Religious leaders pay tribute to former Pope Benedict XVI

Religious leaders around the world have paid tribute to former Pope Benedict XVI who died in New Year's Eve died, aged 95, almost a decade after he unexpectedly stood down due to his age and poor health.

He led the Catholic Church for from 2005 to 2013, he became the first Pope to resign since Gregory XII in 1415. At the time he was nearly 86 making him the fourth-oldest person to hold the office.

Pope Francis paid tribute to his "dearest" predecessor at a New Year's Eve service at the Vatican, describing him as a noble and kind man.

The Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia, Archbishop Geoff Smith, issued a statement today on the passing of Pope Benedict.

"I join with members of Catholic Church, especially in Australia, in giving thanks for the life and ministry of the late Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. Even though it was well known that the health of the late Pope Emeritus was declining, the news of his death is still a shock to many," Archbishop Smith said.

"I give thanks for Pope Benedict's long ministry, his commitment to Jesus Christ, his scholarship and wisdom and his efforts to strengthen the relationship between the Catholic and Anglican Churches.

"May he rest in peace and rise in glory."

[Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, said](#) Pope Benedict was "one of the greatest theologians ofhis age – committed to the faith of the Church and stalwart in its defence".

"In all things, not least in his writing and his preaching, he looked to Jesus Christ, the image of the invisible God. It was abundantly clear that Christ was the root of his thought and the basis of his prayer," the Archbishop of Canterbury said.

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