

Dear friends,

once again let me say that is a great pity we were prevented to meet and get to know. As I said Marta and Francesco will be welcoming you at Lampedusa tonight. They will also give you all the information you need and want about our project Mediterranean Hope.

As a general picture of what the project is about I am sending to you the same short note that I sent to Martin Atkins, the former President of the British Methodist Conference, who is coming to Italy at the end of May.

Please, don't hesitate to ask questions or suggest any improvements. And let me know about your visiting Lampedusa.

Mediterranean Hope (MH) is a FCEI program that we started right after the tragedy of October 3rd, 2013, when 368 migrants died very close to the coast of Lampedusa. In less than one year MH has become the leading project of the whole work of the Federation in the sector of migrations, with a number of positive impacts in some other sectors such as communication. The spirit and the goal (let's say the ultimate meaning) of MH is to make the churches aware that without standing and pushing for a radical change in the European policy we are all condemned to only cry for the victims of the Sea and of the human trafficking. The budget of MH is largely covered by the "8x1000" of the Tavola Valdese. One of the key person is Paolo Naso, responsible for the international relationships. MH walks with four legs.

- 1) The *Observatory* in Lampedusa. Through the last years Lampedusa has become a symbol: someone calls it the southern border of Europe, someone else calls it the frontier between the South and the North of the world. No matter the name you want to give it, Lampedusa is an extraordinary base to understand what the global migration phenomenon is today. The Italian media deal with the migration reality only under the point of view of emergency or national security. That is why almost one year ago we decided to send there two operators, Marta and Francesco. They have the task to spread through both Italy and the churches in Europe our own "narrative" of what migration really is, its cause and its implications. And they have been accomplishing this task in various ways. At the same time they have the task to say the truth about Lampedusa and what the life is like there. That means they have been deeply sharing the life problems of the local population and administration. As the months passed by we realized that we could meet the expectations of our international partners only by asking them to send to Lampedusa their own correspondents not only to translate what Marta and Francesco write but to "interpret" the spirit of our project for foreign sensitivity. Next September a fellow from Germany will move to the isle. Moreover, we are about to sign an agreement with the USA NCC for the same purpose. **You might want to send someone from Holland to serve for the Dutch churches and public opinion.**
- 2) The *Casa delle culture* (House of Cultures) in Scicli. The Italian Methodist church has been ministering in Scicli for more than 150 years, being very involved into the social dynamics and the political life of the town. At the same time we started our work in Lampedusa we planned to organize a "Guesting Center" or "Shelter" in Scicli. We have finally been able to open it up officially the last December but the work had already started at the end of October, after few months of a disturbing opposition by a local neo-fascist group. The House can accommodate up to 40 people and we have been requested by the State authorities to concentrate on what in Italy are called "vulnerable subjects" (namely minors and women).

The very name “House of Culture” says what the spirit of the project is: to build up an experience of integration, which is the criterion that the FCEI churches have adopted ever since in their work with migrants. And as a matter of fact the House has been moving along that direction, organizing language school, social and cultural events, concerts, feasts, sports, family hospitality, and other things. Here comes a very Italian story! As I said the whole MH is largely financed by the 8x1000 of the Waldensian and Methodist churches. That means we don't want to get any money from the State (you have probably heard of the big corruption in Rome around this kind of job that has become a business). And we are paying by ourselves for everything. But since we don't get money from the State the authorities don't know how to relate to us in terms of legal status. The result is that the people we accommodate in our House must leave out in very few days to other structures. That means we cannot yet develop any medium-long term program of real integration. And this happens while all the State authorities publicly say how good our work is! We have even been asked to run the local State Center on behalf of the Scicli administration! That's Italy! We are now managing the whole question with the Sicily regional administration, otherwise we will not be able to do anything for the integration. At the House we are employing 7 people but we also want to develop the volunteer program. **You might want to send some youths or even skilled adults to work with us in Scicli.**

- 3) The *Relocation Desk* in Rome. All the migrants have their own “life project” they seek to pursue. But because of the violence, the human drama, the terrible situations they escape from, it is hard for them to talk about it or even to focus on it. That's why part of our work in Scicli is exactly at this level. We have created a specific team (psychologist, cultural mediator, social assistant, and so on) to facilitate an atmosphere of mutual respect and friendship. We keep individual records of these conversations. Beside that there is the juridical side of the problem. Statistics says that no more of the 20% of all the migrants coming to Italy want to remain here. But because of the so called Dublin Regulation they are forced to remain in the European country they first entered. The result of this “fence policy” is that they are in an illegal position as long as they get the status of asylum seekers, which takes a long time. You can imagine how heavy is the sense of frustration and alienation they accumulate. Since they cannot get any legal jobs they have no alternative to become slaves in the hands of unscrupulous owners or of criminal powers. The Relocation Desk we have opened up in Rome thanks to the commitment of the church in Westfalia is to follow up every single person in Scicli; to help them to fulfill their life project; to identify legal possibility to get quickly personal papers from the State institutions; to create a network among our churches in Europe to welcome and assist them. **You might want to establish a direct channel with our office in Rome to take care of the migrants willing to go to Holland.**
- 4) The *Humanitarian Corridors* in Morocco. This is the youngest leg of MH. I attach a few documents that specify what this particular program is about. Let me underline two specific aspects: its ecumenical dimension and its political impact. The program is a joint venture with the Community of Saint Egidio, a very active and skilled catholic organization in the field of migrations with a strong concern for “foreign affairs”. Ecumenism is at very heart of the whole MH. For instance, the relationships with the local priest and parish in Lampedusa are really good; the same in Scicli. Just to give you an example I attach a short note that I wrote about the ecumenical and interreligious celebration we held the last October, 2nd in Lampedusa in memory of the 3 October 2013 victims. But it is for sure that the cooperation with the Community of S.Egidio is a very strong further step. As far as the political impact

is concerned it is pretty clear that working side by side with Italian, Moroccan and international institutions we will be placed in a privileged position both to get first hand information and to represent the church point of view. As a matter of fact, our Humanitarian Corridors program has excited general appreciation since we publicly announced it. In few days we will be making our second mission in Morocco to set all the organizational aspects. Next June we will be receiving a visit from a delegation of German parliamentarians led by the church of Westfalia; after that we have a meeting in Brussels with some representatives of EU institutions and with the Human Rights Committees of the Italian parliament. We have planned to be operative in Morocco by the end of the month. **You might want to be a partner in the Humanitarian Corridors program to lobby with the Dutch government to join the Italian (and hopefully other European countries) government in this “good practice”.**

Massimo Aquilante

(May 7th, 2015)