

The Most Reverend Peter David Gregory Smith  
21<sup>st</sup> October 1943 – 6<sup>th</sup> March 2020  
Archbishop Emeritus of Southwark

*“Love if the fullness of the law”*

Archbishop Emeritus Peter Smith was down-to-earth, a gentle Canon Lawyer and later a gentle bishop, who always wanted to be a Parish Priest but the Holy Spirit had other plans.

Born in Battersea on October 21<sup>st</sup> 1943, son of Cuthbert and Kathleen Smith, and he grew up in south-west London. He had one brother, James, and no sisters. He attend the local Catholic primary school before going on to Clapham College, a Catholic Secondary School in the area. Having completed his A Levels he considered the world of work. Having seen a vacancy in the local press he asked his father who Coutts and Co are; “the Queen’s bankers boy” was the reply – the young Peter thought to himself “that will do for me”.

After a few years his mind turned to considering University. Coutts were very supportive when he told them that he was considering a Law degree and they assured him that he would be welcome back if he wished once he graduated. So Mr Smith headed off to Exeter University and in 1966 gained his degree (LLB). While at Exeter the call of a priestly vocation began to stir in his mind and the University priest Chaplain was very encouraging, *“I always thought you would make a good priest”*; the head of faculty was less impressed as he thought Peter would have had a good career in the Law.

Having returned to London he applied to his home diocese of Southwark to begin formation for priesthood, and Archbishop Cyril Cowderoy decided to send him to St John’s Seminary, Womersley. His memory of arrival at the Seminary stayed with him for the rest of his years. His brother dropped him off at the door and swiftly drove away. Climbing the stairs he was greeted by a ‘be-cassocked’ student with a clip board. *“Name”*, the reply to *“Smith, believe it or not”*, was *“oh, you’re from the world”*, a curious introduction to seminary! Although he did, while at Seminary, once question his call he was ordained to the priesthood at the Seminary on the 5<sup>th</sup> July 1972.

His first appointment was as assistant priest at the Parish of St Francis, Stockwell. When Archbishop Cyril told Fr Smith about his appointment he said *“We are sending you to Larkhall Lane”*, something that made Fr Smith think of Upstairs Downstairs. He was in Stockwell parish for two years, also during this time helping with the work of the Tribunal at Archbishop’s House.

Fr Smith’s legal background and work with the Tribunal prompted the Archbishop to send him for further studies, and in 1974 he moved to Rome, studying for a Canon Law Licence at the Angelicum. While in Rome he was told that his name had been suggested for work in the Vatican diplomatic service; he was very grateful to the Archbishop who refused permission to release him! He was, however, recommended as a candidate for the Doctoral course and in 1977 he gained his Doctorate in Canon Law (JCD) from the Pontifical University of St Thomas Aquinas, Rome.

On completion of his studies he returned from Rome to take up an appointment at his alma mater, St John’s Seminary, as Professor of Canon Law (1977 – 1984). After seven year Archbishop Michael Bowen spoke with Fr Smith about a new appointment; he asked him to move to St Andrew’s

Parish, Thornton Heath, to start at Easter 1984. He was delighted by this opportunity as he had wanted to be a Parish Priest. However, the Archbishop only wanted him to be there for a year as Administrator, *"to keep his hand in"*, as he would be appointed as Rector of St John's Seminary the following Easter, 1985. Fr Smith greatly enjoyed his splendid, but short, time at St Andrew's and spoke of it frequently.

He began, what was to be ten years of service, as Seminary Rector in 1985 and while in office he worked with many men in formation for priesthood. A significant project that he oversaw at the Seminary was the re-ordering of Chapel, working with architects and artists to create a new space for the community to pray, that remains relatively unchanged today. In 1993 he was approached by Cardinal Hume to assist the Catholic Truth Society and became its Chairman, a role he continued to hold until 2007. Early in 1995, Mgr Peter Smith, having been made a Papal Chaplain, approached the Archbishop about a new appointment. Again looking forward to an opportunity to be a Parish Priest he proposed an Easter handover, followed by a short sabbatical to be ready for a move in the *"autumn manoeuvres"*. Archbishop Bowen was hesitant to make a change but agreed to give the idea some consideration.

