

Judge Annette Berry: Inspiring the Spirit of Giving Back

“Every person, regardless of their situation or circumstances, has the capacity to care for the well-being of others.”

For Wayne County Circuit Court Judge Annette Berry, this notion was ingrained in her at an early age. “Growing up, my parents and grandparents taught me the importance of giving back to those who are less fortunate,” she shared.

One of the ways that Judge Berry gives back is by supporting the Father Clement H. Kern Foundation in Detroit. Named for the late “Labor Priest” who was profoundly involved in the labor movement in Detroit during the 20th Century, the Foundation supports and advances his mission of helping those who have fallen on hard times. Among his many accomplishments, Monsignor Kern helped found the first free medical clinic in Detroit (Cabrini Clinic), as well as a free legal clinic to serve those who could not afford legal services.

As current Foundation president, Judge Berry has “provided necessary energy and important leadership,” according to Msgr. Chuck Kosanke, a past president and her colleague on many charitable projects.

The Foundation hosts an annual dinner to honor its namesake and to recognize members of the community who have championed its mission. It also provides financial support to many local organizations, including schools, soup kitchens, community outreach programs, child welfare groups, and more.

“Judges are public servants who are given an enormous opportunity to make a difference in their communities, not just by the work that they perform on the bench,” remarked Judge Berry. “Giving back is the most important and valuable thing that a judge can do.”

In addition to her work on the Father Kern Foundation, Judge Berry has also volunteered with the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) since 2006, holding positions in her son’s troop, such as Assistant Den Leader, Membership Recruitment Chair, and perhaps most proudly, Popcorn Kernel Committee Chair.

“I believe every adult has something valuable to offer, some gift to contribute, which can assist our youth in development of academic skills, self-confidence, and leadership and citizenship skills that will influence their adult lives,” said Judge Berry. “It is important to serve as a mentor to encourage them to think about others around them.”

For her scouting efforts, Judge Berry has received the BSA Cub Scouter Award for Outstanding Leadership and the BSA Great Lakes Council Outstanding Leader in Scouting Award.

While she firmly believes that anyone—and everyone—can make a difference in their own communities, Judge Berry also thinks it is especially important for judges to give back.

“Through volunteering, I have learned the values of tolerance, listening to others, appreciating their opinions, and working toward a common goal,” she reflected. “In short, our [judges’] willingness to give our time and talents benefits the community while enhancing respect for the judiciary. There is no better way of expressing gratitude for the opportunity to serve.”