

# Michael Higgins



Michael Higgins is a people's scholar. Armed with an enviable academic pedigree, Higgins could sit back and expound the great truths of literature and theology in distinguished journals read by fellow intellectuals.

But Higgins has always reached out beyond the walls of academia, provoking thought and encouraging debate in the community as a commentator in daily newspapers, radio and television.

His passion for public debate was instilled in him during his graduate studies, a time when he was taught that a Catholic academic had added duties.

“A Catholic intellectual ... had an obligation to bring his or her scholarship to bear in the service of the community and could not afford the luxury of withdrawing into an ivory tower,” Higgins has said.

Higgins joined St. Jerome's University in 1982 as a professor of English and Religious Studies. He moved on to become chair of the Department of Religious Studies, academic dean, and finally president of St. Jerome's before accepting a similar post at St. Thomas University in Fredericton, New Brunswick in 2005.

During his long tenure in Waterloo, Higgins was widely known for his columns in the *Toronto Star* and *The Record*. He also wrote radio documentaries and scripts for several CBC programs including *Ideas*, *Celebration* and *Testament*. He was a regular contributor to *Morningside* and its successor *This Morning*. Higgins has been on television on programs such as *Canada AM* and TVOntario's *Studio 2*.

Higgins grew up in a Roman Catholic family in downtown Toronto, attending a Catholic elementary school and a public high school. He entered a seminary for two years and then left to attend St. Francis Xavier University, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in English and Philosophy in 1970. He received his Master of Arts and a PhD from York University where he was taught and mentored by poet Eli Mandel.

Higgins is the co-author of several books including the best selling *Power and Peril: The Catholic Church at the Crossroads* (2002). In this book Higgins and his colleague Douglas Letson argued that the Catholic Church was in crisis, but that it would ultimately prevail if it could permit genuine debate. “Many of us know...very often a crisis is a moment of enlightenment,” Higgins said.

For his own part, Higgins has not shied away from controversial issues such as sexual abuse by Catholic priests. “The pontiff, I'm convinced doesn't fully comprehend the

nature of the particular evil of serial sex abuse... But the dark reality of priestly criminality must be faced," Higgins wrote in 2002.

Other books include the award-winning *Heretic Blood: The Spiritual Geography of Thomas Merton* (1998) and most recently *Stalking the Holy: The Pursuit of Saint Making* (2005).

While at St. Jerome's he helped establish a series of public lectures that attracted diverse speakers like Jean Vanier and Romeo Dallaire and served as editor of the journal *Grail*. In 2005, Michael Higgins was selected as one of Ontario's best lecturers by the TVOntario program *Big Ideas*.

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