



Msgr Laurence Edward Higgins

SEP 3, 1928 - AUG 24, 2016



Scan to Visit



Table of Contents

Obituary	Page 3
Events	Page 6
Tribute Wall	Page 8
Media	Page 11



Msgr Laurence Edward Higgins

SEP 3, 1928 - AUG 24, 2016

H IGGINS, P.A., Monsignor Laurence Edward

died Aug. 24, 2016. He was the founder and pastor emeritus of St. Lawrence Catholic Church of Tampa and served as pastor from 1958 to 2007, the longest tenure of any priest in the Diocese of Saint Petersburg.

Visitation will be held at St. Lawrence Monday and Tuesday from 12-9 pm, both days, with recitation of the rosary at 7:30 pm, Monday and Office of the Dead: Evening Prayer at 7:30 pm, Tuesday. A funeral Mass will be celebrated Wednesday beginning at 11:30 am, with Rite of Committal to follow in Garden of Memories Cemetery.

As one of the best known and respected spiritual and civic leaders in the Tampa Bay area for six decades, attendance at Monsignor Higgins' funeral is expected to be significant. Seating will be available in the Church, the adjacent piazza, and in Higgins Hall. In recent months Monsignor made it known that in lieu of flowers he hoped that those interested would make contributions to one of the organizations so important to him, including St. Peter Claver School, Cristo Rey Tampa High School, Abe Brown Ministries, and the Gold Shield Foundation.

Born Sept. 3, 1928 in Magherafelt, Northern Ireland to government administrator John Higgins and homemaker Philomena, Monsignor was the third-oldest of eight children (Eoin, Mary, Ruaidhri, Philomena, Maeve, Anne, and Margaret). A star athlete, he led the County Derry Gaelic Football Team to the Irish National Championship in 1947.

Monsignor was ordained a Catholic priest on June 21, 1953 at All Hallows Seminary in Dublin, Ireland. Following ordination he was assigned to the United States and the Florida Diocese of St. Augustine. He worked first in Miami before being transferred to the mission territory of the Tampa Bay area in 1958. Monsignor became a U.S. citizen as soon as it became possible and was a proud American.



Obituary

Msgr Laurence Edward Higgins

SEP 3, 1928 - AUG 24, 2016

Upon his arrival in Tampa, Archbishop Joseph P. Hurley gave the young priest 20 acres of cow pasture at Hillsborough and Himes Avenues along with a mandate: "Build a parish." The Parish was canonically established in 1959 with Masses celebrated in barracks in Drew Park, Hillsborough and Jesuit High Schools, and the Wellswood Civic Center until the provisional church building was completed in 1961. As the Parish eventually grew to include 2200 families, finances enabled the permanent church to be constructed and dedicated on April 5, 1981.

In 1961 the parish school opened with four classrooms and 91 students, followed in 1989 with the Polly Murray Early Childhood Center, named in honor of Higgins' long-time parish administrator. Higgins Hall was opened in 1994 and is recognized as one of Tampa's premier event venues.

When offered a more established parish in the 1970s, Monsignor requested to stay as pastor of St. Lawrence but also take on St. Peter Claver, a predominantly African-American parish near Ybor City. Monsignor guided St. Peter Claver from 1971-73. During this period President Jimmy Carter appointed him to the U.S. Commission for Civil Rights for southern states. He also played a role in starting three more Catholic parishes in Tampa: Epiphany, Incarnation and St. Paul.

As a priest Monsignor was appointed the Vicar General (second in command) of the Diocese of St. Petersburg from 1980-90 under the late Bishop Thomas Larkin. In 1983, Pope John Paul II gave him the title of "Monsignor Prelate of Honor" and subsequently in 1988 "Protonotary Apostolic," the highest rank of Monsignor. He also served as chaplain for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Rowdies and was frequently sought by Tampa Bay area media outlets to comment on church-related issues.

Monsignor gained a reputation as a good Samaritan and became a constant presence at civic and athletic events. His contributions to the community include serving on the board of directors of the H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center and Research Institute Foundation, Judeo Christian Health Clinic, "Higgins Alcohol and Addiction Program" at USF, Florida Treatment Center, Project Return, Gold Shield Foundation, Crisis Center of Hillsborough County, Boys and Girls Clubs, Tampa and West Tampa Chambers of Commerce, Ybor City Development Corporation, the Outback Bowl, and many others.

