

PARTNERPLAN

Fiona Kendall - Italy September 2025

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Dear friends

“If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don’t love,
I’m nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate.”

So *The Message* paraphrases 1 Corinthians 13:1. has been much on my mind of late, as I was invited to help to facilitate an ecumenical retreat for young adults at the Monastery of Bose in Piedmont during which Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians would be considered through different lenses. The lens I was to offer was work with those on the margins, one way of manifesting the love or *agape* of which Paul speaks.

Agape, arguably is the highest form of love, that represented in the covenant between God and ourselves. For a number of reasons modelling it is not straightforward and yet, we are told, it is everything. Whatever else we have, if we are without this, we are nothing.

Being at Bose was, in itself, a lesson in what it means to live in community, to have a heart that welcomes others, whatever their rough edges. As monastic communities go, it is young (1968) and a little unusual in that it is ecumenical in nature and open to any gender. Around forty monks live at Bose itself, another fifteen or so in three satellite communities in other parts of Italy. On taking vows, monks commit to a life of celibacy, shared resources, prayer and work. The day is punctuated by three services – at 6.00am, 12.30pm and 6.30pm – characterised by sung liturgy and psalms, open to the public. For those staying, participation in community life is encouraged, which may mean gardening, baking, book-binding or other tasks. The beautiful setting lends itself to activity and reflection; evening meals are eaten in silence, a moment I came to love: forced to be still, to allow the day to percolate and consider what the next might bring.

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At a time when there is so much fragmentation in the world, it is good to find ways to be together, to share and respect our differences, as well as finding and celebrating those things that unite us. The young folk gathering at Bose from around the world and from any number of denominations found many common bonds. All of us were nurtured by the experience, stripped of distractions and focused on what our faith means in practice. It was a rare gift.

Just a few weeks prior to that I had found myself at another gathering, at the other end of the spectrum in terms of scale, but no less formative in modelling what faith might mean in practice. This year's synod of the United Church of Christ (UCC) took place in Kansas City, Missouri and brought together approximately 3,000 delegates from across the US and beyond. I was there to represent Mediterranean Hope, one of the projects which the UCC, through Global Ministries, supports. I confess to having felt some anxiety about going to the US at a time when migration is such a sharply polarising topic. Yet the trip exposed me to US voices less often heard at this side of the pond: people who remain firmly committed to the most vulnerable in society and are fierce advocates for the rights of those on the margins. It is important, I think, for us to know that some churches are at the forefront, respectful yet unafraid to speak out. At a time when narratives matter so much, a gospel of hope, hospitality and inclusion offers a vital counter-narrative. Reflecting on what that means in practice and clearly articulating it seems to me to be more important than ever. It was an extraordinarily uplifting experience.



In news closer to home, this month saw the opening of Mediterranean Hope's new social hostel for seasonal workers in Piedmont. Dambe So Saluzzo (so named in honour of the prototype, Dambe So, in Calabria) is already hosting workers harvesting the fruit for which that region is well-known. Some of these are the same workers who will go on to harvest citrus fruit in Calabria later in the year, people who have become known to us through the

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work of Mediterranean Hope in that region. Others have been referred to us because they are known to local organisations, or are particularly vulnerable, whilst others, on learning of the existence of the hostel got in touch directly to ask whether they too might be able to call this home.

The hostel, part of a farm steading, is in a peaceful rural location. Like its southern counterpart, Dambe So Saluzzo will offer its residents a stable home at an affordable price, a fixed address (which is a gateway to local services), staff support and the opportunity for self-development. MH is rightly proud to have been able to replicate the model piloted in another region of Italy; it has garnered considerable media attention and local interest, largely positive in nature. Present at the inaugural event on 13th September were the local mayor and vice-mayor with representatives from the local community and faiths, as well as media. This matters, since the aim is for other regions and organisations – if not government – to pick up the idea and run with it; to move away from a politics of emergency to one which recognizes reality and plans for the future. Meantime, for the individuals living at Dambe So Saluzzo, that is already happening.

All around us there are gaps; each of us, in our own way can help to fill them. Here's to noticing and acting.

Every blessing to you.

