



# Woodrow B. Seals Laity Award

Recognizing Laypersons For Outstanding Commitment To Christ

**Judge Woodrow B. Seals**, who helped to establish Perkins Theological School for the Laity in 1974 to provide in-depth theological education for laypersons, was a noteworthy leader in the church, the community, and the world.

An active layperson, Judge Seals served at St. Stephen United Methodist Church in Houston. As chair of Evangelism, he reached out to the local community and brought in many new members. He instituted a program of support to the needy, which later became the Society of St. Stephen. He also founded a Peace Advocate program, which received national United Methodist recognition and support. He acted as a lay delegate to Jurisdictional, General, and World Conferences of the Church, and served on national boards.

Through his profession as a lawyer and then as a judge, he benefitted the community in Houston and throughout Texas in multiple ways. He served as U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Texas from 1961 to 1966 and was appointed Senior Judge, U.S. District Court, Southern District in 1966. Among his judicial decisions was a 1980 ruling (later upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court) that declared a Texas law denying illegal immigrant children access to free public education unconstitutional. During the 1960 presidential campaign, he arranged a nationally publicized meeting between John F. Kennedy and Protestant clergy, which was credited with helping to disarm the contentious religious nature of the campaign.

Beyond the U.S. border, his influence and leadership received notable recognition. Judge Seals became the first non-Catholic to be granted the Papal Benerementi Medal, awarded by Pope John Paul II in 1979, for his work with the needy. In 1987, he was honored with the World Methodist Peace Award from the World Methodist Council.

**Nominations to be submitted by March 1, 2024**

*Award presented at the annual Perkins Theological School for the Laity*

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PO Box 750133 Dallas, TX 75275 214-768-3664

[www.perkins.smu.edu](http://www.perkins.smu.edu)