The aphorism *"if you want to make God laugh tell Him your plans"* was possibly called to mind as Mgr Smith's hopes for a sabbatical came to nought. Another phone call from Archbishop Bowen was to lead to an important question: the Holy Father wanted to know if Mgr Smith would accept the appointment as the Bishop of East Anglia. With some hesitancy he accepted. His appointment was announced on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1995 and he was ordained bishop in Cathedral Church of St John the Baptist, Norwich, by Cardinal Basil Hume on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1995. Bishop Peter took on his new episcopal responsibilities with vigour and faithfulness, and had a great love for the diocese and people of East Anglia. Described as 'direct, but never unkind' he brought this and his many other skills and talents to his new episcopal ministry.

In 1998 Bishop Peter became Chair of the Bishops' Conference Department of Christian Responsibility and Citizenship, a role that would lead to many radio and television interviews. This department has a broad remit, one that would lead Bishop Peter to work with and lobby national government. A particular example of this was the input the Catholic Church was able to give in 2005 on the Mental Capacity Bill. In 2000 Bishop Peter was asked to represent the Bishops of England and Wales on the committee chaired by Lord Nolan which was to review child protection in the Church; the report of this committee, known as the Nolan Report, was published in 2001.

The Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham lies within the diocese of East Anglia and as Bishop he was a member of the Shrine Committee. It was after one of their meetings while in Walsingham that Bishop Peter received a phone call from the Apostolic Nuncio. Archbishop Puenta said *"I am glad that you are in Walsingham... as Our Lady said 'Yes'."* This cryptic start to the conversation was to lead on to the Nuncio passing on the request of the Holy Father that Bishop Peter become the next Archbishop of Cardiff – he did say yes and soon left East Anglia for the city of Cardiff.

Archbishop Peter took on Cardiff Diocese at a difficult time in its history, but despite being from England and not speaking Welsh, he won over the clergy and people of the Archdiocese. When describing Archbishop Peter's time in Cardiff his successor Archbishop George Stack, wrote: *"We in*

*the Archdiocese of Cardiff have good reason to be grateful to Archbishop Peter Smith for his ministry amongst us between the years 2001 and 2010. His kind and warm presence and his sense of humour ensured that he was an approachable pastor and friend.”* He made many friends in Wales, at the same time deepening ecumenical and inter-faith relations, especially with the Muslim Council of Wales. Among these friends was the then Archbishop of Wales, Archbishop Rowan Williams. When in 2002 Archbishop Rowan became Archbishop of Canterbury, although pleased for him, he was disappointed in losing an ecumenical partner. It was while in Cardiff that, at the urging of others, he agreed to obtain his episcopal heraldry. His motto *Legis Plenitudo Caritas* (love is the fullness of the law) drew on his Canonical studies and his calling as an ordained minister, and he always tried to lead in a just and loving manner.

He very much expected to spend the remaining years of his ministry in Wales, but another phone call from a Nuncio was to bring another change. This time the call came from a new Nuncio, Archbishop Faustino: *“It is all sorted... Southwark!”* *“Oh good”* replied Archbishop Peter *“who is it?”* A silence hovered as Archbishop Peter realised that the phone call could only mean that the appointee was to be him, *“but I am no spring chicken!”* he said. The Nuncio in reply told him that as he knew Southwark, his home diocese, so well and had *“a good eight years”* of ministry left he would be ideal. So with some sadness at departing he moved back to South London, where his journey had begun. Speaking of his appointment to Southwark, Archbishop Peter said: *“I shall never forget the warmth and generosity of the people of Wales, not only the Catholic community but so many others, and their great sense of humour and cheerfulness. However, my sadness at leaving is tempered by the prospect of returning to my roots in South London and going home to the Archdiocese in which I was born and for which I was ordained a priest in 1972... It is good to be returning home, although I feel there is part of me which will always have a ‘second home’ in Wales.”*

