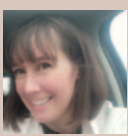




# HEARTS SET ON PILGRIMAGE WHERE TO NEXT?

**Bex Lawton** looks to the future of CMF's nurses and midwives fellowship and ministry.



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*You can't really know where you are going until you know where you have been.*  
 Maya Angelou<sup>1</sup>

**A**h! Here's a good place, I think. Let's stop for a minute.' Little encouragement is needed; there's a *click, shuffle, and thump* as backpacks are unfastened and straps are shrugged off shoulders down to the crook of our elbows, before being dropped to the ground. We arch and stretch our backs. Necks are rolled. Shoulders rubbed. Some even slip off their walking boots to give their toes a wiggle. All with the accompanying noises of those who have come a long way. And let's face it, as nurses and midwives, we had our share of aches and pains to begin with, despite the back-care facilitator's best endeavours.

'Anyone fancy a slightly squashed and unpleasantly warm cheese sandwich?' Oops! Maybe not my best choice for a day like today. We rummage

for snacks, unscrew flasks of tea, and share our provisions. And then sitting on our bags, or coats bunched up as make-shift cushions, we relax and take in the view. Wow! What an incredible vista. It's breath-taking. For a moment, the constant chatter that has accompanied our group for most of our walk ceases. A hush descends.

Did we realise how far we've come? You can probably see where this is going, reader.

'Hey, look over there!' We follow Liz's index finger, as she points to rough terrain we navigated in early days. Others like Steve, Annie, and Pippa in turn, spot familiar pathways, and share stories of, 'Do you remember...?' Because (as you will have come to expect from a journey metaphor) our course has had its ups and downs. It's been precarious at times. As well as taking sudden turns of direction we weren't expecting. But from this glorious vantage point, we're able to map the way we came. Oh, how precious it is to stop for a moment together, to give God our thanks and praise.

Gosh I know the journey narrative can be cliché,

I do hope it's not unbearably cheesy for you! I'm laughing to myself now, because, like my flattened sandwich, I'm sticking with it! Maybe it's an overused analogy because it's so helpful? And maybe I can be forgiven for using it, since themes of travelling and movement are so prevalent in our Holy Scriptures too? I hope so.

So, what now faithful pilgrims? Well, you'll see we're not getting out our CMF Nurses and Midwives flag, just yet, with its blue triple helix spiral and central cross on a white background. Why would we? We're not marking the end of our excursion together. What we are marking is an important milestone, ten years of Nurses and Midwives belonging within CMF.

At a significant time in the Israelites history, Samuel 7:12 tell us that *'then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far the Lord has helped us."* 'Ebenezer' means stone of help.<sup>2</sup> Presumably he used a stone because they were readily available. What could we use? Maybe we should set up drip stands, suture packs, crocs, laptops, fob watches. Whatever we can lay our hands on. We set them up here in 2024. And name them medical supplies of help. Of provision. Of grace. Of faithfulness. We mark this place saying, 'Thus far the Lord has helped Christian nurses and midwives in this country'. And we give him praise, 'How great thou art!'

With nearly 500 nurse and midwife members, a growing number of local groups, annual national in-person gatherings, and the regular *Spotlight* magazine, plus other publications and resources for our members, what a wonderful position we find ourselves in.

*'I hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees and feel the gently breeze'*,<sup>3</sup> so I cannot see a reason to divert from this path God has brought us to. Our relationship with Christian student workers across our nation will continue to be key to our sustainable growth. We'll invest in a younger generation of nurses and midwives, training them and giving them opportunities to lead. Connecting people one-on-one and in encouraging communities as best we can. Turning membership into fellowship. And we will endeavour to follow wherever the Holy Spirit guides us. Adapting, as needed, to serve our members. Responding creatively to challenges we meet. Being light-handed and flexible with our agendas and programmes, whilst remaining steadfast in our call to unite and equip Christian nurses and midwives to live and speak for Jesus in their workplaces. Faith and flexibility. Our hiking poles in each hand.

We appreciate this summit, but I don't believe it's the only one we'll reach as a fellowship. Don't worry, we won't linger here for too long. We are a movement, after all, not 'a dormant' or 'a stagnant'. I pray for multiple peaks for us. We pray and plan for a peak of midwives to join our fellowship, to feel

welcome, seen and heard. With more midwives on our team, more midwifery focused content is coming. It's not enough for us to have articles and blogs broadly relevant to both professions. Midwives' jobs are unique, and the support and encouragement we provide them needs to be tailored to the opportunities and challenges they face.

It's an incredible time in history to be working as midwives and nurses in the UK. With our clap-worthy heroic efforts through the pandemic not far behind us, we've gone straight into a season of strikes and rumours of strikes. Both professions are appealing to our government for better pay and working conditions so that we can safely staff our maternity and medical services. Before now, I wonder if our tired workforces had become despondent and apathetic. Silent and acceptant, with little hope of being heard. But whether our members chose to vote for or against strike action, it seems that in 2023 nurses and midwives began to find our voices again. I pray that in this time, Christian voices would rise too; to our God in prayer, as well as to those in authority on earth. Let's reach for a peak where CMF Nurses and Midwives are not only reactive in blogs and social media posts, responding to whatever the UK media deems newsworthy, but are actively exploring ways to change the narrative. Mobilising, influencing, and catalysing meaningful changes for our beloved professions.

'Come on then, everyone. Time to go.'

A few last-minute selfies to savour the moment. Smiling faces beam against this beautiful backdrop. 'Cheese!' And then with phones tucked away and flask lids tightened we help each other on with our backpacks once more. We move forward with purpose. Leaving our medical Ebenezer behind us. Marking a decade of CMF Nurses and Midwives.

CMF N&M woz 'ere, and God was 'ere too!

We walk on together in twos and bigger groups as well. With relationships still at our core. Because, whilst the story of how far we've come is often told as a timeline of dates and events, our story is full of people. We have a rich history of faithful men and women seeking their God and serving him in their workplaces. Of nurses loving nurses. Midwives loving midwives. Of persistent pray-ers. Of generous charitable givers. Of people opening up their homes to host students. Of prayer in hospital chapels before work and walks to debrief after shifts. Yes, let's move onwards, keeping to this road. Maybe, when we stop again, we'll be able to say, *'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'* (Luke 24:32) Come Lord, so that *'They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them'* (v. 14-15). Amen. ●



SCAN FOR MORE

## key points



- This year, we celebrate ten years of the nurses and midwives fellowship and ministry in CMF.
- We have seen a lot of growth in that time, so it is good to take stock and lay down a marker of thanks to God.
- But this is not where we end – God has more for us to do, so we are looking forward to the next steps on our journey with the Lord.

## References (accessed 05/03/2024)

1. America's Renaissance Woman. Academy of Achievement Interview, January 22, 1997. [achievement.org/achiever/maya-angelou/#interview](https://achievement.org/achiever/maya-angelou/#interview)
2. NIV Study Bible. Nashville: Zondervan, 2011 – entry for 1 Samuel 4:1.
3. Stuart Wesley Keene Hine. *How great thou art*. © 1949, 1953, & 2010, The Stuart Hine Trust.