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New York Archbishop Ronald Hicks smiles after being introduced during the 81st annual Alfred

New York Archbishop Ronald Hicks smiles after being introduced during the 81st annual Alfred E. Smith Memorial Foundation Dinner at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City Oct. 15, 2026. (OSV News/Gregory A. Shemitz)

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New York Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch was presented with the Happy Warrior Award during the 81st Annual Alfred E. Smith Memorial Foundation Dinner at the Waldorf Astoria in Manhattan Oct. 15.

The evening was filled with heartfelt remarks stressing the importance of unity, humility and compassion — and the significance of speaking out against hatred, such as the hate that New York Gov. Al Smith, "the Happy Warrior," faced from anti-Catholic groups when he ran for president in 1928.

About 850 people attended the event. The foundation raises funds to support vulnerable women and children in the Archdiocese of New York. An estimated \$6.4 million was raised this year, according to the foundation's executive director, Kathleen McGowan.

"I am a Jewish police commissioner working for a Muslim mayor, and tonight I am being honored by the Catholic Church. God bless America," Tisch, recognized for her commitment to public service, said during her acceptance speech, words that were greeted with loud cheers and applause.

"Thank you for this extraordinary honor," Tisch said, later mentioning the group of interreligious NYPD chaplains that she appointed this year. The police commissioner also named Cardinal Timothy Dolan, archbishop emeritus of New York, and the Rev. A.R. Bernard co-chief chaplains.

"I was building a clergy dream team. ... There is something that binds us together, and that is service to this city," Tisch noted. She also stressed the importance of the public safety work of NYPD officers, citing the value of "duty and sacrifice."

Actress Lynda Carter, the original Wonder Woman, was at a table near the dais. She stood and was holding a Wonder Woman shield that eventually made its way to Tisch, who was declared "our modern-day Wonder Woman."

Dolan, former host of the dinner, delivered the keynote speech, saying, "I used to be in 'Who's Who,' now I'm 'Who's He?' ... 'Emeritus' is a Latin word meaning 'has been.'" The cardinal went on to note, "Alfred Emanuel Smith, the Happy Warrior, as FDR nicknamed him, how we need his light today. ... Al Smith bridged the conflicts of the time — and folks, do we ever need him now."

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Dolan cited today's divisive, sometimes hate-crime violent society, adding, "Oh Al, where are you? Where are you, Al Smith? Well, I'll tell you where Al Smith is, folks. He's right here this evening in a ballroom crammed with his heirs. ... We are a city on a hill, where, as Bob Kraft, last year's Happy Warrior, reminded us: Hatred and vitriol have no coinage."

The cardinal expressed his delight at New York Archbishop Ronald Hicks serving as his successor, commended the good works of the Al Smith Foundation leaders and told Tisch, "Thank you for the splendid job you're doing."

Hicks and others noted the high-profile and effective leadership Dolan provided for many years, and a video attesting to that was shown, narrated by columnist Peggy Noonan.

Hicks, hosting the dinner for the first time, acknowledged, "My friends, this is my first rodeo," and he noted, "This is an iconic event; it brings us together to do something good. We may disagree and poke fun and do all that, but it's in a common spirit for the common good. ... Almighty and loving God, we thank you for this evening, for the fellowship and the friendship we share — and for all the good the Alfred E. Smith Dinner promotes."

Actor and comedian Jim Gaffigan was the emcee, delighting all with humorous remarks that began with: "Thank you, rich people. Instead of laughing, please give me money. ... But the most important thing is the generosity of this dais, and frankly this entire room. It really is inspiring."

Among the special guests on the dais were Mayor Zohran Mamdani, Gov. Kathy Hochul and other elected officials, religious leaders, prominent business owners and Al Smith Foundation members — including Mary Callahan Erdoes, foundation vice chair, who expressed sincere words of joy and gratitude.

The concluding benediction was offered by Rev. Bernard, CEO and pastor of the Christian Cultural Center and NYPD co-chief chaplain.

[Armando Machado writes for The Good Newsroom. This story was originally published by The Good Newsroom, the online news outlet of the Archdiocese of New York, and distributed through a partnership with OSV News.]

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