He founded the Raphael Foundation in 1997 which supports programs for the disadvantaged such as MacDonald Training Center, Meals on Wheels, Judeo Christian Health Clinic, Abe Brown



Obituary

Msgr Laurence Edward Higgins

SEP 3, 1928 - AUG 24, 2016

Ministries, and Trinity Cafe. He also established “Housing by St. Laurence,” which is dedicated to helping first-time home buyers and low-income families, and San Lorenzo Terrace I and II, a HUD project of retirement apartments for low-income seniors.

A celebrated member of the Tampa Bay community, Monsignor received numerous honors including the “Outstanding Service” Award from the Cuban Civic Club, the Sertoma Club “Service to Mankind” Award, the “Citizen of the Year” Award from the Tampa Civitans Club, the “Ethics” Award from the University of Tampa, the “Gonzmart Family Ambassador” Award from the Tampa Bay Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Jewish National Fund Tree of Life “Lifetime Achievement” Award, and the Tampa Bay Lightning “Community Hero” Award. He received an honorary law degree from Ave Maria School of Law shortly before his death.

Monsignor Higgins was a man of great gifts: charm, wit, compassion, understanding, wisdom and street smarts; a genuine man of the people. As a priest he was steadfast in prayer, faithful, loyal and always ready to serve the people. He drew his strength for this service from his deep love of God and displayed a Christ-like love for all.

Throughout his priesthood, Monsignor was fond of describing his life in sports metaphors. In his final years, he told people regularly that he was “on the five-yard line of life and moving toward the end zone.” Now that Monsignor Higgins has crossed the eternal goal line, it can surely be said that in his 63 years of dedication as a priest, and in his many acts of sacramental and civic duty, he left all he had to give upon the playing field of this life.

He fought the good fight to the end; he has run the race to the finish, he has kept the faith...

