



TO GO FORTH

A blog from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Department of Justice, Peace & Human Development. Inspired by Pope Francis.

Remarks from Ana Chavarin, the 2019 Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award Winner

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On November 11th the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) presented the 2018 Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award to Ana Chavarin, interim lead organizer at the CCHD-funded group Pima County Interfaith, in Tucson, AZ. Ana was honored for her efforts mobilizing migrant families and faith communities to impact the issues that affect them. To learn more about the Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award, please see the [USCCB press release](#).

Ana's remarks offer reflections on the call to work for justice and peace in our communities:

Good evening, I am honored to be here today. I would like to thank USCCB for this opportunity, the selecting committee, Sr. Leonette Kochan who nominated me, and those who supported my nomination; My Pastor Monsignor Raul Trevizo and My Bishop from the Diocese of Tucson Bishop Weisenburger.

I am an immigrant from Mexico, I moved here in 2003. I am raising 4 kids as a single mom and I am pursuing a bachelor's degree in psychology at the University of Arizona while working in my community as an organizer.

I first became involved in **Pima County Interfaith Council**, which receives funding from CCHD, in 2014. I prayed to God to help me find the right job where I had the flexibility to take care of my children and use the skills and my passion to help others. Three days later Mr. Courtney, former lead organizer, called me and offered me a job as a project organizer starting with 10 hrs a week. This gave me the flexibility I needed plus, I had the opportunity to use my voice and train others to use their voices.

This work has helped me to achieve things I never imagine possible. I have learned how to teach, lead, think and analyze, connect with people, see what others don't see, and to have the courage to make changes in my community. All the things I have learned in my work as an organizer with

Pima County Interfaith has helped me in my education as well. When in my class I must present about a topic, I can do it easily because this is part of my daily job.

This work also brought me closer to my faith, to my God-given purpose and my community. When we work to better the life of our neighbor, I know I'm fulfilling my mission.

My work consists of finding the right people who care for their communities and who want to bring change. I work with them and train them to develop stronger skills so they can advocate for issues that threaten our families. For instance, in 2016, the issue was drugs sold legally in our low-income immigrant neighborhood. A group of concerned churches and community members came together. We had mothers sharing their stories about how this drug was destroying the life of their kids. We trained those mothers and they learned how to use their voice to defend their children, for the first time ever, they had the opportunity to use their voice and advocate for their families. Also, the drug issue led to the creation of a strong relationship between the Police department and our community at St. John's, our parish.

The results were a City Ordinance that prohibited the sale of this drug in Tucson and then passing of state law.

On the issue Immigration, I have been training leaders to host "Know your rights sessions" and workshops to learn how to do power of attorney letters, to educate families and help them to be prepared in case of being detained.

Also, every year Pima County Interfaith Council makes sure that more low-income students receive help through JobPath our workforce development program. Which helps low-income students with tuition, books and other needs to help them to achieve success. Every year, PCIC advocates for the funding needed to operate this program. Last year PCIC achieved an increase of almost 20% from the County's budget for JobPath. Over the years JobPath has lifted more than 1,500 families out of poverty into living-wage jobs.

CCHD has helped us to make this work possible. Thanks to this support we can train leaders and build stronger relationships in our community. Now we are working with over 150 new Hispanic leaders through CCHD and the impact in our community shows. Last year, when we had asylum seekers coming to Tucson, the Hispanic leaders took charge and organized their parishes to shelter immigrants. I was very proud to see that many of our leaders who came to our trainings were leading their parishes and preparing them to be shelters or assisting parishes who operated as shelters. This is the impact of CCHD in our lives.

But our work has been possible thanks to the support of Bishop Weisenburger, Bishop Emeritus Kicanas, Monsignor Trevizo, Fr. Vili Valderrama, Sr. Leonette Kochan, and Sr. Gladys Echenique. Without their support, our work would have not been the same.

One of my favorite elements in Catholic Social Teaching is Human Dignity. To me, human dignity means to make sure that every person has access to education, food, shelter, health care, a decent

job, and to live in a community free of violence and drugs. This is what CCHD helps us to protect, human dignity.

I thank God for this life and for being here in this moment. My wish is to continue to grow stronger in my faith, to continue doing this work, and that all of us will feel the call to protect the most vulnerable in our community. When I see the people working in the community reminds me of the love of God. It strengthens my faith and gives me hope for a better future. When I see the leaders working for the common good, I think, this is it! This is what is about, this is what Jesus Christ told us we should do as in Mathew 25:35-40

Ana Chavarin is the interim lead organizer at the CCHD-funded group Pima County Interfaith in Tuscon, AZ and the winner of the 2019 Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award.

