OPENING REMARKS JEWISH-CATHOLIC DINNER FEBRUARY 2026

Thank you all for being here tonight.

I want to begin by expressing my deep appreciation to Archbishop Smith for his partnership and friendship, and to each of you who made the decision to come. In a moment when our world feels strained and divided, gathering like this is meaningful. Choosing to sit at the same table carries weight.

In our tradition there is a brief psalm, only three verses long, that begins with these words:

Hinei mah tov u'mah na'im, shevet achim gam yachad.

"Behold how good and how pleasant it is when brothers and sisters dwell together in unity."

The first word, *hinei*, means "behold." It invites us to pause. To notice. To recognize something rare and precious when it happens.

The verse speaks of goodness and pleasantness. Moral goodness and human sweetness. It speaks of dwelling together. That language suggests more than proximity. It implies relationship, patience, and the willingness to remain present with one another.

The psalm continues with an image that resonates in both of our traditions. It describes oil poured upon the head of Aaron, flowing down over his garments. Oil signifies consecration. It marks something as holy. The psalm suggests that when human beings choose to live together with care and respect, there is a sacred quality to that choice. Holiness emerges in relationship.

We are living in a fractured world. Polarization shapes public life. Religious language can deepen misunderstanding as easily as it can inspire hope. Communities carry real pain and complex histories. Faith communities are not immune to any of this.

Yet faith also carries resources for healing. Our traditions speak of the dignity of every human being. They demand moral seriousness. They teach humility before God. They call us to see one another as bearers of divine image.

Tonight is an opportunity to listen carefully, to speak honestly, and to encounter one another as people rather than positions. Dialogue asks for courage. It asks for generosity. It asks for trust that truth is not diminished by conversation.

The psalm ends with another image. It speaks of the dew of Mount Hermon descending upon the mountains of Zion. In that landscape, dew sustains life. It arrives quietly and steadily. Its impact is real even though it makes no noise.

Healing often unfolds in that way. Through steady presence. Through shared meals. Through conversations that widen rather than narrow the heart.

Perhaps this evening can be one small expression of that blessing.

May our time together be thoughtful and sincere. May it strengthen our capacity to lead with faith in a world that needs moral clarity and spiritual depth. And may the Holy One bless this gathering with wisdom, compassion, and peace.

Thank you. Let us share this meal and begin.