

# Bonita J. Dancy, retired Baltimore City Circuit Court judge, dies



Bonita J. Dancy was an adjunct professor at Morgan State University, and was named to the Circuit Court bench by then-Gov. Parris N. Glendening. (Handout)



By **Frederick N. Rasmussen**  
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**B**onita J. Dancy, a retired Baltimore City Circuit Court judge who also served more than a decade as a master for family law cases, died Nov. 23 from Alzheimer's disease at Woodholme Gardens in Pikesville. The North Charles Street resident was 72.

"Bonita became a lawyer for all of the right reasons," said Judge Robert M. Bell, chief judge of the Maryland Court of Appeals from 1996 until his retirement in 2013. "She took to heart that we are all created equal and have certain unalienable rights. She was devoted to that."

"She was the second African-American women to go on the Circuit Court bench, and became a mentor," said retired Baltimore Circuit Judge Marcella A. Holland, a colleague and close friend who joined the bench in 1997.

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court system," said Judge Holland. "African-  
> we were like a club, and became great

friends.”

“I got to know her when she was in law school and would attend national bar association conventions,” Judge Bell said. “She was mentored by young women lawyers who came before her, and then she did the same thing — not just young black women, but all women lawyers. She loved teaching.”

Bonita Joyce Dancy was born in Baltimore and raised on Liberty Heights Avenue, the daughter of Homer B. Dancy, manager of the Mondawmin Mall Florsheim Shoe store, and his wife, Joyce Harper Dancy, a homemaker.

After graduating in 1963 from Frederick Douglass High School, she received a bachelor’s degree in 1967 in history from Morgan State University, then a master’s in 1971 from the University of Maryland School of Social Work. She also completed a clinical internship in social work at Sinai Hospital Adolescent Center.

From 1973 to 1975, she was an associate professor of sociology at what was then Coppin State College, where she taught a course on marriage and family relations. She was an adjunct professor at Morgan State from 1975 until 1981, when she received a law degree from the University of Maryland.

Judge Dancy worked as a social worker in adult services and as a child welfare caseworker from 1967 to 1970, then was supervisor for family services for the Baltimore City Department of Social Services from 1971 to 1972.

She was then named administrator for Northwest Youth Services, a position she held for nine years. She was also a training consultant for the University of Maryland School of Social Work from 1974 to 1975, and an attorney adviser for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services from 1981 to 1982.

From 1982 to 1995, Judge Dancy was a domestic equity master for the Circuit Court, hearing family law cases.

She was then appointed as a judge on the Circuit Court by then-Gov. Parris N. Glendening to replace Judge Elsbeth Bothe.

She sat on the bench hearing civil, criminal and family dockets.

“Bonita really cared about young people,” Judge Holland said. “She was very firm and she didn’t suffer fools gladly. It was about civility, and her temperament was never condescending. She didn’t deliver ‘schoolmarm’ lectures, but she wanted them to understand what she was ordering them to do.”

“Bonita was one of the best judges we had. She had a quiet demeanor and high expectations, but lawyers realized what was expected of them, and that was no less than their best,” Judge Bell said. “Justice was to be done. That was always her goal.”

When she retired in 2006, she agreed to be on recall duty and served as the lead judge of Baltimore’s Model on her recall position.

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“Bonita was always full of good ideas and a pleasure to work with, and when she retired, we were all very sad. It was such a loss,” Judge Holland said.

Judge Dancy was a member of the American Bar Association, the Bar Association of Baltimore City, the Monumental City Bar Association, the Maryland Alliance of Black Women Attorneys, the National Association of Women Judges and the Maryland Institute for Continuing Professional Education for Lawyers.

In 1982, she married Theron N. Whitaker Sr., a financial adviser for Annuity Life Insurance Co., and the couple settled into a North Baltimore home.

She and her husband enjoyed traveling and entertaining family and friends.

“We loved to travel and saw so much. We went from the Acropolis to running with the bulls in Pamplona,” her husband said.

They were also both active members of Douglas Memorial Community Church, where Judge Dancy served as a trustee and participated in many church activities.

She was a life member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority and a charter member of Rho Xi Omega chapter. She also chartered and worked diligently with the Baltimore City chapter of the Coalition of 100 Black Women.

She was a member and past president of the Alumni Association Board at Morgan State. In a profile of her published at Morgan, she was quoted saying: “As a little girl I certainly did not think I would be a social worker turned lawyer turned judge.

“In some cases it was the serendipity of capturing the opportunities as they presented themselves,” she added. “Those positions were stepping stones on my career path long before the path was lit for me.”

A memorial service will be held at 11 a.m Thursday at her church, 1325 Madison Ave., Baltimore.

In addition to her husband, she is survived by a stepson, Theron N. Whitaker Jr. of Cheverly; a stepdaughter, Danielle Whitaker Gonzales of Dundalk; two brothers, Homer B. Dancy Jr. of Harrisburg, Pa., and Edward Dancy of Baltimore; three sisters, Norva Dancy of Randallstown, Rhonda Dancy Smith of Baltimore and Josephine Fuller of Washington; and a granddaughter.

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