



THRIVING TOGETHER

IFES Ministry 2022–2030

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FROM THE IFES BOARD CHAIR

An encouragement from **Septi Bukula** | February 2022

As we look ahead to what it means to follow God's leading into these next years of ministry, it is right for us to remember where he has brought us and to acknowledge the challenges of our times.

Over the past 14 years, our Living Stones vision gave us focus and a common language. It grounded us in the Word: Scripture engagement was integrated into events and initiatives. It kept students at the centre; we welcomed student representation into our IFES Board and held student events at three World Assemblies. It helped us to work globally on shared issues and strengthen our movements. These changes nurtured student initiative, energizing our vision and connecting us to the issues that students are facing.

We rejoice in the growth we experienced under the guidance of the Living Stones vision. Nevertheless, as we take a fresh look at the current context of our mission, we also see that there is much more to do together. We are prayerfully confident that our new strategy will help us to continue moving in an exciting direction, building on the foundation of Living Stones.

The research and preparation for this new strategic plan began in 2019. Since then, our global fellowship has faced some key challenges—some internal, but also the significant external challenges of a global pandemic, wars, civil unrest, increasing economic inequality, and increasing persecution of Christians in many countries. In this context, the idea of Thriving Together, as espoused in our new strategy, may seem difficult to imagine.

Our struggles can either paralyze us or, with God's enabling, they can act as a catalyst for change in how we function as a fellowship. As in the story of Nehemiah, the first step towards Thriving Together is to "inspect the walls": we must prayerfully assess our situation and repair and rebuild where we see gaps (Nehemiah 2:11-18).

God has placed us in this network of gifted people and national movements who share a common mission and vision and are ready to support each other. I pray that God will open our eyes to see effective ways to work together to make sure all parts of our global family are flourishing and bearing fruit.

The Board is grateful to the team that has worked diligently and tirelessly to bring this new strategy into being. We also express our thanks to all who provided vital input that contributed to the shaping of this final product.

FROM THE IFES GENERAL SECRETARY

An encouragement from Tim Adams | February 2022

One of the most beautiful images in the Bible is the thriving tree in Psalm 1, which bears fruit season after season and has leaves that never fade. This tree is thriving because it is planted in a good place, its roots fed by streams of life-giving water.

Seventy-five years ago, IFES was established to build a fellowship of national student ministries that seek to “awaken and deepen personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and further evangelistic work among students throughout the world” ([IFES Constitution](#)).

Like the tree in Psalm 1, IFES is intentionally rooted in God’s Word. Our hope for the 2020s is that, as we continue to draw from these life-giving roots, God will help us thrive together in our calling as a global fellowship.

We desire to thrive in our witness, seeing students as faithful witnesses to Jesus Christ, in word and deed. We aim to thrive in whole-life commitment, seeing students equipped to influence the university, the church, and society for the glory of Christ. We hope to thrive on new ground—to see strengthened Christian student ministry in cities, campuses, and countries and pioneer where there is no witness. We want to thrive into the future—to be a strong fellowship of national movements that are also healthy and resilient.

“Thriving together” is not intended in a superficial or worldly way. We are well-aware of our brokenness, fragility and limitations. And we are living in challenging times, facing the COVID-19 pandemic, economic and political instability, and hostility towards the Christian faith.

However, from this reality, we are called to serve and support one another towards our mission. In Acts 4:32, we read that “All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.” The emerging Christian community in Acts did not need to build a huge corporate structure. Instead, their “business model” was based on fellowship and mission, and ours should be too. Our goal is not to make IFES into a large, centralised organisation. Instead, we aim to be a fellowship that is “one in heart and mind” and to develop an appropriate infrastructure that will facilitate fruitful connections across our global network. We want to share our gifts, resources and experience with each other, enhance our partnerships, strengthen our creativity, and—by God’s grace—help one another to thrive together.

From the outset, IFES was a gospel-focused, counter-cultural movement, connecting heart and mind, and passionate for God’s glory.

TIM ADAMS, IFES GENERAL SECRETARY

IFES IDENTITY: WHO ARE WE?

IFES was founded in 1947 when leaders from ten evangelical student movements across the globe came together to form a global movement. Their ambitious dream was to see a clear witness to Jesus Christ established in every university in the world.

Today our global fellowship spans more than 180 countries. Together we are pioneering student witness in new countries and campuses, inspiring each other in evangelism, and engaging with the big issues in our universities.

