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Fiona Kendall - Italy April 2024

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Dear friends

“Pasquetta” is the name given by Italians to Easter Monday. This “little Easter” is often a day when friends come together – so this seems a good day for me to be writing to you. As I reflect on the last three months, I am struck by just how significant it has been in terms of establishing and consolidating relationships which are likely to be fundamental to my work over the next three years.



Early in January, the newly-formed Executive Committee of the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) spent two days together in Brussels, where CCME's office sits just few minutes' walk from the Berlaymont, an iconic building which houses the headquarters of the European Commission. Given that one of CCME's primary tasks is to advocate in relation to European migration policy, the location is remarkable. It was good for members of the new ExCom to meet together in the CCME townhouse, to be grounded in CCME's history and mission, as well as sharing their own background and the priorities of their sending organisations. All of this equipped us better to review CCME's current priorities and finances which, over the coming months, should see CCME emerge with greater clarity as regards its areas of focus. We are all conscious of the responsibility we have to ensure that CCME, as the churches' representative, is balanced, clear and responsive in its work but we are in no doubt about how challenging that continues to be. As moderator of this body over the next four years, I am therefore excited to be working with an energetic and committed group of people, who bring a diversity of experience from across Europe and different church traditions.

Hot on the heels of the Brussels ExCom meeting was the three-day “People on the Move” conference which the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI) hosted along with Global Ministries (UCC and Disciples of Christ) and the Reformed Church of America in Rome. This was a significant event which brought together not only those working in the migration sector but also those with lived experience, involving voices from the Middle East, Africa, Europe and the US. As a result, the exchanges were rich in content and perspective. Few attended as mere observers and the decision to commit not only to working sessions but also to socializing together helped to solidify

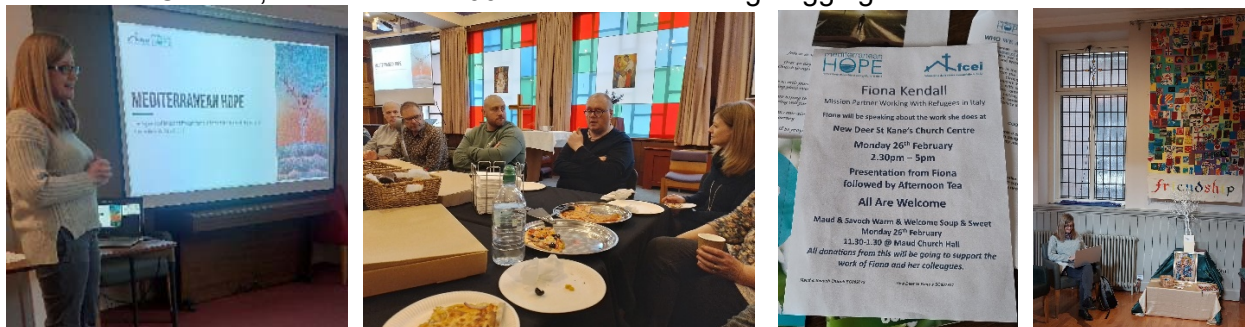


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the nascent community of practice. Those of us on the planning team, fortified by very positive feedback, are now considering how we can strengthen and build on the links made. We were from the outset keen that the event should not only permit reflection but lead to action.

February was quite different! Three years later than anticipated, I was finally able to have a “deputation period” back in the UK. The pandemic had thwarted earlier efforts but I can’t help feeling that this was in fact the right time to come. Certainly, I felt better equipped than I would have done in 2020 to talk about the remarkable work of Mediterranean Hope (MH) and to appreciate the concern and responsiveness of many of you to UK migration policy. It was an absolute joy to connect with so many congregations, groups and schools from as far apart as Duffus and Chester, a distance of 400 miles with much zig-zagging in between.



I am deeply grateful to all who were involved in setting up and publicizing over thirty events, to those who gave lifts and baked cakes, and to those who were generous enough to host me along the way. It was a privilege to get to know many of those already supporting MH’s work, to gain fresh perspectives and to learn about some excellent initiatives in your own communities. I came back to Rome with no voice – but completely inspired! All being well, my next deputation will take place in August/September 2026 and there is plenty of scope for online interaction before then.



March has been all about projects: reporting, writing and kicking off! FCEI has won further EU (AMIF) funding for two new projects, both of which involve working with a number of other partners from across the EU. FCEI will lead STEP (Skills, Talent and Empowerment through Pathways) in advancing pilot labour mobility programmes for refugees in Italy, Ireland and Spain. FCEI is also part of the Share QSN+ consortium which will concentrate on embedding, improving and diversifying community sponsorship across Italy, France, Belgium, Ireland and Spain. Kick-off meetings for both projects took place in Brussels at the end of March and we are excited about being at the heart of these significant initiatives. MH strongly believes that support should be provided to asylum-seekers however they reach another country but there is no question that the outcomes are generally better – both for host societies and for those hosted – when a formal pathway can be accessed. These pilot projects will, we hope, help to provide an evidence base for policies which establish and expand such pathways. Meantime, we continue to welcome people through the existing humanitarian corridors scheme and look forward to welcoming another 85 through our COMET network¹ later this year. These EU projects simply would not exist were it not for the partnerships which drive them. Some of us have now worked on a number of projects together and there is a high level of trust and respect for the diverse strengths and experience which each partner is willing to share. It is good to be working together again.


¹ [COMET Network - COMETNETWORK](https://www.cometnetwork.org/)

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MH teams based outside Rome continue to work extremely hard. Those in Bosnia have recently launched a book about the Flamingo Loophole climbing centre set up in Bihac; the accompanying exhibition has been an opportunity to tell the story of the centre, its ethos and our work. Dambe So, our social hostel for seasonal workers in Calabria, continues to catch attention; the hostel and staff were recently the subject of a report on Rai 1 (the equivalent of BBC 1) and we hope to open a hostel based on Dambe So in Piedmont early next year. The team on Lampedusa remains indefatigable notwithstanding the increasing number of arrivals to the island whilst those in Lebanon continue to bring support – and hope – to refugees based there.

The world may be beset by conflict and challenge but I continue to be filled with inspiration and hope. Change is possible – and we can all be part of it. Every blessing to you in Eastertide.

Fiona Kendall

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