4 Timothy;7-8.





Events


Msgr Laurence Edward Higgins

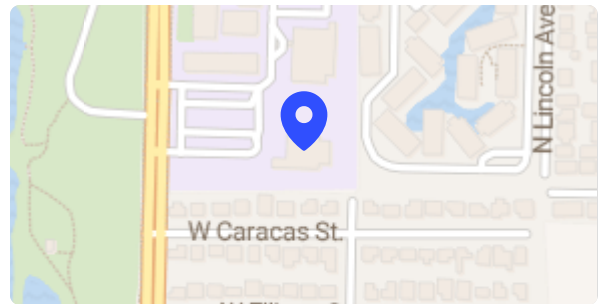
SEP 3, 1928 - AUG 24, 2016

Visitation

 **Monday**, August 29, 2016


 12:00 PM - 9:00 PM ET


 **St. Lawrence Catholic Church**
5225 N. Himes Ave, Tampa FL 33614

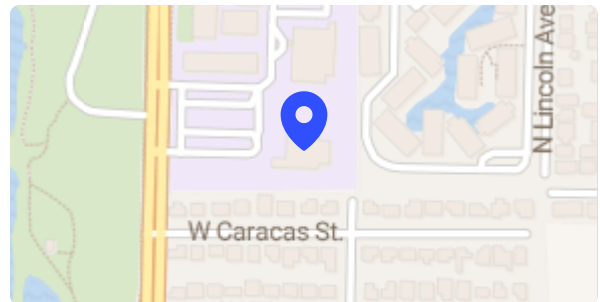


Rosary

 **Monday**, August 29, 2016

 7:30 PM ET


 **St. Lawrence Catholic Church**
5225 N. Himes Ave, Tampa FL 33614

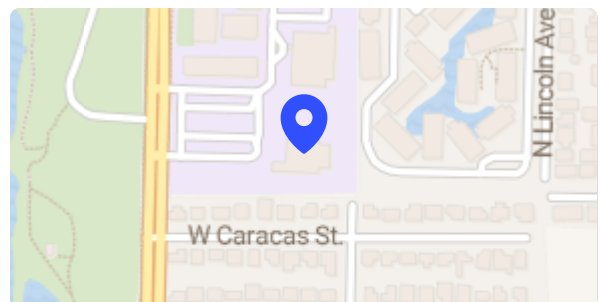


Visitation

 **Tuesday**, August 30, 2016


 12:00 PM - 9:00 PM ET


 **St. Lawrence Catholic Church**
5225 N. Himes Ave, Tampa FL 33614

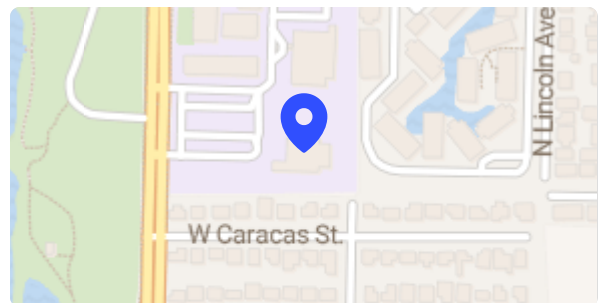


Office of the Dead: Evening Prayer

 **Tuesday**, August 30, 2016

 7:30 PM ET

 **St. Lawrence Catholic Church**
5225 N. Himes Ave, Tampa FL 33614






Events


Msgr Laurence Edward Higgins

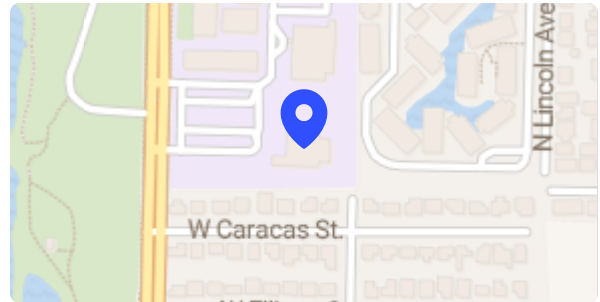
SEP 3, 1928 - AUG 24, 2016

Funeral Liturgy


 **Wednesday**, August 31, 2016

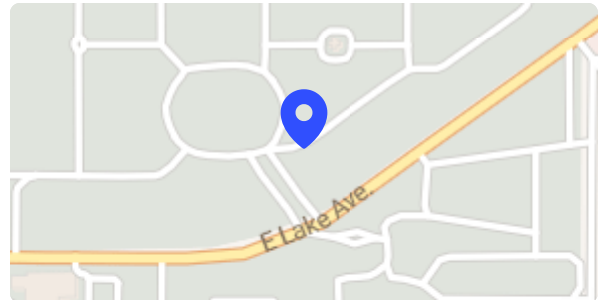
 11:30 AM ET

 **St. Lawrence Catholic Church**
5225 N. Himes Ave, Tampa FL 33614



Cemetery Details

 **Garden of Memories Cemetery**
4207 E. Lake Ave, Tampa FL





Tribute Wall

Msgr Laurence Edward Higgins

SEP 3, 1928 - AUG 24, 2016



Allisun Sfeir shared a photo to the **Tribute Wall** album.

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen

January 11 at 10:51 PM



Nirmala Jacob posted:

I often met with him for advice and consolation. Especially when my younger brother passed away tragically. His humility and strength touched my heart. His words of wisdom have been invaluable in my career as a physician and healer. So my dearest friend and mentor I hope to meet you in a hundred years. I wonder what the world would be like in a hundred years. I will find your blue eyes among a million blue eyes and they will shine more brightly than they did yesterday. Rest in peace. Nirmala Jacob

September 6 at 9:05 AM



Susan Fernandez lit a candle in honor of Laurence.

August 31 at 11:04 AM



SF **Susan Fernandez** August 31 at 11:05 AM

Blue candle reminds me of his twinkling blue Irish eyes!



