

Rome, 17th December 2018

The body which gave life to the Mediterranean Hope project is the FCEI¹, generally referred to in English as the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy. Currently comprising eight member churches, one adherent church and two observers, the FCEI provides, amongst other things, a vehicle for members to act collectively in living out – rather than simply talking about – faith.

The Mediterranean Hope project is one manifestation of the FCEI's commitment to justice. Its work has grown considerably in scope over the four years since the project came to life, including the migration observatory on Lampedusa, reception centre in Scicli, Medical Hope in Lebanon, relocation desk in Rome, the pioneering humanitarian corridors programme, and collaboration with search and rescue operations at sea and in the air.

This year, perhaps more so than ever, it has been important for those involved in the project to speak out about migration issues in broadcast, print and social media. In the face of a rising tide of populist nationalism and, on occasion, blatant xenophobia, a counter-narrative is vital. Facts, rather than opinion; information, rather than speculation; measured argument, rather than fear-mongering are all important tools in re-balancing the discussion on migration.

For the FCEI, it has been equally important to re-state why these issues matter, and the basis for its approach. Perhaps unusually, whilst migration may polarise from a political perspective, from a theological perspective, the fundamental principles seem fairly straightforward. There is clarity about what our attitude to “the stranger” should be. In light of that, the FCEI has seen fit to cut through the political maelstrom with its “Welcome Manifesto”, a two-page leaflet² which sets out the biblical position on migration and, significantly, how that applies in today's context.



¹ <https://www.fcei.it/>

² <http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Welcome-Manifesto-English.pdf>

For those coming at this from a faith perspective, it can be helpful to go back to basics and to be reunited with some markers in the mist of the conflicting chatter. For those coming at this from another perspective, it is perhaps helpful to know what motivates some of us to act as we do, and also to know that this is not party political.

The Welcome Manifesto was formally adopted by the FCEI this summer, and has been shared widely with congregations across Italy. Notwithstanding the Italian context, the principles it expounds are universal. Fundamentally, the FCEI is arguing for radical hospitality, even where that presents some personal challenges. For the FCEI, this is nothing new. However, its willingness to be transparent about its motives sets it apart from some other organisations, and its clarity about how we might also choose to act is to be welcomed.