

Address to the Throne, United Reformed Church General Assembly 2018

This address was read out by Mr Alan Yates, Immediate-past Moderator of the United Reformed Church General Assembly, on Monday 9 July 2018.

To the queen's most excellent majesty,

The General Assembly of the United Reformed Church now meeting in Nottingham sends loyal greetings to your majesty.

Since the General Assembly last met, the Duke of Edinburgh has retired from public life. We express our thanks for his remarkable lifetime of service and wish him good health and fulfilment in his retirement.

Many members of our Church shared in the joy of the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex this May. The sermon preached by the Most Reverend Michael Curry was a forceful reminder that our God is a God of love, and that this has important implications for how we relate to one another. As he said: 'Jesus of Nazareth taught us that the way of love is the way to a real relationship with the God who created all of us, and the way to true relationship with each other as children of that one God, as brothers and sisters in God's human family.' As a Church, we are troubled by some developments in society and government that are acting to diminish this relationship.

In the year when we are celebrating 70 years since the Empire Windrush arrived in Tilbury Docks, we have been appalled by recent revelations about the treatment of some members of the 'Windrush Generation' and other migrants as a result of the government's 'hostile environment' policies. General Assembly passed a resolution expressing its deep concern that these policies are leading to destitution, discrimination and distrust in society.

Over the last year, we have been engaged in a process of reflecting on the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade with members of our sister Churches in the Council for World Mission. We are mindful that historic injustices form a backdrop to Britain's international responsibilities and immigration policies, and create a particular imperative to ensure that every individual, whatever their status, is treated with humanity, dignity, respect and fairness.

A major issue of continuing concern to the Church is poverty and inequality in Britain, and especially the impact of welfare changes being pursued by your majesty's government. Many of our church members are involved in running and supporting foodbanks, which have seen major increases in demand, especially in areas where universal credit has been rolled out. We believe that a benefit system which drives families into debt and leaves them hungry is a failing benefit system.

However, we are glad to live in a country which takes seriously its role and responsibilities in tackling global poverty, and commend Your majesty's government for its continued commitment to the international aid budget. Many in our churches play their own part in helping people around the world to escape poverty through giving, practical action and campaigning, notably through the United Reformed Church's own Commitment for Life programme, which has made a significant impact over the 26 years since it started. At General Assembly we were encouraged to hear from the new Chief Executive of Christian Aid.

We are a diverse denomination and include members of many races, life experiences and economic backgrounds. As a Church, we are enriched and strengthened by our involvement of people from the commonwealth, from continental Europe, and from other parts of the world in our congregations

and ministry. We are together members of the body of Christ, and, as St Paul says in his first letter to the Corinthians: 'If one member suffers, we all suffer together.' We therefore suffer and stand alongside all those who are facing prejudice, uncertainty and unfair treatment in our society today, and continue to pray that our political leaders will exercise wisdom, compassion and good judgement in these challenging times for our country and our world.

We also pray that our generous God of love will strengthen, sustain and guide your majesty in the years ahead.