Southwark was somewhat larger a diocese than Archbishop Peter had looked after previously, with three auxiliary bishops; he valued their input and help – but it took some months to fully appreciate that he was not the only bishop watching over the diocese. Despite it being his home diocese until 2010 he had only directly ministered there for about three years, as much of his time as a Southwark priest had been based at the Seminary. He did however know many of the clergy from his various times at St John’s Seminary and so felt a warm welcome. Within weeks of his return to London the Papal Visit of Benedict XVI took place. Archbishop Peter welcomed the Holy Father to the diocese during a visit to St Peter’s Home, Vauxhall, and greeted the Pope on behalf of the Bishops of England and Wales at the Hyde Park gathering.

He set out to build on the work of his predecessors and to develop Southwark in various ways. A significant example of this was his desire to strengthen the support he received in the governance of the diocese, and one fruit of the review he commissioned into this was an expansion of the trustees of the charity to include four lay trustees. He also supported work outside the diocese travelling overseas with CAFOD and also visiting Nigeria meeting several religious congregations who support Southwark with priests. In 2014 he assisted the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton for several months as Apostolic Administrator, following the resignation of the Bishop, until the installation of Bishop Richard Moth in May 2015.

During his seventy fifth year, in line with Canon Law, Archbishop Peter submitted his resignation from office and on the 10<sup>th</sup> June, exactly nine years after his installation in Southwark his successor was appointed. On the 25<sup>th</sup> July he handed on the Diocesan Crozier to Archbishop John Wilson and drove off into retirement in the Kentish town of Whitstable to enjoy his own space, with a decent garden and a log burner! His plan was to do nothing but be retired for six months and then to perhaps help out as a priest in the local area. He had always been proud of the fact that the medics had “*never had their hands on me*”, sadly in early in 2020 he began to feel unwell and had to book into the doctor. His condition deteriorated rapidly and he transferred to the Royal Marsden Hospital at short notice for what were to be his final weeks. The diagnosis of advanced cancer meant no treatment was practical. He died in the final minutes of Friday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

Among various other responsibilities Archbishop Peter had were Vice President of the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales (2009 – 2019) and Chairman of the Central Religious Advisory Committee (CRAC) of the BBC and ITC (2001 – 2004).

He was appointed Sub-Prelate and Chaplain of the Order of St John of Jerusalem in 2002. He has been awarded Honorary Fellowships at St Edmund’s College, Cambridge (1997), the University of Wales, Lampeter (2004) and Cardiff University (2006).

Archbishop Peter was a stalwart patriot, generous to friend and stranger, although not at all keen on the ideal of European integration. Despite this he did enjoy travelling a couple of times a year to a small town just over the Belgian border for a little shopping trip for his ‘silk cut purple’. Bishops who wanted a quick word after meetings would always know where to find him – just outside... look for the plume of smoke.

Peter Smith enjoyed walking and holidays in the West Country. He revelled in hot weather and bright sunshine, looking forward to spending time in retirement tending and watching over a garden. A regret he had in his move to Southwark was the loss of his garden, he told someone in Cardiff soon after arriving “... *I have no garden, but one weed and I am cultivating it!*” On a quiet evening at Archbishop’s House Southwark he could be found in front of a television showing Midsomer Murders either munching Maltesers or snoozing.

Archbishop John Wilson of Southwark wrote about of his predecessor:

*“In a ministry that spanned almost fifty years, Archbishop Peter made an outstanding contribution to the Catholic Church across three dioceses, and nationally through his service on the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales. Most importantly, he was a disciple who witnessed to Christ with straightforward, splendid faith and radiant joy. Together with the other dioceses in which Archbishop Peter served, we mourn him with enormous affection and deep gratitude for all he gave so willingly and selflessly to so many people.”*