

2026 Walks of Life Honoree

Dr. Charles Garven



Dr. Charles J. Garven was born in Montana—a location determined by migrations and meetings on the part of people from far-flung places. His mother, Maisy Wenger, was a nurse who worked in a hospital in Great Falls, Montana, where Garven's father, also named Charles Garven, was stationed with the Air Force. His mother's grandparents had arrived in western Montana from Switzerland in 1897. His father's parents arrived in Cleveland from Scotland in 1923, though ancestors of both were born in Ireland.

It wasn't long before the Garvens re-settled in Cleveland, where Charles Sr. resumed his long-time work as a pressman for the Plain Dealer. The family lived primarily in the working-class suburb of Brook Park and belonged to Assumption Parish. During his years at Padua Franciscan High School, Garven participated in the peer-led Search

Retreat movement, learning enduring lessons in leadership, making life-long friends, and prompting a two-year stint as a Glenmary mission volunteer in Kentucky.

Garven graduated from Cleveland State University with a bachelor's degree in occupational therapy. After earning his medical degree from Case Western Reserve University and completing his residency at the Medical University of South Carolina, he began practicing medicine as a family physician. Leadership opportunities soon beckoned. Garven was the founding medical director for Rockport Family Medicine within Lakewood Hospital, subsequently assuming the roles of the lead physician at Cleveland Clinic Family Medicine, Rockport, and vice president of medical operations at the former Lakewood Hospital.

He has worked with such charitable clinics as Neighborhood Family Practice and NorthCoast Health, also taking on a consulting role for the Sisters of Charity Health System. He is an assistant professor in the Department of Family Medicine at CWRU's Cleveland Clinic Lerner College of Medicine. He has served on the Cuyahoga County Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board as well as the boards of Healthy Lakewood Foundation and Regina Health Center.

Alongside his work as a family physician, educator, and healthcare executive, he has also been a longtime medical mission volunteer. In 1998, Hurricane Mitch, the second deadliest Atlantic hurricane on record, had a particularly devastating impact on Honduras. Fr. Kevin Conroy, who was then assigned to the Cleveland Diocesan mission in El Salvador, recruited Cleveland firefighters and medical personnel to assist him in Honduras.

With medicines and medical supplies from St. John Westshore and the Cleveland Clinic, Garven and others set up a clinic in Nuevo Paraiso, Honduras. After that first 3 ½ week trip, Garven returned to Nuevo Paraiso at least twenty times, often leading students from Gesu, St. Ignatius High School, and Marquette University. He has also volunteered in Haiti and in Houston, where he treated post-Hurricane Katrina evacuees in the Astrodome.

Garven and his wife Eileen have been married for 43 years and live in Lakewood. They raised 3 children—Chad (Bridget), Maura (Ata), and Kevin (Kathleen)—and have two grandchildren, Jack and Fiona.