

John Caruana: 'A truly lovely gentleman with a strong commitment to do the right thing'



John at the RFA Association's 2011 reunion.

John died peacefully on the evening of Saturday 27 July in his 87th year, after a few days of hospice care following a lengthy decline in health.

Born in Malta and qualified as a marine engineer, he was a well-liked parishioner at St Simon Stock's church in Walderslade near Chatham, Kent, having arrived there to work in one of the companies providing design services to the former Royal Dockyard. For several decades he served as treasurer of the Kent Diocesan Area J&P Group and for a lesser period was on the Steering Committee of the diocesan Commission.

When paid employment ceased, he wasted no time in taking an active part in other fields. He was a long-time member and secretary of Medway Interfaith Action - usually the only Catholic - and of the Diocesan Committee for Inter-Religious Relations and its predecessors. He much appreciated pilgrimages around local places of worship, viewing their interiors whilst meeting new people and coming to appreciate their Faiths.

Similarly, he was associated with the ecumenical Kent Industrial Mission, later known as the Kent Workplace Mission, reflecting the decline in employment by heavy manufacturing industries.

Remembering his Mediterranean experience in the Royal Fleet Auxiliary ("RFA"), he was a port visitor for the Apostleship of the Sea (Stella Maris) before having to withdraw on the grounds of age. He discovered that crew members missed having some religious symbols in their cabins and arranged for much appreciated bundles of annual calendars from the Columban Missionaries to come their way.

Bishop Paul Hendricks commented on his tremendous contribution to so many aspects of interfaith and social justice matters, in the Southwark diocese and beyond.

Outside the Church, he was an active Trades Unionist (with some successes in getting justice issues on to the national agenda) and worked with the former Medway Winter Warmers Society and the former Medway Detainees Support Group - serving people in the country's first immigration detention centre in a wing of Rochester Prison.

He was a member of both the RFA and Merchant Navy Associations in the UK: curiously the RFA is not part of the Royal Navy, despite providing services to its fleet.

In addition he was a trustee in the early years of operation of the Kent Refugee Action Network, which partly owes its existence to people pondering upon a relatively casual comment by Bishop John Jukes about the value of collaborative work.

John was willing and able to contribute to regional media, as well as more widely, as can be seen in this [interview](#) for the Times of Malta about his sadly unresolved campaign to discover the grave of a RFA deckhand who suffered an accidental death while on active service during the Cyprus emergency.

In all of this he was sustained by following the Catholic Faith that he received from his family in Malta.

In recent years he has been the main carer for his wife of 53 years, Geraldine, who had become housebound, and who survives him.

Comments from those who knew him have stressed that, "he was a truly lovely gentleman with a strong commitment to do the right thing. A dear, good man whose company could be much enjoyed, with an impressive compassion for those in need and an obvious devotion to ecumenism".