

# Judge Brown was a humble leader

As seems to be happening too often these days, Baltimore has lost another friend. Judge Roger Brown's unexpected exit from this world on March 23, 2009, has left a gaping hole in not only Maryland's legal community, but also in our region's black Catholic community.

Judge Brown's accomplishments as a lawyer and as a member of Baltimore's District and Circuit Courts are well-known. His resume of public life reads like a well-crafted novel about a man of humble beginnings going on to enjoy great success. For example, after completing college, Judge Brown worked as a short-order cook during the day to pay for law school at night. During the course of his legal career, Roger Brown served as a prosecutor and a public defender before going on the bench.

Wanting to do more, Judge Brown sought and received an appointment to the District Court for Baltimore City by Gov. Harry Hughes in 1985. He so distinguished himself on the District Court that in 1987 when an opening became available at the next level, the Circuit Court for Baltimore City, Gov. William Donald Schaefer elevated him.

On the Circuit Court, Judge Brown handled some of the city's more publicized cases. Judge Brown presided over the tobacco litigation that resulted in a fund that continues to provide health education statewide. In 2006, he handled the trial and sentencing of the young man accused of murdering Linda Trinh, a student at The Johns Hopkins University.

Though his cases often thrust him into the media spotlight, they are not what made him a distinguished man. Rather, it is Judge Brown's life as an involved parishioner of St. Ann, and his role as family man that earned him this title. Judge Brown was St. Ann's representative to the newly formed Franciscan Youth Center Board in the early 1990s. Often, Judge Brown served as the head cook at church bazaars and picnics. He was a humble leader, organizing the men of the church to carry out mundane activities by leading them through his example. Judge Brown chaired fundraising efforts for St. Ann's 120th anniversary. Because of this humility, what is less known about Judge Brown is his personal story. It is this lesser-known but

equally accomplished part of Judge Brown's life that we share here.

His calm, everyday manner made us want to know more about Judge Roger Brown. With a little digging, we found out:

- His humble beginnings (he was adopted as a child and was a self-made man) and eventual rise to the top of the legal profession speak of an all-too-rare humility and self-sacrifice. And those qualities make him a role model for Catholics striving to find their place in today's world of multiculturalism.
- His embracing of Catholicism was not compromised by his judicial duties. Perhaps because of his faith, Judge Brown was recognized by all as a man of honor and decency. He required that all those with whom he and his staff came into contact were treated with respect and dignity. This virtue was appreciated by Roger Brown's colleagues, the lawyers who appeared before him and even those who stood before him facing criminal charges.

In the days we knew Judge Brown as a parishioner of St. Ann, he was a quiet, calm presence in the church. He was friendly and down to earth. He was one of those who showed us how to be Catholic and African-American at the same time.

Like many African-Americans, he looked forward to the election of Barack Obama as America's first black president. Judge Brown's life was one that helped pave the way for such a good and drastic change. We are happy he lived to see it happen. And we know he was very delighted. He told us so very proudly.

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