THE ARCHBISHOP
OF CANTERBURY

**The Archbishops of Canterbury and York are issuing a call to the nation to pause and reflect to remember the more than 100,000 people across the UK who have died after contracting Covid-19 and all those who know and love them.**

In an open letter, Archbishops Justin Welby and Stephen Cottrell invite everyone across England – whether they have faith or not – to pause, reflect on the "enormity of this pandemic" and to pray.

Death, they insist, does not have "the last word", and the Christian faith promises that one day "every tear will be wiped away".

God, they write, knows grief and suffering and "shares in the weight of our sadness".

Acknowledging the wider impact of the pandemic on the whole of society through loneliness, anxiety and economic hardship, they invite people to "cast their fears on God".

The letter also speaks of the particular impact of the pandemic on poorer communities, minority ethnic communities and those living with disabilities.

It acknowledges many who have lost their livelihoods as a result of the economic impact of the pandemic and it speaks about those unable to be with loved ones as they died or even at their graveside because of the restrictions.

The archbishops give thanks for NHS and social care staff, who they describe as "a blessing and lifeline for our nation"; for clergy, other frontline workers and "so many good neighbours". They give thanks for the development of vaccines and reiterate a call to everyone to take the vaccine when it is offered.

They also urge people to support each other both by following the guidelines to limit the spread of the virus and in practical ways, reaching out in care and kindness.

The letter includes an invitation to everyone – whether they have faith or not – to join the archbishops in pausing and praying each day at 6pm from February 1.

The archbishops write: "100,000 isn't just an abstract figure. Each number is a person: someone we loved and someone who loved us. We also believe that each of these people was known to God and cherished by God.

"We write to you then in consolation, but also in encouragement, and ultimately in the hope of Jesus Christ. The God who comes to us in Jesus knew grief and suffering himself. On the cross, Jesus shares the weight of our sadness."

They conclude: "Most of all, we have hope because God raised Jesus from the dead. This is the Christian hope that we will be celebrating at Easter.

“We live in the hope that we will share in his resurrection. Death doesn’t have the last word. In God’s kingdom, every tear will be wiped away.

“Please be assured of our prayers. Please join us.”

The tragic milestone comes amid lockdown conditions in which large gatherings such as a national memorial service are not possible in person.

It is expected that the Church of England will hold services of remembrance for those who have died and thanksgiving for all those who have cared for them when it is possible to do so.

A prayer for those who mourn is also being shared on social media and will be available to churches across the country. The Text is below.

## Full text of the letter from the Archbishops to the nation

*Dear friends*

*As we reach the terrible milestone of 100,000 deaths from COVID-19, we invite everyone in our nation to pause as we reflect on the enormity of this pandemic.*

*100,000 isn’t just an abstract figure. Each number is a person: someone we loved and someone who loved us. We also believe that each of these people was known to God and cherished by God.*

*We write to you then in consolation, but also in encouragement, and ultimately in the hope of Jesus Christ. The God who comes to us in Jesus knew grief and suffering himself. On the cross, Jesus shares the weight of our sadness.*

*We therefore encourage everyone who is feeling scared, or lost or isolated to cast their fears on God. We also know that poorer communities, minority ethnic communities and those living with disabilities have been afflicted disproportionately and cry out for the healing of these inequalities. During this pandemic, we encourage everyone to do all they can to live within the guidelines and constraints given by government following the advice of the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Adviser. We show our commitment, care and love for one another by ensuring we do everything we can to stop the virus spreading.*

*None of this is easy. Very many of us are experiencing isolation, loneliness, anxiety and despondency like never before. Many people have lost their livelihoods. Our economy struggles. Also, the necessary restrictions we live with have also prevented us from being alongside loved ones as they died, or even at their graveside. All grief profoundly affects us, but this pandemic grief is so hard.*

*Therefore, we need to support each other. We do this by following the guidelines. But we also do it by reaching out to each other with care and kindness.*

*One thing we can all do is pray. We hope it is some consolation to know that the church prays for the life of our nation every day. Whether you're someone of faith, or not, we invite you to call on God in prayer. Starting on 1 February we invite you to set aside time every evening to pray, particularly at 6pm each day. More than ever, this is a time when we need to love each other. Prayer is an expression of love. A number of resources will be made available on our website.*

*Finally, we write of hope. We are grateful for the hope we have because of the service of our NHS and social care staff. What a blessing and lifeline for our nation. We are grateful for the service given in local communities by clergy, other frontline workers and so many good neighbours. We are grateful for the hope of the vaccine. It is a testimony to the God-given wisdom and gifts of scientists and researchers. We urge everyone to take the vaccine as soon as it is offered to you.*

*Most of all, we have hope because God raised Jesus from the dead. This is the Christian hope that we will be celebrating at Easter. We live in the hope that we will share in his resurrection. Death doesn't have the last word. In God's kingdom, every tear will be wiped away.*

*Please be assured of our prayers. Please join us.*

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