2026 DINNER and AWARDS for ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

Father Steven Bell, CSP
FASPE Board Member and Clergy Faculty

Good evening. I'm Father Steven Bell. I serve on the FASPE board and am a proud member of our Clergy faculty. When I am not with FASPE, I do work to help people address unhealthy religious contentions and sociopolitical polarization in the church, centering on reconciliation and restorative justice practices.

Being a cleric at a dinner typically means being asked to bless the meal. So I am pleasantly surprised to find myself on the program *after* the main course. Kudos to the organizers for wanting you well-wined & dined before handing a microphone to a priest famously not known for giving short sermons. And, so that my work can have merit among you, august congregation on this wonderful evening, please allow me to offer thanks for what's still to come. Our accomplishments, our hopes, and our final award… and dessert! Because gratitude is a fundamentally active virtue this evening. We do have much for which to be thankful.

For one, tonight we've heard from Honorees, the magnificent Jordyn Holman and the illustrious Dr. Vardit Ravitsky, two phenomenal women who model well what it looks like to bring intentionality, integrity, and conscientiousness to their work with such elan and inspiration that it goes beyond the walls and above the byline into the discussions and dialogues happening in the public square.

For two, we are in the supportive company of Fellows, alumni, friends, supporters, and perhaps even a few curious seekers who make up the “FASPE-sphere”. You believe in the importance of responsible ethics and ethical decision-making; you support the FASPE mission, you make this work possible, and we are truly grateful for every one of you.

By donning your piece of the FASPE mantle, you are taking part in a kind of healing that so many are looking for…a repair of the world that so many are hoping for.
These days, people are asking, *"What can I actually do that makes a difference?"* I'd like to answer that by starting thusly.

To give you a sense of the questions FASPE fellows wrestle with - in our Clergy program, one question that always surfaces: *How does a member of the clergy navigate the wavy line between exercising a duty to speak out on injustice from the pulpit, and turning that pulpit into a platform for their own politics?* It's neither an abstract nor clear question with risks on all sides. During

the 1930s rise of Christian Nationalism, a brave few German clerics spoke up - and paid for it. When our Fellows stand in those places and ask, *"What would I have said? What am I saying now?"*, it isn't a seminar exercise. It's an examination of religious administration systems, parishioner care, and personal conscience. Tackling deep questions like these can cause inexorable changes in thinking, attitudes, and approaches that our fellows have experienced, which compel them to carry these questions home to their own congregations and ministries, where they are making a difference.

How can you continue to make a difference? Let this force of gratitude inspire you to engage. One way for you to engage, is to come see this work for yourself. We have a program called **Ethics Abroad**, where we offer the FASPE experience - in a shorter program - for small groups of curious travelers. We go to Germany and Poland, with off-the-beaten-path access to the key historic sites. We engage in seminars and debates that link the history to pressing contemporary ethical questions, led by FASPE's remarkable brain trust - Thorsten & Rebecca, faculty, special guests on the ground in Europe. We do stay in slightly nicer hotels, share nice meals and sip the occasional vodka. These powerful trips happen each year, and the next one is **April 2027**. So, if you're curious, get in touch with us to explore it.

You can also engage by helping to sustain our mission. I'll do this in the most dignified way a priest can: tonight is FASPE's most important fundraiser of the year. You are already here, and that matters. If you've already given, thank you. If you're a guest tonight, and you feel so moved, there are envelopes on the tables and there will be donation boxes around the room.

One of the most powerful means of engagement you can take costs nothing: talk to us - and talk ABOUT us. Tell us who you are, and how we might connect. In other words, spread the good news about FASPE's mission and approach.

I'll wrap up this good news, by giving us a third thing for which Gratitude: our final Honoree of the evening is an inimitable pillar of FASPE whose, erudite skills, thoughtful care, dedicated generosity and loyal commitment have crafted and cultivated FASPE's work and focus from the beginning…leading to FASPE's impressive impact thus far and for years to come. Please welcome our Awards Dinner co-chair, Maura Marino, to present this Award to Fred Marino.