****

**\*\*\*PRESS RELEASE\*\*\***

**LEADING CHURCH FIGURES URGE CHRISTIANS TO PARTICIPATE IN WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY (18TH- 25TH JANUARY)**

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 18TH JAN 07.01AM**

Christian leaders across the UK have today issued a joint letter encouraging Christians of all denominations to join in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity which runs from 18-25th January 2019.

The letter, whose signatories include Archbishop Justin Welby (Archbishop of Canterbury); Cardinal Archbishop Vincent Nichols (Archbishop of Westminster); The Revd Michaela Youngson (President of the Methodist Conference), His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos (Coptic Archbishop of London) and Pastor Agu Irukwu (Chair of Redeemed Christian Church of God UK) – invites Christians to participate in this call to prayer with the ‘utmost seriousness.’

The letter’s central message urges Christians to ‘pray together for Christian unity, in our life together, our witness and our longing to see the Kingdom of God in the midst of our world’ and to ‘find ways to give expression to our search for greater unity in obedience to the command of Christ that we love one another,’ citing Jesus’s last prayer on unity taken from John 17.

The leaders also encourage Christians not just to pray during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity but also to get involved in Thy Kingdom Come – a global ecumenical prayer movement in which Christians pray for more people to become followers of Jesus Christ.

Thy Kingdom Come, now in its 4th year, has united over a million Christians from more than 65 different denominations and traditions, in more than 114 countries to pray for evangelisation. It takes place between Ascension to Pentecost which this year is May 30th-June 9th.

Commenting on the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Cardinal Vincent Nichols said: “We should never underestimate the power of prayer nor our need of the strength that God gives us through prayer. I appeal to all to take to heart this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Growth in unity comes about, above all, as a gift of God. Our shared life in Christ is the powerful source of our shared mission. May this Week of Prayer, as well as the time of prayer at Pentecost, ‘Thy Kingdom Come’, strengthen our common life and mission.”

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, said: “Unity in truth and faithfulness in witness are gifts to the Church from the heart of God. Each requires the other. Please join with us and other faithful servants of Christ in churches across England as we pray for the Holy Spirit to work in us to fulfil God’s purpose (Philippians 2.13).”

Lynn Green, General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, said: “As I meet churches and leaders across Baptists Together it is very clear to me that God is at work stirring up a renewed passion for prayer and a fresh desire to work together because we long to see God’s Kingdom come in our communities and nations. Pray, deepen relationships and be part of what God is doing in these days!”

Archbishop Angaelos, Coptic Archbishop of London, said: “As we experience significant challenges across our own nation and become more aware of the very real struggles experienced by Christian sisters and brothers in the Middle East and around the world, as well as so many others who struggle in a variety of ways, it is paramount that we come together and offer our prayers collectively. It is especially at times of apparent hopelessness and powerlessness that we call upon God’s grace and are reminded of the collective strength we have in prayer, being and offering light in darkness as the Body of Christ.”

Speaking about Thy Kingdom Come, the Revd Michaela Youngson, President of Methodist Conference, said: “Thy Kingdom Come is a fantastic example of Christian Churches working together, not for their own sake but for the sake of all God’s people. Prayer is at the heart of all we do, leading us to acts of love and care in response to the love of God that we see most clearly in Jesus Christ.”

**\*\*\*ENDS\*\*\***

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

* For more information contact: Kemi on Kemi.Bamgbose@LambethPalace.org.uk or call 07904 855571.
* The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is organised by Christians Together in Britain and Ireland. It takes place 18th-25th January. For more information visit: [www.ctbi.org.uk/weekofprayer](http://www.ctbi.org.uk/weekofprayer)
* Churches Together in England is the formal ‘National Ecumenical Instrument’ of the 47 national member churches in England: [www.cte.org.uk](https://emea01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cte.org.uk&data=02%7C01%7Ckemi.bamgbose%40lambethpalace.org.uk%7C0e74a4e6bdd1416c6f1308d67c755c6b%7C95e2463b3ab047b49ac1587c77ee84f0%7C0%7C0%7C636833240849324657&sdata=lAgEgH2OlBh%2FbhOPOftdMiB63Rdl8A6fm%2Bk2Oj6O83s%3D&reserved=0)
* For more information on Thy Kingdom Come visit www.thykingdomcome.global

**Full list of signatories:**

* Cardinal Vincent Nichols – Archbishop of Westminster and President of CTE
* Archbishop Justin Welby – Archbishop of Canterbury and President of CTE
* Archbishop Dr John Sentamu – Archbishop of York
* His Eminence Archbishop Gregorios – Archbishop of Thyateira and Great Britain
* His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos – Coptic Archbishop of London and President of CTE
* The Revd Michaela Youngson – President of Methodist Conference
* The Revd Dr Hugh Osgood – Moderator of the Free Churches Group and Presidents of CTE
* The Revd Lynn Green – General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain
* Pastor Agu Irukwu – Chair of Redeemed Christian Church of God UK and President of CTE
* The Revd Canon Billy Kennedy – Leader of the Pioneer Network