

The Revd John Eldrid, who died on 24 October after a stroke, was a much loved and committed parish priest, whose ministry was mostly dedicated to working with those who were suicidal and despairing. He is perhaps best remembered for his work as John 250 at the Central London Branch of the Samaritans.

Born in 1925, he was badly wounded by friendly fire in the Normandy landings during the Second World War. He was just 19, and the bullet that struck his chest did less damage than it might have done, as it struck his cigarette case. He was often subsequently, heard to exclaim: "Smoking is good for you!"

Having studied theology at King's College, London, he was ordained deacon in 1953 and priest in 1954; the same year, he married Rosalie, to whom he was devoted.

His first curacy was in London diocese. In 1956, he moved to East Grinstead before returning to London to be Assistant Curate of St Stephen's, Walbrook. It was here that he met and worked with Prebendary Chad Varah, who founded the Samaritans, and his work with the Samaritans began. Save for a brief period between 1964 and 1972, when he worked in the diocese of Portsmouth and was director of Portsmouth Samaritans, the work of Central London Branch was one of the constants in his life.

Between 1968 and 1972, he was the national chairman of the Samaritans, and he was on the national executive committee for 30 years. In 1972, he became General Consultant to Central London Samaritans, returning to St Stephen's, Walbrook, and in 1974 he became their director.

His commitment to those who were suicidal and in emotional distress was absolute. He was perhaps at his happiest when working with those in crisis. His work as director of the Central London Branch involved him in leading the branch's development and training new volunteers.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was growing concern about the rising rate suicide rate among young people, and so he sought a way for the Samaritans to reach out to this group of people. In 1970, he co-founded, with Dick Blackwell, the Festival Branch of the Samaritans. This is part of John's legacy to the Samaritans, as volunteers from this branch still go to outdoor events, such as rock festivals, where young people gather. Through this, the Samaritans have gained many younger callers and volunteers.

John realised that the befriending model used by the Samaritans, which he did much to help develop, was important internationally, and he helped to found La Fédération Internationale des Responsables dans la Cité, an organisation for young people involved in telephonic help and emergency services around Europe. He later served as a consultant to the group.

He and Rosalie returned to live in Havant in 1987, and in 1988 his book *Caring for the Suicidal* was published. It told of the work of the Samaritans, and shared the principles by which John worked. This remains a seminal book for all new Samaritans.

He continued to serve in the diocese of Portsmouth, where he had permission to officiate, and to see Samaritan clients; and in 1997 he was awarded the OBE for his services to the Samaritans.

He will be greatly missed by all those whose lives he touched, and his thoughtful befriending style will live on with successive generations of Samaritan volunteers. He is survived by Rosalie, their children, Sarah and Peter, and three grand-daughters, Freya, Amy, and Charis.