

[Daily Journal](#) Newswire Articles  
www.dailyjournal.com  
© 2009 The Daily Journal Corporation. All rights reserved.

• select Print from the File menu above

---

• Oct. 30, 2009

## **Losing Her Religion** **Parrilli Abandons Theology for True Calling**

By Dhyana Levey

Daily Journal Staff Writer

By Dhyana Levey

Daily Journal Staff Writer

SAN FRANCISCO - After former justice Joanne C. Parrilli retired from the 1st District Court of Appeal in 2007, her first thought was to finish working on her degree in theology.

World religions had always intrigued Parrilli, 62, who attributes a great deal of her early academic success to the nuns who educated her in elementary school and high school. While working as a justice, she juggled classes here and there at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley and thought about returning on a more regular basis when she had more time.

But then she realized she didn't want to be a full-time student. That's when ADR Services came calling.

Parrilli said the more she heard about becoming a neutral, the more she realized it fit her personality and interests as a former appellate justice. Since 2007, she's worked as a mediator and arbitrator, also dedicating part of her time with ADR Services to helping attorneys prepare their arguments for appearances in appellate court.

"It's all part of the peace-making process," she said. "It's very satisfying. It's a little bit of everything."

Outside of work, Parrilli finds peace through yearly silent retreats offered to members of the legal profession. Each spring since 1996, she's participated in or assisted with weekend sessions at the Jesuit Retreat Center of Los Altos.

"It's a chance to be in the quiet," she said. "We never get that ... It's an introvert's dream to walk into a dining room and not talk."

While attorneys who have worked with the retired justice describe her as understated and mild mannered, they say her "razor sharp" intelligence and experience stemming from her work on the bench demand attention and respect.

"She gets listened to because the substance of what she has to offer is so compelling," said Paul D. Fogel, a partner with Reed Smith in San Francisco who will become an Alameda County Superior Court judge in November.

Parrilli helped Fogel and his colleagues prepare for a complex civil appellate case and, while Fogel said he couldn't go into detail about the nature of the litigation, he praised her assistance.

"There were a lot of moving parts but in no time flat she had it down," he said. "She had a take on the case

that was very insightful and helped us work through it."

Parrilli said she also enjoys working with arbitrations because they remind her of being back on the trial bench. She still gets to make the final decision, but in a more relaxed setting than a courtroom.

She recalled a legal malpractice case she arbitrated last year that she didn't believe would have worked out in mediation. All of the personalities involved were so strong and the parties were so convinced of the merits of their case that she was glad she got to make the decision instead of trying to get the parties to compromise.

"Some people don't like the tension of mediation," Parrilli said.

While conducting mediations, Parrilli said she tries to stay open to every side's argument and allow everyone to be heard. However, she added, she will become more assertive and offer her own opinions if the session appears to be going in circles.

Mill Valley plaintiffs' attorney David S. Rand recently had Parrilli mediate a contentious property boundary dispute between two neighbors and referred to her as "unendingly patient."

"She's a great mediator," he said. "I would use her again. But I have to say, I was disappointed when she stepped down because she was such a fine jurist."

Parrilli came to the Alameda County Superior Court bench in 1985 after spending some time at the county's district attorney's office and then a couple of years practicing small business, family and criminal law in Tahoe City.

A brief stint with the Hayward trial court's quick-moving law and motion calendar whetted her appetite for the appellate courts. In 1995 she became an associate justice for the 1st District Court of Appeal.

But earlier in life, Parrilli said, her career appeared to be headed in a different direction.

The Chicago native dropped out of her Catholic high school in 1964 with the intention of running off to New York to become an actress. But one of the school's nuns intervened and got Parrilli an early entrance into Chicago's Loyola University, where she studied anthropology.

Parrilli then moved out to California and eventually earned her undergraduate degree from San Francisco State University before attending the University of San Francisco School of Law in 1971. She never did get her high school degree.

As a law student, she never thought she'd go on to become a judge. However, a friend during that time gave her a present that predicted her career. He handed her a gavel and a note that said, "You're going to need this someday."

*Here are some of the lawyers who have used Parrilli's mediation, arbitration and appellate preparation services:*

William G. McDevitt, Brayton Purcell; Carol C. Sleeth and Reuben B. Jacobson, Lewis Brisbois Bisgaard & Smith; Paul D. Fogel, Reed Smith; Paul F. Utrecht and James B. Kraus, Zacks & Utrecht; David S. Rand, Mill Valley; William S. Weisberg, Weisberg & Miller; Denis F. Shanagher, Luce, Forward, Hamilton & Scripps; Michael Garvin, Sheuerman, Martini & Tabari; Thomas V. Loran III, Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman; Robert S. Schulman, Fulbright & Jaworski; Bruce E. Copeland, Nixon Peabody

[dhyana\\_levy@dailyjournal.com](mailto:dhyana_levy@dailyjournal.com)

\*\*\*\*\*

© 2009 Daily Journal Corporation. All rights reserved.