IFES helps students across the world thrive in following Jesus—for life. We do this by bringing together a vibrant network of autonomous national movements. The movements energise and support one another by exchanging resources, ideas and experience. And we feed into this network with vision, training and expertise. This worldwide collaboration develops robust followers of Jesus. Graduates of our network have an impact on the future of ideas, culture, church and society. This makes our ministry strategically important in global mission.

The aims and structure of IFES, along with our doctrinal basis, are captured in the [IFES Constitution](#).

VISION

Students thriving together as communities of disciples, transformed by the gospel, and impacting the university, the church, and society for the glory of Christ.

MISSION

To connect and nurture national movements so that students and graduates thrive as witnesses for Christ.

OUR CORE VALUES

As we work together across the IFES fellowship towards our vision, we seek to live out these core values in every aspect of our ministry.

- **Faithfulness to Scripture:** The Bible is the ultimate authority and inspiration for life and all aspects of our ministry. We emphasise the loving, studying, living and sharing of God's Word.
- **Prayer:** We pursue and maintain a posture of humility and dependence on God through prayer in our ministry.
- **Community:** We seek to cultivate vibrant local, regional and global communities that encourage fellowship and learning and enhance our mission.
- **Student Initiative:** We are a ministry of students reaching students and we believe in students taking the initiative in all aspects of witness to the university.
- **Unity in Diversity:** We value the diversity of God's creation and the body of Christ. We draw participants from diverse ethnicities, cultures, languages, and church traditions as a worldwide fellowship.
- **Partnership:** We believe we are more effective in our work when it is done together. We accomplish our mission in partnership with one another, with the local church and like-minded organisations around the world.

LOOKING TO 2030: OUR PRIORITIES

The context of much of the ministry of IFES is distinctly different from when IFES was started three-quarters of a century ago. In the past decade alone, the context for student ministry has changed considerably. Some of these changes, like the growth in online learning and international student numbers, were foreseeable. Others, like the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education and society, were scarcely imaginable. IFES itself has also grown, changed and adapted to new contexts.

We have spent two years listening carefully—to students, staff, theological advisors, research students, faculty, and our supporters and partners. Above all, we have listened to the voice of God to lead us. This listening and discerning journey provided insights into the context of IFES and the global context. The rapidly changing world coupled with the global COVID-19 pandemic has created new opportunities for our ministry despite the many uncertainties and challenges. These contexts inform our priorities in *Thriving Together: IFES ministry 2022—2030*.

Read more about our research and context in Appendix I (page 9).

HOW WILL WE USE THIS DOCUMENT?

It is our prayer that this theme of Thriving Together will unite us—as national movements, IFES staff, and supporters—as we work towards a common vision. Across the fellowship, the outworking of this strategic plan will look different, depending on role and context.

The priorities and objectives are an invitation to fellowship and partnership as together we work towards our shared calling. We trust national movements will be able to see connections between their own plans and the work of the wider network of which they are part. We also offer this plan as a framework to inspire movements in developing their own strategies where that is helpful.

For the IFES regions, global resource ministries and international services teams, this document gives a basis to develop and implement ministry plans. This will happen on a three-year cycle and the plans will inform the initiatives, training and support we offer.

THRIVING TOGETHER: FOUR PRIORITIES

As we look ahead to the coming years, we envision IFES ministry as a connected, vibrant, and influential fellowship, where students and graduates can experience Jesus, be firmly rooted in the Word of God and be nurtured as faithful witnesses to Christ, in the university, church, workplace and society.

Across our work together, we want to shift our approach to embrace these **three critical success** factors:

Collaboration

We will strengthen local, regional and global connections to promote learning and mutual encouragement across the IFES network and with partners (supporters, universities, churches and like-minded organisations). We will exchange ideas, resources, and experiences to help us live out our calling.

New Ways

We will seek to grow in new ways and in new spaces. We will give space to try new ideas and show creativity in our ministry and organisational practices.

Impact

We are partakers of God's kingdom work, seeking to bring impact in the depth of transformations in the lives of students and graduates and in the breadth of our ministries in reaching students.