Susan Fernandez posted:

I first met Monsignor when my children went to St. Lawrence School in the 80's; I became a Eucharistic minister at the church and made home calls to the shut-ins; I then sought marriage counseling and spoke to Monsignor, cried on his shoulder, and he helped me so much in a difficult period of my life. I always loved his sincere example of Christ and he was a wonderful humanitarian. I am a home health nurse and I recently had the privilege of being his nurse of several occasions; he remembered me and again I felt that presence of his love and joy to see me again. I thank God for giving all of us such a wonderful man, priest, counselor, friend; may he rest now in the presence of our Father in Heaven. My heartfelt sympathy go to his family. Sincerely, Sue Fernandez

August 31 at 11:01 AM



Tribute Wall

Msgr Laurence Edward Higgins

SEP 3, 1928 - AUG 24, 2016

VS

Vic Schumacher posted:

In 1970 we moved to Tampa, St Lawrence become our parish. My wife was baptized by Monsignor, two years later our daughter was baptized by Monsignor and many years later our granddaughter was also baptized by Monsignor. When seeing him at his retirement party, his keen memory recalled those events which made us feel so special. Today I still have his picture of that event on my desk. We were blessed to have known him and he will never be forgotten. Vic and Linda Schumacher Palm Harbor, FL

August 31 at 9:52 AM

SG

Steve Gerenski posted:

My family and I moved to Tampa in 1979 from upstate N.Y. We started going to a small church at the time which happened to be St. Lawrence and we ended up going there for twenty six years and the main reason was Monsignor Higgins. He has to be the greatest priest we have ever known and such a great human being. He got us through many tough times in our lives like when I lost my younger brother to brain cancer back in 1988 and he consoled me and helped me through my grief. Another tough time was when our daughter was hit by a drunk driver back in 1992 and we were not sure she was going to pull through. Monsignor came to visit her in the hospital and she was in a coma and on a ventilator. We prayed together and he put his hand on her leg and told us she would be o.k. After weeks in the hospital and months of rehab she recovered and went on to Florida state and got a masters in teaching. We have a long history with Monsignor and St. Lawrence since our son and daughter made there first communion and were confirmed there and when my daughter was ready to get married she wanted Monsignor Higgins to perform the ceremony at St. Lawrence and he also renewed our wedding vows on our twenty fifth anniversary which was real special to us. We thank him for being a part of lives and knowing him and we will always miss him and remember what he did for us. May he be in the kingdom of heaven be at peace and have eternal life. Steve & Sandi Gerenski Plant City, Florida

August 30 at 1:11 PM

JP

John Parker posted:

My fondest memory of Monsignor Higgins outside of being a very special Spiritual Leader for me and Barbara Ann was his wit. He made us promise to never let the Baptist beat our St. Lawrence Softball Team and they didn't. Rest in peace you true and faithful servant. Love you and miss you. John and Barbara Parker

August 30 at 7:12 AM



Tribute Wall

Msgr Laurence Edward Higgins

SEP 3, 1928 - AUG 24, 2016

DA

Deb Andrade posted:

Our thoughts and prayers are with the family of Msgr. Higgins. He will be missed by all who knew him and the ones whose lives he touched. RIP Msgr. Higgins. Ben & Deb Andrade

August 30 at 6:07 AM

CK

Carol Kurdell posted:

Monsignor Higgins will be sorely missed. His joy of life, his prayer that made you feel blessed, his delight in sharing a story, and that lilt in his voice made you feel warm, hugged and special. We are all better because of him and how he lived his life. Thank you Monsignor, for sharing who you were all these many years. Hon. Carol W. Kurdell School Board District 7 Hillsborough Public Schools

August 29 at 4:33 PM

VD

Vito & Jemma Didia lit a candle in honor of Laurence.



August 28 at 2:47 PM

JF

J Fischer posted:

We wish to express our deepest condolences for the loss of such a great man. He certainly enriched our lives and understanding of our faith. He will be missed and included in all our prayers. Jane and Jim Fischer Sun City Center

August 28 at 8:17 AM

JL

Joe Lezama posted:

My son was an altar boy at St. Lawrence School for many years, I would go to confession, but instead he would ask me to pray for my son's vocation to the priesthood. Msgr. Higgins married my two children, Joe and Michelle, and baptized my grandchildren, but the most wonderful memory of him was when my mother-in-law, Martha, was dying of cancer and he would visit her at the hospital everyday. My family is forever grateful. Joe and Lenni Lezama and family

August 27 at 7:00 AM



Allisun Sfeir shared a photo to the **Tribute Wall** album.

January 11 at 10:51 PM





Memories only last if you share them

Join us in honoring Laurence by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



Scan to Visit

