

BY: Senator KENNEDY

MOURNING the death of Friar Neil J. O'Connell,
member of the Order of Friars Minor and former
President of St. Bonaventure University

WHEREAS, It is the custom of this Legislative Body to pay tribute to citizens of the State of New York whose lifework and civic endeavors served to enhance the quality of life in their communities and this great Empire State; and

WHEREAS, Friar Neil J. O'Connell of Allegany, New York, passed away on Thursday, March 24, 2022, at the age of 84; and

WHEREAS, The son of Cornelius J. and Marie K. (Schneider) O'Connell, Neil J. O'Connell was born in Buffalo on May 21, 1937; he was raised in South Buffalo, where he attended Buffalo public schools 72 and 67 and Bishop Timon High School, graduating in 1955; and

WHEREAS, Drawn to the life of the Franciscan friars who staffed Bishop Timon, Neil J. O'Connell attended St. Joseph Seraphic Seminary in Callicoon from 1955-1957; and

WHEREAS, Neil J. O'Connell entered the Order of Friars Minor as a novice at St. Raphael Friary, in Lafayette, New Jersey, on July 14, 1957, receiving the religious name Neil James O'Connell, OFM, the name by which he would be known professionally and socially for the rest of his life; and

WHEREAS, Friar Neil J. O'Connell made his first profession of vows as a Franciscan in 1958, and was educated at the seminaries of the Order, St. Francis College, Rye Beach, New Hampshire, a school of St. Bonaventure University, from which he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in philosophy in 1960; he also attended Holy Name College in Washington, D.C., receiving a Bachelor of Sacred Theology degree from the Catholic University of America in 1964; and

WHEREAS, On February 22, 1964, Friar Neil J. O'Connell was ordained to the priesthood at the Franciscan Monastery in Washington, D.C.; after a pastoral internship at St. Anthony Shrine in Boston, Massachusetts, he began teaching at St. Francis College in Rye Beach, New Hampshire, in 1965; and

WHEREAS, While working on his theological degree, Friar Neil J. O'Connell concurrently worked on his Master of Arts degree in history in summer school at Siena College in Loudonville; he continued graduate studies in history at the University of Georgia, receiving his Ph.D. in 1970; during his years in Athens, he ministered at the Catholic campus ministry; and

WHEREAS, After a year teaching at Prairie View A & M University in Prairie View, Texas, Friar Neil J. O'Connell joined the history

department of Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, eventually becoming Associate Professor, Chair of the History Department, and Director of Humanities and Fine Arts; he also ministered to students in the Catholic campus ministry center and at Meharry Medical College, also in Nashville; and

WHEREAS, In 1980, Friar Neil J. O'Connell returned to Buffalo and joined the staff as both a Professor and Dean at SUNY Erie Community College; during these years, he also served as Adjunct Associate Professor at Christ the King Seminary in East Aurora; and

WHEREAS, In 1986, Friar Neil J. O'Connell became Professor and Dean at Elizabeth Seton College in Yonkers, which merged with Iona College in 1989; the following year, he was appointed President of St. Bonaventure University, serving until 1993; and

WHEREAS, After leaving St. Bonaventure, Friar Neil J. O'Connell served in numerous pastoral ministries in New York City, while continuing to teach part-time at various colleges and universities; and

WHEREAS, From 1993-2002, Friar Neil J. O'Connell was the Pastor of St. Stephen of Hungary Parish in New York, and was an Adjunct Professor at Marymount-Manhattan College in the Bronx; and

WHEREAS, Friar Neil J. O'Connell then served as administrator of All Saints Parish in Harlem from 2002-2008, while an Adjunct Professor at Lehman College in New York; he then resided at St. Joseph of the Holy Family Parish in Harlem from 2008-2016, while continuing as adjunct at Lehman College and Campus Minister at Lehman and Borough of Manhattan Community College until 2014; and

WHEREAS, In 2016, Friar Neil J. O'Connell retired from active ministry at St. Anthony Friary in St. Petersburg, Florida; in 2019, he returned to Western New York, where he moved to the healthcare facility at St. Elizabeth Motherhouse in Allegany; and

WHEREAS, Over the years, Friar Neil J. O'Connell was active in a wide variety of academic, religious and community organizations; he enjoyed working with the African-American community in the Catholic Church and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; he was also active in a wide variety of civic and community organizations, such as the YMCA and Big Brothers/Big Sisters and the Rotary Club; and

WHEREAS, Friar Neil J. O'Connell was also a longtime member of the board of CREATE, Inc., a community organization focusing on outreach and drug rehabilitation programs for youth in Harlem; and

WHEREAS, Friar Neil J. O'Connell is survived by his sister-in-law, Mary Ann Kennedy O'Connell; one niece, Rosemary O'Connell Shmavonian; and six nephews, Patrick, Matthew, Mark, Joseph, Brian and Brendan O'Connell, as well as all their families; and

WHEREAS, Armed with a humanistic spirit and imbued with a sense of

compassion, Friar Neil J. O'Connell leaves behind a legacy which will long endure the passage of time and will remain as a comforting memory to all he served and befriended; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to mourn the death of Friar Neil J. O'Connell, member of the Order of Friars Minor and former President of St. Bonaventure University; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the family of Friar Neil J. O'Connell.