Good evening.

Welcome and thank you for joining me to honor the 2023 winner of the Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award, presented by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development.

This evening we honor a lay woman—a wife, a mother, and a leader in her parish and community—whose work embodies the ideals of CCHD, which for over fifty years has supported initiatives that empower people in poverty to address the issues that impact their families and communities.

This year's winner, Ivonn Rivera, was nominated by her pastor at St. Lucy Parish, in the Diocese of San Jose, who described Ivonn as an active leader at the parish who first joined the parish's organizing team with CCHD-funded Silicon Valley Sponsoring Committee (SVSC) because she was troubled by the many needs facing her neighborhood, which is plagued by crime, drugs, and gang activity.

Through her parish's work with SVSC, Ivonn received leadership training and then put new skills to use! Ivonn began organizing monthly *Misas del Barrio*, to help the parish be present to neighborhoods in need.

After each Mass, Ivonn and other SVSC leaders listened in the neighborhood to understand community concerns—and to identify and invite new leaders.

Ivonn's work with SVSC has led to many opportunities to address her community's challenges. During the pandemic, Ivonn was a spokesperson when over 1,200 leaders in the California IAF network, 10 bishops and 7 state legislators advocated on Zoom with the Governor and legislature on behalf of essential workers left out of state and federal relief, helping to win the California Earned Income Tax Credit for essential workers with children under the age of six.

In 2021, Ivonn engaged her community in a months-long effort with state-wide community organizations and Catholic Charities to win statewide extension of the eviction moratorium and expansion of the rental assistance pipeline for renters in need.

In 2022, when an 8-year-old boy was hit and killed in the crosswalk going to the neighborhood school, Ivonn helped organize listening sessions. This led to a large procession from the neighborhood to St. Lucy Parish, where Ivonn co-chaired an assembly of 250 people with San Jose city officials about improving neighborhood safety. New stops signs were installed two weeks later. Work with city officials has continued; this past April, Ivonn led a night tour of the neighborhood to show city officials areas where improved lighting and safety measures are needed.

Ivonn's pastor, Fr. Rick, wrote in his nomination: "Ivonn has developed as a leader and is making a difference." Clearly this is the case!

Ivonn has incredible leadership abilities, so you might be surprised that Ivonn's community work is all-volunteer! For 18 years, Ivonn has worked in the fast food industry; she's worked her way up to restaurant manager. And of course she is fiercely dedicated to her family: her husband, Carlos and children: Iván, Dilan, Lupita and Alexander. (Lupita is here with her today!)

Leaders like Ivonn exemplify what CCHD is all about: the power of the Holy Spirit working through a humble leader, so that she and those who surround her can become protagonists of their own development.

In 2022, Ivonn sent a letter to Pope Francis, through a friend on a delegation to meet him through IAF Southwest's Welcoming the Stranger project. She couldn't believe it when Pope Francis wrote her back. As part of his response, he wrote (in Spanish, but translated to English here):

I encourage you to remain linked to a community in which you not only find support, but where you can also accompany others who are in the same situation. Onward!

And so we also say, *Adelante*, Ivonn! Onward, not on your own but surrounded by the community you have built: with your parish, your neighbors, and with CCHD, working together so that all can thrive!

I now turn it over to Bishop Cantú, of San Jose, to help present the 2023 Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership to Ms. Ivonn Rivera.