Looking to 2030, Thriving Together will focus on **four strategic priorities**:

1. Thriving in Witness

We want to see: students as witnesses to Jesus Christ, proclaiming the kingdom of God and showing the relevance of Jesus to all areas of university life.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. ACTS 1:8

IFES will:

- 1.1. Empower students to witness to the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed, inviting others to become Christ's disciples
- 1.2. Equip students for witness to the whole university, acknowledging diverse cultures, ethnicities, faiths and backgrounds
- 1.3. Empower students, faculty, and researchers to bring their Christian voice and service into the academic conversations and culture of the university
- 1.4. Equip students and graduates to dialogue relevantly and biblically around the big issues of our day
These big issues may include the societal and emerging concerns identified such as corruption, ideological secularism, mental health, and injustice, as well as other locally-relevant issues.

2. Thriving in Whole-Life Commitment

We want to see: students growing as disciples of Jesus Christ, bearing fruit as they integrate their faith with every area of life, learning to lead in their communities and standing for Jesus in challenging contexts.

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel. PHILIPPIANS 1:27

IFES will:

- 2.1. Nurture students and graduates towards a resilient Christian faith that is rooted in the Bible and reflects godly values in every area of life
- 2.2. Equip students to be competent and value-based leaders as demonstrated by our Lord Jesus Christ
- 2.3. Catalyse theological thinking across IFES, recognising its value in IFES ministry, churches, and society

2.4. Equip students and graduates to be agents of transformation in their sphere of influence through their vocations

This includes the arts, politics, media, economics, ethics, science, and education.

3. Thriving on New Ground

We want to see: vibrant new student groups on campuses and in locations where there aren't any and support to revitalise groups and movements, working in partnership with others.

Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. JOHN 4:35

IFES will:

- 3.1. Re-pioneer and strengthen existing student groups and ministries impacted by external challenges
External challenges include global pandemics, persecutions, poverty, social injustice, and changing generations.
- 3.2. Pioneer and sustain student groups on new campuses, in new cities and new countries
- 3.3. Foster new partnerships with churches and like-minded organisations to strengthen our united witness to Christ and his work among students and graduates

4. Thriving into the Future

We want to see: a healthy network of resilient movements showing Christian integrity and accountability so we can continue our calling among the next generations of students.

By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established. PROVERBS 24:3

IFES will:

- 4.1 Strengthen awareness and ownership of our vision, values and shared doctrinal commitments, both locally and as a global fellowship
- 4.2 Cultivate a culture that prioritises Scripture engagement, prayer, spiritual formation, and well-being for staff to thrive as individuals and in their ministry
- 4.3 Invest in staff learning and development, particularly in theological, vocational discipleship, leadership and skills development and shared learning across the global IFES network
- 4.4 Practice good governance and establish effective ministry structures and leadership succession plans, that are contextually appropriate
- 4.5 Cultivate a culture of learning and accountability through strategic ministry development and research, monitoring and evaluation to discern God's direction, to mobilise and steward the resources entrusted by God
- 4.6 Cultivate trust and generosity across the IFES global network by developing sustainable funding and engagement models in giving, prayer, and action

EVALUATING OUR IMPACT

A monitoring and evaluation framework will be developed to review and celebrate the milestones of the strategy implementation. The progress and findings will enable IFES to evaluate the impact of our ministries and to adjust the plans to support national movements effectively in the next decade.

As the IFES network thrives together, we want to see students thriving together as communities of disciples, transformed by the gospel, and impacting the university, the church, and society for the glory of Christ. We desire to see the fruit that God promises when we remain faithful to his calling.

Together, we celebrate God at work in the past, in the present and the future. Through Thriving Together, we are committed to monitoring, evaluating, learning, and celebrating the impact in the lives of our students through IFES ministries with the following global indicators:

- Students empowered to be faithful witnesses to the good news of Jesus Christ
- Students nurtured as committed disciples of Jesus Christ
- Students and graduates empowered to be agents of transformation in their sphere of influence
- Student groups pioneered and sustained on new campuses, in new cities and new countries
- Staff supported to grow and flourish in their ministry
- A strong culture of good governance, learning and accountability in IFES
- Enhanced ministry awareness and sustainable fund development

Our mission is accomplished as we see students and graduates become faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, impacting the world for his glory.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:58

APPENDIX I

LOOKING AROUND US: WHAT IS THE CONTEXT OF OUR MINISTRY?

The context for much IFES ministry is distinctly different from when we started three-quarters of a century ago. In the past decade alone, the context for student ministry has changed considerably. Some of these changes, like the growth in online learning and international student numbers, were foreseeable. Others, like the impact of the pandemic on education and society, were scarcely imaginable. IFES itself has also grown, changed and adapted to new contexts.

