

Retired judge supports school vouchers

Kathryn Du Four to host 10th annual Lumen Christi dinner

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DELRAY BEACH

One of the nation's first female circuit court judges said she supports the idea of school vouchers in Florida because it would promote better education for children.

Judge Kathryn Du Four, 88, said she has concerns about the education children are receiving in the state of Florida, and is a strong advocate for Catholic education.

"Education has declined over the years — children do not speak proper English, don't know what a verb, predicate or adjective is at all," said Judge Du Four, a 1928 graduate of Hollywood High School in Hollywood, Calif.

Judge Du Four said she had the good fortune of having "wonderful English and chemistry teachers" in California, which at that time was one of the leading education states in the nation.

She believes school vouchers in Florida would help parents afford to send their children to the school of their choice.

"Children listened to their parents and teachers in my day," said Judge Du Four, "we also behaved. Unfortunately, some youngsters don't behave or even know what ocean is out there," she

said as she pointed out to the Atlantic Ocean from her penthouse in Delray Beach.

Each year the bishop of the Diocese of Palm Beach selects someone in the diocese to co-host as chairperson for the Lumen Christi ("Light of Christ")

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Judge Kathryn Du Four

dinner. The event raises money for Catholic education.

Judge Du Four is that person this year. The Lumen Christi dinner will take place at the Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach on Friday, Dec. 4.

When asked about her thoughts on overcrowded classrooms, Judge Du Four, who is a member of St. Mark Parish in Boynton Beach, stated that having no more than 20 children in a classroom is the most conducive atmosphere to learning.

Judge Du Four was also something of an athlete. She was the president of the South California Athletic Association and was active in basketball, baseball and golf in her high school days. She is a 1936 graduate of Washington College of Law for Women, which has become part of American University.

Married with two children, Judge Du Four ran a lucrative private legal practice. Both her children attended Blessed Sacrament School, a parochial school in Chevy Chase, Md.

"Joan was nine years old and Lawrence was seven when I went back to work," said Judge Du Four. "And I felt it was important to take off the afternoons to be home for them when they got out of school."

Judge Du Four became active in her community and the Maryland Legislature in a roundabout manner.

Potholes in the road in front of her farm property prompted the judge to attend a county council meeting regarding road repairs. She later found herself explaining to her husband that all the roads in the county needed fixing.

"Imagine it all started when I attended that citizens' meeting about potholes," laughed Judge Du Four.

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In 1955, Maryland Gov. Theodore McKeldin said he wanted to appoint her to a vacant seat on the bench of the state's Sixth Judicial Circuit Court. Judge Du Four believes she was the first female circuit court judge on the East Coast and possibly the nation.

She was encouraged to work for the Department of Justice even though she would take a pay cut from \$60,000 a year to \$17,000. After Judge Du Four's appointment in 1955, she ran against and won a 1956 election against Democrat incumbent Charles Ireland. Afterwards, she was re-elected and served 15 terms as judge of Maryland's Sixth Circuit Judicial Court.

Judge Du Four couldn't comment on rumors at the time that she might be considered as the first woman appointee to the U.S. Supreme Court. That happened in 1981 when President Ronald Reagan appointed Sandra Day O'Connor.

Upon hearing the news, Judge Du Four sent Justice O'Connor a congratulatory telegram. The justice wrote back, stating that Judge Du Four had "paved the way, all the way from Maryland."

That letter is on display in the Kathryn J. Du Four Law Library at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

Judge Kathryn Du

In memory of her daughter, Joan Lawlor, Judge

Du Four also gives one full scholarship each year to a woman in her second year of law school at Catholic University.

“I feel the scholarship is given to women who are very serious about their education,” she said. “When I was in law school in the District of Columbia only two percent of women went on to their second year of law school.”

Judge Du Four had the honor to be invited to sit on the Queen’s Bench in England as special guest of Judge Elizabeth Lane. Judge Lane is the only British woman member to ever sit on the Queen’s Bench in England.

“The Queen’s Bench is the highest trial court in England and attorneys take a special examination called ‘Taking Silk’ to become one of its members,” said Judge Du Four.

A picture hangs on her wall with her standing alongside of Lord and Chief Justice of England,

Lord Parker of Waddington, to commemorate that event.

The judge is also a member of the Knights and Ladies of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem. In 1993, she was inducted into the Order of Malta.

In addition to her collection of accolades hanging on her walls, Judge Du Four has received two letters from Pope John Paul II. One was received on the occasion of her 85th birthday.

This year’s Lumen Christi dinner will mark the event’s 10th year. The theme is “Star of Bethlehem.” Tickets are \$175.

Father Francis Lechiara, vicar for education and pastor of St. Edward Parish in Palm Beach, will host a reception for the benefactors of the dinner on Friday, Nov. 6.

For information about the Lumen Christi Dinner, call (561) 775-9519.