

RESOLUTION 20-

WHEREAS, the City Council and Mayor of the City of Huntsville, Alabama, are deeply saddened by the passing of the extraordinary musical legend and influential figure in pop-culture, Richard Wayne Penniman, known as “Little Richard.” Mr. Penniman transitioned peacefully on May 9, 2020 surrounded by family and loved ones; and

WHEREAS, Little Richard was born December 5, 1932 in Macon, Georgia, the third of twelve children. His family was deeply religious and actively involved in the churches within their community. It was from the pews that his deep love of music flourished. As a child, he dreamed of becoming a minister and expressing his connection to God through song; and

WHEREAS, he was deeply inspired as a young man by the gospel and R&B queen, Sister Rosetta Tharpe. She gave Richard his first break after hearing him sing her songs outside her concert while selling drinks to those attending the show. She called the 14-year-old on stage to sing with her, marking his first performance outside of church. This became a pivotal moment in his life. Later that year, he left home and joined Dr. Hudson’s Medicine Show, a meager beginning to what would become an illustrious musical career; and

WHEREAS, after years of struggle, Richard’s luck changed in 1951, when he signed a record deal with RCA. At a time when racial tensions were at a peak, Little Richard officially emerged on the scene. The next few years encompassed many ups and several downs. At one point, he found himself washing dishes at a bus station in Macon while writing songs in his free time. It was not until the owner of *Specialty Records* in Chicago heard him singing, that the break he had been waiting for finally arrived. As the country argued over civil rights and desegregation, the acclaimed song “Tutti Frutti” was released. He crossed racial and social barriers with this instant hit and followed it up with one chart topping song after the next. Befitting his achievements, he became known as “The Innovator,” “The Originator” and “The Architect of Rock and Roll.” He was a consummate showman, dedicated to giving his all to the audience and leaving them wanting more; and

WHEREAS, despite Richard’s undeniable success, he felt pulled to return to his original call to ministry. To the dismay of many, he left his Hollywood lifestyle in 1957 and enrolled in seminary school at Oakwood University, a place he fondly referred to as “home” throughout the rest of his days. Many believe that at Oakwood University his soul had found the peace and joy he had been seeking all his life. Although he left before graduating, Richard became an ordained minister and never let the teachings he had received far from his heart. Richard commonly gave out his favorite Adventist publications at each of his performances and was known for handing them out to random citizens on the streets; and

WHEREAS, after returning to the rock n’ roll scene, he enjoyed great success touring in England with The Beatles and the Rolling Stones. He made countless TV appearances and was featured in several films. In 1986, he was one of the ten original inductees into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. In 1993, he was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award at the Grammy’s. A biographical tv film was released in 2000 titled “Little Richard.” It was highly acclaimed for capturing the struggles Richard endured beginning in his early years of poverty to his rise of fame during the civil rights movement. Eventually, he retired to a quiet and pious life in Tennessee. He maintained as he got older that his most significant achievement was not as a rock legend but that of a faithful Christian. With each encounter and interview, he earnestly compelled all to turn to the Lord. His humble and inspiring testimony marks that of a man with incomparable talent fueled by true faith and conviction.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City Council and Mayor of the City of Huntsville, Alabama, salute the extraordinary legacy and memory of Mr. Richard Penniman, better known as “Little Richard” for his unmatched talent and achievements as a musician and his admirable virtue as a man.

ADOPTED this the 11th day of June, 2020

President of the City Council of the
City of Huntsville, Alabama

APPROVED this the 11th day of June, 2020

Mayor of the City of Huntsville, Alabama