

Judge O’Gara has been married for 25 years to Anna O’Gara, and he and his wife have two adult daughters.

Judge O’Gara was the first member of the O’Gara family to graduate from college, earning a B.A. with Honors from Quincy University in 1983. He received his Juris Doctor degree from St. Louis University School of Law in 1987.

He tried numerous cases in the 20th Judicial Circuit in his 30 years as a trial lawyer and a judge. O’Gara tried close to 100 jury trials throughout the State of Illinois and in the United States District Court for the Southern District of Illinois. He was admitted to the United States Supreme Court Bar and he argued appeals before the Illinois Supreme Court and the United States Court of Appeals, 7th Circuit.

Judge O’Gara was the Criminal Justice Act Panel Attorney Representative for the United States District Court, Southern District of Illinois from 2014 until 2016.

John O’Gara was appointed by Illinois Supreme Court Chief Justice Karmeier as Chairman of the 1st and 20th Circuit Illinois Capital Litigation Trial Bar Admission Committee from 2005-2011.

O’Gara was in private practice for over 21 years, concentrated in criminal defense with some civil plaintiff and defense work. He previously served as the Public Defender in Knox County, and he was Public Defender of St. Clair County before becoming an Associate Judge. In 2009-2016 he received an AV Rating and was named to the Bar Register of Preeminent Lawyers by Martindale-Hubbell, listed in Chicago Magazine’s Top Attorneys in Illinois, 2009, 2013-2016, Leading Illinois Lawyer Advisory Board from 2003-2016, and named an Illinois Super Lawyer from 2008-09, 2012-2016.

O’Gara was President of the Illinois Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers from 2012-2013. Judge John O’Gara was President of the St. Clair County Bar Association from 2006-2007. He is Second Vice President of the East St. Louis Bar Association, previously on the St. Clair County Bar Foundation.

Judge O’Gara frequently lectures at continuing education events for lawyers regarding trial and substantive legal issues with the Illinois Institute for Continuing Legal Education, the Illinois State Bar Association, the Illinois Appellate Defender, the Illinois State’s Attorney Association, and he was the first defense lawyer to address the Illinois Homicide Investigators Association. He will participate as a panelist at the Illinois Judicial Education Conference.

Judge O’Gara received the Chief Judge Richard A. Hudlin, IV Award from the St. Clair County Bar Association in 2015. The award is given by the Bar Association to an attorney “who most reflects the commitment to service and charity to the people of St. Clair County and epitomizes the best aspects of the legal community in its relationship to the society at large”.

John O’Gara received the Faith in the Marketplace Award from the Messenger-the newspaper of the Diocese of Belleville- in 2016, which is awarded “to individuals who could be recognized by their faith and by their ethical behavior in their chosen profession.”

Judge O’Gara was named as a Distinguished Alumnus of Althoff Catholic High School in 2016.

O’Gara is on the Board of Directors, Catholic Urban Programs.

O’Gara is a member of the Criminal Justice Council and the Bench and Bar Council of the Illinois State Bar Association. Judge O’Gara volunteers in the Illinois State Bar Association High School Mock Trial Invitational at the University of Illinois College of Law.