



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Mario J. Paredes recognized for advancing community health and decades of service to Catholic Church**

11th Annual New York Award dinner benefits education and ministries of Latin American Catholic Sisters

Chicago, IL — [Catholic Extension Society](#) honored Mario J. Paredes—a remarkable leader whose extensive efforts have advanced community health and promoted the Church’s mission of service—with its Spirit of Francis Award at their [11<sup>th</sup> annual New York Award Dinner](#). Paredes is the chief executive officer of SOMOS Community Care in New York. [The Spirit of Francis Award](#) recognizes an individual or group who has made a significant impact on the mission of the Catholic Church in America through service or philanthropy.

Spirit of Francis Award recipients are laudable for their commitment to “reach out to the margins of society” and Paredes, with over 20 years of leadership in health care, business, diplomacy and philanthropy, has done just that. A native of Chile and a naturalized U.S. citizen, Paredes came to the United States to serve the poor, dedicating his life to the development of leadership and service within the Latino community. Paredes is a founder of the Catholic Association of Latino Leadership, and president of the International Academy of Catholic Leaders.

Reflecting his lifelong work, proceeds from the Award dinner will support the ministries and education of Latina Religious Sisters. Three Catholic sisters in attendance, [Sister Maryud Cortés](#), Sister Mercedes Alonzo, and Sister Yelitza Ayala Gilot, shared their personal experiences as graduates of Catholic Extension Society’s [U.S.-Latin American Sisters Exchange Program](#). Their participation in the program and the master’s degree they earned not only shaped their religious life but substantially increased their capacity to serve those on the margins. Other notables in attendance included Cardinal Seán Patrick O’Malley O.F.M., Cap.

Father Jack Wall, president of Catholic Extension, who awarded Paredes alongside Cardinal Seán Patrick O’Malley O.F.M., Cap said, “The late Pope Francis was a vocal and tireless advocate for

the marginalized. Mario's extensive efforts as an inspirational leader demonstrates similar devotion, safeguarding the health and wellbeing of countless families in need."

Father Wall concluded, "As we honor Mario this evening and celebrate his accomplishments, I'm grateful for the inspiration his work lends us as we continue to build up vibrant and transformative Catholic faith communities in the poorest regions of our country."

Seán Patrick O'Malley O.F.M., Cap, said of Paredes, "There is no other layman in the United States who has made the kinds of contributions to the ministry to our immigrants than Mario Paredes."

Upon receiving the award, Paredes said, "I am grateful for the Spirit of Francis Award that is given to me by you and Catholic Extension Society. I receive it as an assignment of a commitment to continue the vow in my life and my best efforts to the sowing of the good news of Jesus Christ."

Since 2015, Paredes has served as the director of SOMOS, New York City's first network of over 2,500 primary care providers. Paredes oversaw grants worth over \$700M from the State of New York for reforming the Medicaid health system and was a key facilitator during the discussions between the respondents to the COVID-19 pandemic and health authorities in the State and the City of New York.

Paredes served as a personal advisor to John Cardinal O'Connor, Archbishop of New York, and has served as a consultant to the Justice and Peace Commission of the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops and the Vatican Commission for Latin America. Additionally, the Holy See awarded him the highest decoration for a layman, the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice, for his service to the Catholic Church.

The Spirit of Francis Award is inspired by its three namesakes: St. Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis and Father Francis Clement Kelley, the founder of Catholic Extension—all of whom are known for embracing and helping the poor.

For more information on Mario J. Paredes and the New York Spirit of Francis Award, please visit [here](#).

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**About Catholic Extension Society:** Founded in 1905, Catholic Extension Society works in solidarity with people to build up vibrant and transformative Catholic faith communities among the poor in the poorest regions of America. For more information visit [www.catholicextension.org](http://www.catholicextension.org); follow us on Facebook at [facebook.com/catholicextension](https://facebook.com/catholicextension) or on X, formerly known as Twitter, at [@CathExtension](https://twitter.com/CathExtension)