News

by Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Vatican City — September 1, 2017

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint



English Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, a longtime leader in Catholic-Anglican relations and former archbishop of Westminster, died Sept. 1 at the age 85. He is pictured in a 2013 photo. (CNS/Paul Haring)

English Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, a longtime leader in Catholic-Anglican relations and former archbishop of Westminster, died Sept. 1 at the age of 85.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols of Westminster issued a statement saying his predecessor "died peacefully this afternoon, surrounded by his family and friends." Murphy O'Connor had been hospitalized in mid-August.

Early Sept. 1, the Westminster diocese tweeted a link to a letter from Murphy-O'Connor, which said, "At this time, the words I pray every night are never far from my thoughts: 'Into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit.'"

He asked Nichols to tell the people of the diocese "I am at peace and have no fear of what is to come."

Murphy-O'Connor was once described by The Tablet, a Catholic weekly, as "everyone's favorite bishop: human, genial, collaborative, imposing.''

A leader in ecumenical relations, Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor served as Catholic chairman of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission for two decades. At a lecture in Salford, England, just a month before he was made a cardinal in 2001, he said that "unity must be our constant goal and at the heart of all that we do.''

Anglican Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury, reacting to the cardinal's death, said that "in Cormac, people saw something of Christ."

The Anglican leader said that, as Catholic chairman of ARCIC, Murphy-O'Connor "lent both his customary good humor and his theological acumen to the production of some of the most influential of ecumenical agreed texts of the 20th century. At a time when others bemoaned the lack of instant progress in ecumenical relations, Cormac saw the work of ARCIC as an investment and a building block for future closer relations."

Advertisement

Cormac Murphy-O'Connor was born Aug. 24, 1932, in Reading, England, the fifth son of Irish parents, Dr. George Murphy-O'Connor and his wife, Ellen. Two of his brothers also became priests.

He was educated at Presentation College, Reading, and Prior Park College, Bath. He trained for the priesthood at the English College in Rome and earned degrees in philosophy and theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University. He was ordained a priest in Rome Oct. 28, 1956, and was appointed bishop of Arundel and Brighton in 1977.

Prior to his ordination as a bishop he was rector of the English College. He also was private secretary and chaplain to the then-Bishop Derek Worlock of Portsmouth, later archbishop of Liverpool.

St. John Paul II inducted him into the College of Cardinals in February 2001 and he retired eight years later.

After retiring as archbishop of Westminster, he moved to a house in Chiswick and continued his work in Rome, taking up new posts on the congregations for Bishops and for the Evangelization of Peoples. On several occasions, he acted as papal representative to places such as Stockholm, India, Bangladesh and Trondheim, Norway.

In June 2010, he was named as the apostolic visitor to the Archdiocese of Armagh, Northern Ireland, in the aftermath of the Ryan and Murphy Reports on clergy abuse of children.

After he turned 80, many of his Vatican commitments ceased, and he participated in the conclave of 2013 as a nonvoter.

Throughout his life, the cardinal remained interested in music and sports, especially rugby and golf. He occasionally performed on the piano 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).

His death leaves the College of Cardinals with 222 members, 121 of whom are under the age of 80 and eligible to vote in a conclave.