEREND TIMOTHY C. SENIOR, CHAIRMAN

*USCCB Subcommittee on the Catholic Campaign for Human Development
Bishop of Harrisburg*

You can be part of CCHD's critical work by donating at Mass or through your parish's online giving platform. #iGiveCatholicTogether also accepts funds for CCHD. Visit usccb.igivecatholictogether.org/organizations/usccb-catholic-campaign-for-human-development to learn more.



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committee that identifies groups who could receive funding from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) to help low-income residents like Ivonn be part of solutions and decisions that affect their lives and those of their neighbors.

Silicon Valley Sponsoring Committee is one of the groups who receive CCHD funding.

"Ivonn went to every training she could with the sponsoring committee, learned all these skills, has a natural talent in relating to people, but then, she understood how to actually get things done," Tom said.

As part of the listening sessions, Ivonn integrated a religious aspect into others' activities to organize communities around a cause: namely, a neighborhood Mass, or Misa del barrio, for the Cadillac neighborhood's Spanish-speaking residents. Instead of having Mass at the parish church, Ivonn helped organize Masses at different households in the neighborhood. At these Masses, Christ's presence in the Eucharist came into their neighborhood and spread peace in a fraught environment, especially for many neighbors who were afraid to go outside because of crime.

"She's done, I think, 22 consecutive ones," Tom said. "After the Mass, we would do a listening session to find leaders and listen to what the needs of the community are. It's incredible how much this means to people. It's just incredible. That's all Ivonn's leadership."

Through prayer-inspired action, Ivonn called on one of the local government members to walk with her and other residents through their neighborhood at night to see how dark the streets were and how overgrown trees further dimmed the street lights—a situation criminals used to their advantage to break into cars—and to experience the general uneasiness and fear those in the area feel on a daily basis.

The nighttime walking tour made TV news and newspaper headlines in the region

and put a spotlight on the crime-ridden neighborhood's plight. With it came a vow of action from local government.

"Now we have a commitment that this year all the lights in the neighborhood will be replaced with brand new, brighter bulbs, and that the trees that were blocking the light will be cut at city expense," Tom said. "So that's now a commitment that this group has won."

But what has been most rewarding to Ivonn is the renewed sense among her neighbors that they matter and others are looking out for them.

"They thought that because they don't, or we don't, speak English, no one is going to listen to us, that we're not worth anything," Ivonn added. "But now we're working to motivate people, to tell them that together we can make a change."

The coronavirus pandemic temporarily halted the neighborhood Masses in 2020, but Ivonn talked to San Jose's Bishop Oscar Cantú about restarting them, given their importance as opportunities to gather and organize.

"Ivonn has been a tireless voice in favor of the humble, who felt that they had neither voice nor vote. I approved the celebration of the Misas del barrio so that residents in poor and humble areas would know that the Church is with them and supports them in organizing their

voice for improvements in matters of security and public services," said Bishop Cantú. "The diocese is very proud of the work Ivonn Rivera has carried out. The organization of the residents, especially of neighborhoods that lack security and public services, is of great importance toward justice and peace for those residents and for the entire community."

Ivonn's story is an excellent example of how CCHD carries out its mission to reach out to society's members who are disproportionately affected by adverse conditions and help them take part in solutions to improve their lives and those of their communities.

"It's about human dignity," Tom said.

Even though he's not part of the neighborhood, Tom has started attending the Misas del barrio and interacting more with the neighborhood's residents and with St. Lucy's Spanish-speaking parishioners. Ivonn appreciated his presence and support. The plight of her neighborhood was a type of Via Crucis, or Way of the Cross, as her community faced fear, vandalism, crime, a feeling of helplessness, and the sense that no one cared. But with the support of community members they met through the Silicon Valley Sponsoring Committee, she discovered that they weren't alone. Others like Tom showed up physically to be with them.



(Left to right) Bishop Oscar Cantú of San Jose, 2023 Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award recipient Ivonn Rivera, Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles, and Ivonn's daughter, Guadalupe Delgado. (Photo: USCCB staff)



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“The people from Silicon Valley committee, even though they’re not all Catholics, they saw us as human beings, they saw that we needed help,” she said. “When we did our night walk [with the elected official], they showed up, they came from other counties and so I felt support. I said to myself, ‘You are not alone.’”

She appreciates the new friendships and the wider sense of community she now feels with people from other neighborhoods. Even though some committee members are retired and could be enjoying their lives by relaxing elsewhere, they have chosen to show up, lend support, and bolster her enthusiasm to fight for a better life.

“They want things to change, not for their benefit but for the benefit of others,” she said.

Ivonn’s work has gained national recognition. In 2023, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development awarded Ivonn the Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award, by which CCHD “recognizes a young adult who demonstrates leadership in fighting poverty and injustice in the United States through community-based solutions.”

She was honored during the bishops’ annual fall plenary assembly in Baltimore, Maryland, in November 2023.

At the parish level, Ivonn’s work has brought together the Spanish- and English-speaking communities at St. Lucy’s.

“The parish is mostly English-speaking, but it has a sizable Spanish-speaking population. And much of the Spanish-speaking population, most live in the Cadillac neighborhood,” Tom said. “Our neighborhood is kitty-corner from the Cadillac neighborhood. It sits behind a shopping center. We knew some of the kids from school because of our daughters, but I really knew nothing about it until this experience with the Misa del barrio and Ivonn.”

The struggling neighborhood’s success has inspired similar communities to ask, “How do we organize our neighborhood

like what’s being done in the Cadillac neighborhood?” They too have turned to the Silicon Valley Sponsoring Committee for help.

What Ivonn wants most is to encourage people that no matter where they are, they can become part of the change.

“I want them to have hope, to have faith,” she said. “Change doesn’t happen overnight, but with persistence, it happens.”

God and her Catholic faith—particularly praying for the intercession of the saints—helped her navigate the process of seeking justice, which is why the neighborhood Masses have been an important part of seeking change for her community. If the idea helped her community, it could help neighboring communities too.

“I think faith has been part of them opening up, trusting us, telling us their stories,” she said.

Much work remains to be done to bring peace to her neighborhood, and sometimes it seems daunting. The community still doesn’t have all the resources it needs, for youth and for others, but security on the streets is a must.

“Those of us who live here need to be able to feel safe to walk outside at night, to feel the safety that others feel, so we can go out and work, support the community,” she said.

Tom describes how Ivonn’s success has served as an example inspiring other community members to get engaged.

“Now we have a second parish doing the same thing, organizing on the east side of San Jose, also low-income, that’s basically following the example,” he said. “They do the leadership and we support. We help provide the training, but we’re the backup. We’re supporting, and they learn how to lead.”

Ivonn said prayers helped her listen and act on behalf of people who felt they didn’t have anyone to hear their pleas—but the work has been shared by an entire community.

“There are a lot of disciples, even if there’s a lot of work to do,” she said. “So that’s what encourages us, and faith encourages us, as well as hope, unity, fraternity, to make changes. That’s how we will work together and sow good seeds.”

IN GRATITUDE



Ralph McCloud

Following his 16 years of leading the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, and in gratitude for his lifetime of service to the poor, to his community, and

to the Church, CCHD bade farewell to Mr. Ralph McCloud in May. We thank him for his years of service, his dedication and hard work in standing up for the dignity of those on the margins, and his commitment to following and promoting the values of Christ as taught in the Gospels.

For more than 50 years CCHD has gone to help and empower those on the margin, those stuck in a cycle of poverty. The work Ralph led on behalf of the faithful has had a tremendous impact on people and communities working to improve their lives and the lives of their families. We will truly miss him and pray for his success in new endeavors.



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