



Pray for me Cormac Murphy-O'Connor

Here lie the remains of His Eminence Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, Cardinal Priest of the Holy Roman Church of the title of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, tenth Archbishop of Westminster and President of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

Early Years

Cormac Murphy-O'Connor was born on 24th August 1932 in Reading, the fifth son of Dr George Murphy-O'Connor and his wife Ellen. His parents originally came from County Cork.

Education

He was educated at the Presentation College, Reading, and Prior Park College in Bath. In the Holy Year of 1950 he started training as a priest for the diocese of Portsmouth at the Venerable English College, Rome, where he joined his two brothers, Brian and Patrick. In Rome he gained licentiates in philosophy and theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University. He was ordained by Archbishop Luigi Traglia on 28th October 1956.

Diocese of Portsmouth

On returning to his home diocese, he served as curate at Corpus Christi, Portsmouth (1956-63) and Sacred Heart, Fareham (1963-66). In 1966 he became Private Secretary to the Bishop of Portsmouth, Derek Worlock. He also served as Director of Vocations and helped establish the country's first Diocesan Pastoral Centre at Park Place, Wickham. In September 1970 he went to Immaculate Conception, Portswood as Parish Priest.

Venerable English College, Rome

At the end of 1971 returned to Rome as Rector of the Venerable English College, Rome. The years following the Second Vatican Council were challenging ones to be a seminary rector, with much uncertainty about the future and the constant need, as he later put it, to 'broker a peace between the people who want to change everything and the people who want to change nothing'. He proved to be a steady pair of hands and did much to boost student numbers and the College's finances. As Rector he also hosted Archbishop Coggan of Canterbury during his historic visit to Blessed Pope Paul VI in 1977.

Bishop of Arundel and Brighton

In 1977 he was appointed third Bishop of Arundel and Brighton, a diocese covering Sussex and Surrey. He was ordained Bishop on 21st December 1977 by his predecessor, Michael Bowen, who had become Archbishop of Southwark. The new bishop quickly became engaged in a round of parish and school visitations, opening up his large house at Storrington for special events and adopting the American 'RENEW' programme. This was inspired by his belief that the Church should be 'experienced not as a faceless institution but as a community, a family, to whose life all its members contribute' and involved the creation of 'small communities' in parishes.

Ecumenical work

From 1982 until 2000 he was Co-Chairman of the Anglican and Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), and ecumenism remained a cause close to his heart. Indeed, in 2000 he was awarded a Doctorate in Divinity by the Archbishop of Canterbury in recognition of his work for Christian unity.

Archbishop of Westminster and Cardinal

On 15 February 2000 he was appointed tenth Archbishop of Westminster, in succession to Cardinal Basil Hume, OSB. The following year, on 21st February 2001, he was created Cardinal Priest of the title of Santa Maria sopra Minerva. Among the other new cardinals created that day was Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the future Pope Francis, with whom he would enjoy a friendly relationship.

As Cardinal he was appointed to the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, the Administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See, the Pontifical Council for the Study of Organisational and Economic Problems of the Holy See and the Pontifical Council for the Family. He also served on the Pontifical Councils for Culture and for Laity, and acted as secretary of Vox Clara. In April 2005 he participated in the conclave that elected Pope Benedict XVI.

As Archbishop of a densely-populated and diverse diocese, he took on various initiatives. In 2001 he began replacing the previous system of episcopal areas with four key areas of responsibility (Education, Clergy and Consecrated Life, Pastoral Affairs, and Ecumenism and Interfaith relations), each one under the supervision of a different auxiliary bishop. He hoped this would serve further to unify the diocese.

In September 2003 he launched 'At Your Word, Lord' with a special Mass held at Wembley Arena. Based on the 'RENEW' programme he had followed in Arundel and Brighton, this three year process brought together thousands in small prayer groups and promoted a vision of the Church as 'a communion of communities.' It was followed by the publication in February 2006 of a 'White Paper,' Communion and Mission, which identified the priorities for the local Church in the twenty-first century: the call to holiness, the formation of adults and young people, small communities, priesthood and vocations and increased participation, collaboration and accountability.

Aware of the scourge of child abuse and having had personal experience of cases as Bishop of Arundel and Brighton, he commissioned Lord Nolan to chair an independent review on child protection in the Catholic Church in England and Wales. This was a landmark document and led to the establishment of an independent office (COPCA) to oversee the protection of children and vulnerable adults.

In order to consolidate this work, he also commissioned a review, conducted by Baroness Cumberlege, which led to the establishment of the Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Service and the National Catholic Safeguarding Commission.

As a Cardinal and President of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, he had to tackle many sensitive issues in the 'public square', providing a Catholic voice on issues as diverse as the war in Iraq, medical ethics and the 2006 Equality Act. He enjoyed good

relations with the Royal Family and in 2002 not only read a prayer at the funeral of the Queen Mother but also preached before Her Majesty the Queen and Prince Philip at the Sunday service in Sandringham. He was privileged, too, to host the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh for lunch at Archbishop's House, an historical highlight with regard to the place of the Catholic Church in British society.

Archbishop Emeritus

On reaching the age of seventy-five, he submitted his resignation as Archbishop of Westminster to the Holy See. He continued until his successor, Archbishop Vincent Nichols, was appointed on 3rd April 2009. He was the first Archbishop of Westminster to retire, all his predecessors having died in office.

He moved to a house on Duke's Avenue, Chiswick and continued his work in Rome, taking up new posts on the Congregation for Bishops and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. On a number of occasions he acted as Papal representative to such places as Stockholm, India, Bangladesh and Trondheim in Norway.

In June 2010 he was named as the Visitor to the Province of Armagh in the aftermath of the Ryan and Murphy Reports on child abuse.

After reaching his eightieth birthday in August 2012, many of his Roman commitments ceased and he participated in the conclave of 2013 as a non-voter. In 2016 he celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of his Priestly Ordination.

Throughout his life, he kept up a keen interest in sport (especially rugby and golf) and music; he was a talented pianist and occasionally performed at charity events and celebrations.

His publications include *The Family of the Church* (1984), *At the Heart of the World* (2004) and a volume of memoirs, *An English Spring* (2015). He will long be remembered for his personal warmth, humour and persuasive leadership.

In August 2017 he entered hospital for the last time. Shortly before his death he sent a final message to his brother Bishops asking for their prayers. On Friday 1st September 2017 he sent a further message to the clergy and lay faithful of the Diocese of Westminster thanking

God for the many blessings he had received and thanking all for their friendship. He added that he was at peace and had no fear of what was to come. Later that afternoon, strengthened by the Church's sacraments, he fell asleep in the Lord, a few days after his 85th birthday.

May he rest in peace.