We have spent two years listening carefully to students, staff, theological advisors, research students, faculty, and our supporters and partners. Above all, we have listened for the voice of God to lead us. Here are the key points we have discerned about our current ministry context.

GLOBAL CONTEXT

Based on the global trends prioritisation exercise conducted at World Assembly 2019, there was broad consensus among national movements about the four most important issues affecting student ministry: secularism, corruption, mental health, and poverty.

The rise of ideological secularism received the highest vote, with nine out of 11 regions prioritising it as the top issue which will affect the student ministry in the coming years. Corruption at all levels in society—personal, national, and university—was another major concern, with eight regions identifying this as a top trend to address.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and even accelerated the practical impacts of these top trends, with long-term implications for the health, education, social and economic sectors across the world. The heightened uncertainty and prolonged isolation experienced by many only intensified existing mental health challenges.

Although the changing higher education landscape was placed seventh in the prioritisation exercise, this trend was frequently raised as a concern and has been given higher priority in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. We know that the pandemic has also had seismic practical impacts on living, studying, and working. Online education was already growing rapidly before 2019, with tremendous consequences for what student ministry means today. The widespread shift to distance learning in response to COVID-19 has highlighted both the potential and the limitations of this medium. Those called to student ministry now have intensive, hard-won experience in rapid innovation to continue student outreach and discipleship in these conditions, and we will need to carry forward and build on these discoveries.

The [global trends report](#) contains further details on these topics.

HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT

The world's population of higher education students continues to grow. Before the pandemic, one study projected that the global student population would keep growing at an average of 4.2% annually, well above the overall population growth rate.¹ How the pandemic will affect these

¹ [Study projects dramatic growth for global higher education through 2040 - ICFE Monitor - Market intelligence for international student recruitment](#)

projections remains to be seen.

Nonetheless, it is undeniable that the student population will continue to rise in the next decade. In response, IFES has to be sufficiently equipped to engage with the future generation of students.

In June 2020, IFES surveyed students and graduates to understand their faith experience, how student groups and national movements shape them, and opportunities to further support the next generation of students. We rejoice that the majority of the respondents agreed that students were empowered to take initiative in their student groups and engage their peers from a biblical perspective on topics related to human suffering and nominal Christianity.

That said, the survey also revealed opportunities to better support these eager students in their discipleship. Even those who feel confident about peer engagement seek more robust resources for questions about human sexuality, the authority of Scripture, suffering, the existence of God, and other religions or worldviews. While 80% of the respondents reported a desire for their faith to impact their thoughts, words, and actions:

- only half seized opportunities to share the gospel with others,
- only 36% engaged and served their non-Christian community, and
- only one in five said that students find ways to challenge injustice on campus.

Barna's "Connected Generation" research complements our survey findings. It helps us understand today's students as a product of the ongoing digital revolution. Students are more globally linked than previous generations but are often lonely and isolated from their surrounding community. Many young adults also experience uncertainty related to vocation and economics, which leads to anxiety about their future.

Therefore, there is an increasing need to support students to be true and committed disciples of Christ.

IFES CONTEXT

As a fellowship of national movements, we need to be guided by the priorities identified by the movements themselves. Consequently, we take very seriously the feedback gained in our 2019 National Movements Priorities Exercise. National movements are seeking to strengthen the following areas:

- partnerships for ministry (particularly in the areas of church relations, graduate ministry, engaging the university, and international students)
- staff care and development; financial foundations; and organisational capacity.

We were interested to see the broad global consensus on these areas of attention. We also note that 24 movements have joined IFES since 2007. While we rejoice in this growth, we recognise that many of our member movements are newly established and still need particular attention and support as they continue to develop.

IFES has reflected extensively on our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and risks as an organisation. As mentioned above, our strengths include our:

- foundation on the Scriptures
- deep commitment to developing student leadership

- dedicated and experienced staff
- network of graduates supporting the ministry and living a vibrant witness across all sectors of society

However, like many national movements, we face continued risks in financial sustainability and organisational capacity. Our global resource ministries provide excellent resources with the credibility that comes from production by diverse teams, but their current reach remains limited. Better leveraging the potential within global resource ministries is thus a key opportunity to inform the implementation of the next strategic vision.

Notably, our broad first-hand experience with students provides unique opportunities for better understanding and reaching the future generation of students. All parts of IFES ministry can benefit from the new doors opened by digital platforms—and the increased familiarity with these platforms in a post-COVID world.