

Catholic Charities board member J.P. ‘Blase’ Cooke dies

Longtime board member of Catholic Charities and generous contributor for the Archdiocese of Baltimore Joseph Peter “Blase” Cooke died Oct. 2 at his Glenwood home.

The 60-year-old St. Louis, Clarksville, parishioner and married father of three sons had carcinoid cancer.

Mr. Cooke’s 25-year involvement with Catholic Charities included serving on the development committee, leadership breakfast committee and the capital campaign, said Harold A. Smith, executive director of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Since 1987, he has been the “founding chair and ongoing life source” for the Catholic Charities golf classic, which he chaired every year until his death, Mr. Smith said.

“It’s a great loss for our community, but he’s also given a great gift,” he said. “By the way he lived he really taught a lot of us how to live and by the way he died ... he taught a lot of us how to die,” said Mr. Smith. “His courage, tenacity, and his continued faith and commitment to others during the last years of his life were remarkable, even though I’m sure he was dealing with great physical pain and even though I’m sure it was tempting to focus on that. But he continued to focus his outreach on those around him.”

A Baltimore native, Mr. Cooke began working for the Marriottsville-based Harkins Builders as a laborer in the 1960s and eventually became the company’s president and chief executive officer, according to the company’s Web site.

Awarded a papal honor in 2004, he also served on the archdiocesan board of financial administration and as chairman of the finance committee at St. Louis. He worked tirelessly for My Brother’s Keeper soup kitchen in Irvington, and the charitable organization named its new facility the J.P. Blase Cooke Center.

"It's rewarding giving back to the community and to the church," Mr. Cooke told The Catholic Review in 2004.

"He was an extraordinary human being," Mr. Smith said. "I think the Jesuit catchphrase is 'living a life of a man for others,' and he certainly lived his life that way. He was in love with life."

Mr. Cooke is survived by his wife of 39 years, Dawn Klinger Cooke of Glenwood; three sons, Brian Cooke of Clarksville and Jason Cooke and Kevin Cooke, both of Baltimore; two brothers, Philip Cooke of Herndon and Gregory Cooke of Sykesville; two sisters, Julia Stamerro of Glenwood and Mary Cooke of Columbia; and four grandchildren.

A funeral Mass was celebrated at St. Louis Oct. 5 and the family is asking that - in lieu of flowers - contributions be made to My Brother's Keeper, 4207 Frederick Ave., Baltimore, MD 21229.

In addition to his work with Catholic Charities, St. Louis, the archdiocese and My Brother's Keeper, Mr. Cooke served many other organizations, including University of Baltimore, where he earned his bachelor's degree.

He was someone who gave of himself, without believing he was spreading himself too thin, said Kerrie Burch-DeLuca, director of communications for Catholic Charities. "Blase was a saint and a prince among men."