

In Memoriam



Bob Buckhorn, Mayor

WHEREAS, the City of Tampa takes pride in recognizing those individuals whose commitment and dedication have made a lasting impact on our community and its citizens. One of these individuals was **Monsignor Laurence E. Higgins**, a most beloved Tampa, Florida Spiritual and Community Leader who passed away on Wednesday, August 24, 2016 at age 87; and

WHEREAS, born on September 3, 1928, in Magherafelt, Northern Ireland to the late John and Philomena Higgins, Monsignor Higgins was a fun-loving and outgoing child who excelled in sports, especially soccer, rugby, and Irish football, and was named All-Ireland Forward and was instrumental in winning two National Championships, and upon graduation from college, he studied medicine at the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons in Dublin until answering his call to the priesthood; and

WHEREAS, ordained at All Hollows Seminary on June 21, 1953, Monsignor Higgins was sent to the Florida Diocese of St. Augustine in the United States at age 29, first assigned to Miami, Florida parishes before finding his new home in Tampa in 1958, and he was charged with building a parish within 20 acres of pasture land, named St. Lawrence Catholic Church, in honor of a Catholic Deacon martyred in the year 258. Dedicated to God and his task, his new flock of 200 families soon grew to include 2,200 families, a provisional church building constructed in 1961 along with a parish school, a permanent church built and dedicated in 1981, the opening of the Polly Murray Early Childhood Center in 1989, and Higgins Hall, named in his honor in 1994, and St. Lawrence Catholic Church is now one of the area's largest parishes and it includes a highly esteemed parochial school; and

WHEREAS, accomplished, well-respected and the longest-serving priest in the Diocese of St. Petersburg, serving 49 years until retiring as Pastor Emeritus in 2007, Monsignor Higgins facilitated the establishment of Epiphany, Incarnation and St. Paul parishes, served as Interim Pastor of St. Peter Claver parish, was Chaplain for Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Tampa Bay Rowdies, appointed Consultor, Vicar Fornane and Vicar General of the Diocese of St. Petersburg, appointed by President Jimmy Carter to the United States Commission for Civil Rights, and Pope John Paul II titled him Monsignor Prelate of Honor in 1983, and he was elevated to the highest rank of Monsignor, Protonotary Apostolic in 1988; and

WHEREAS, the iconic Monsignor Higgins' dedication, charisma and love of all people endeared him to the community, and he worked to bring positive change and growth, championing for education, housing, health, and progress, and he founded the *Raphael Foundation*, *Housing by St. Laurence*, and *San Lorenzo Terrace I and II* senior retirement apartments, and he provided guidance and leadership in many non-profit and humanitarian organizations including the H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center and Research Institute Foundation, Higgins Alcohol and Addiction Program, named for him, Judeo Christian Health Clinic, and the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay to name only a few, and Monsignor Higgins received numerous honors over his lifetime including the Cuban Civic Club's *Outstanding Service Award*, Sertoma's *Service to Mankind Award*, Tampa Civitans' *Citizen of the Year Award*, University of Tampa's *Ethics Award*, Jewish National Fund's *Tree of Life Lifetime Achievement Award* and he received an *Honorary Law Degree* from Ave Maria School of Law; and

WHEREAS, a mentor, a friend and inspiration to all who knew him, he will be forever remembered as an intelligent man who led his life committed to his faith, his parish, his community and its citizens, and a leader who led by example with love, charm and exceptional wit, and although we are grieved at the loss of this outstanding citizen, his legacy will continue to live on through the improvements he brought to our community and in all those countless lives he has touched over the years.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Bob Buckhorn, by virtue of the authority vested in me as Mayor of the city of Tampa, Florida, do hereby urge all citizens to join me in publicly expressing sorrow and heartfelt appreciation to the Monsignor Laurence E. Higgins Family, sisters Philomena, Maeve, Anne and Margaret, other family members and the parish of St. Lawrence Catholic Church, and to express our hopes that they will take solace in their many cherished memories and the impact of his life on our city.

Dated in Tampa, Florida, this 29th day of August, 2016.



Bob Buckhorn

Mayor