

Jesus Christ desires His followers to be united.
To restore unity of belief and practice requires initiative
and effort at all levels of responsibility, by each one of us.
Visible unity will only come about when ordinary Christians
everywhere desire it and are prepared to work for it.
The key to such common desire and witness lies in spirituality,
prayer and worship together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
If people pray together, they will live in peace.

Living Today the Church of Tomorrow



in Worship,
Discipleship
and Fellowship

Presentation of IEF

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The story of the International Ecumenical Fellowship (IEF) is the story of pilgrims from many places, journeying together towards the same destination – the renewal and unity of the Christian Church.

In the more than forty years of our history, our story has been one of a community of largely grassroots Christians being inspired and encouraged to work, in our own localities, for Christian unity.

Our inspiration has been the vision and the experience of living today the Church of tomorrow. Our vision has been shaped by events and personalities, but the experience has been everyone's.

It is significant that IEF's name includes the word fellowship: we are a koinonia, a community bound together by the Holy Spirit. This presentation introduces IEF and what makes us distinctive, in the hope that you will wish to share our faith journey.

I.

Core Values and Aims

One of our great strengths is the way that we bring lay and ordained Christians together across the divides of language, ethnicity, nationality, political structures, spirituality and Church traditions.

This broadens our understanding of God and gives us a taste of what it means to be part of a worldwide Church. We come to appreciate the gifts that God has given to the different traditions, find God challenging us through the ‘others’, and are strengthened and equipped to work for unity in our home situations.

In developing deep friendships with people from different backgrounds, we experience personally the power of Jesus Christ to make us one in Him. IEF’s work is therefore focused on three things.

1. Worship and Spirituality

Common prayer and worship together is at the core of IEF: this is where we seek to become one with God and with each other, experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit in healing and liberation, and in community building. We also share the pain that full communion of churches and worship is not yet given.

An important task for IEF is to work towards the visible communion between churches and Christians, lay and clergy, as *People of God*: through Bible study, worship and common prayer; repentance, healing and reconciliation; exploring different church traditions, possibilities for Eucharistic sharing, and common meditations.

In our prayer life we enjoy a rich diversity of denominational liturgical traditions in the unity that exists already among us. But it is precisely through this experience that we come to recognize our division, specifically when invited to the Lord’s Table.

Therefore, a clear priority for the mission and vision of IEF is searching for, finding and developing new solutions to overcome the scandal of division at the Eucharist, in order to witness authentically to the visible unity of the Church, Jesus Christ’s reconciling work and God’s purposes for the world.

At international conferences we hold daily denominational Eucharistic services; and occasionally a Eucharistic celebration according to the ecumenical *Lima Liturgy*, developed in 1983 in connection with the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) document, published by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

2. Discipleship and Theological Study

IEF enables its members to understand the current situation in official *ecumenical dialogues* and in other ecumenical matters. We respect, study and challenge the role of obedience, discipline and individual conscience concerning levels of participation in the prayer and worship of other denominational traditions.

While we gather around the table of the Lord, we constantly search for theological and spiritual wisdom and truth, and seek to understand the various emerging and currently important ecumenical issues. The place of individual conscience is a vital part of this search.

We acknowledge that while we work for ecumenism, it is not ours to give, but it is of God in Jesus Christ; so this must involve humility, repentance and a willingness to listen and learn from others in dialogue led by the Holy Spirit.

In 2005 our *Theological Commission* (ThC) was re-established. This is composed of representatives from the regions, bearing in mind the need for both female and male members and a wide spectrum of Church traditions.

3. Fellowship and Friendship

We, members of the IEF stand firmly in the *Tradition* of the Church as well as in the traditions of our respective churches. We are faithful to our current denominational regulations, which we are called to respect.

We are far from knowing the full truth of unity and we will never reach that state until we *act* in unity and love in all our deliberations, in all our worship, in constant prayer, and in our relationships with each other.

We share in *local ecumenical projects (LEP)* in our own countries and regions, on the firm and well-grounded understanding that ecumenism is also effective from below, as a grassroots phenomenon.

Many of us come from interdenominational and interchurch families, in which we try to live our vocation in a consciously ecumenical way. We share with other ecumenical organisations a deep spiritual and social commitment.

We are called to experience the communion of the Spirit with various gifts and a prophetic vocation, through local and regional groups, meetings and contacts with other ecumenical networks, among others the *World Student Christian Federation (WSCF)*, the *Association of Interchurch Families*, and the *Conference of European Churches (CEC)*.

Our meetings with other grassroots and ecumenical organizations, under the umbrella of national ecumenical structures for instance, are increasingly leading to bridge building and further collaborations.

II. History and Structure

1. History

IEF came into being in 1967, following the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). Members of the *International League for Apostolic Faith and Order (ILAFO)*, which had been founded in 1951 as a consequence of the formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC, 1948), realized that a more inclusive ecumenical body was now desirable.

At the conference in *Fribourg* in 1967, ILAFO, whose predominantly Old Catholic, Anglican and Evangelical-Lutheran membership had already been enriched by some Orthodox, Reformed and (since 1966) Roman Catholic individuals, decided to reconstitute itself as the International Ecumenical Fellowship (IEF).

The charismatic personality of Flora Glendon Hill inspired the *Fribourg Statement*, which has remained at the heart of IEF: “By prayer, study and action, the International Ecumenical Fellowship (IEF) seeks to serve the movement towards the visible unity of the Church according to the expressed will of Jesus Christ by the means He wills.”

She encapsulated IEF’s vision for shared worship, discipleship and fellowship in the following words: “To serve the will of God, and unite the people of God, by hearing the word of God, proclaiming the praise of God, and breaking the bread of God.”

The first IEF international conference was held in 1968 at *Gwatt* in Switzerland, and at subsequent conferences the basic format for IEF conferences, with the celebration of the Eucharist at its heart, was established.

Our growth led to the adoption of a formal constitution and the establishment of national bodies (called *regions*) in 1974, the founding members being Great Britain, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany and the United States of America (USA). As conferences took place in different countries, new regions were formed in France and in Belgium.

IEF developed significantly after the fall of the *Berlin Wall* in 1989. Contacts nurtured by individuals in the previous decade were able to grow, and further regions came to be formed in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia; and Christians in the Eastern part of Germany were able to join a reunified German region.

A new dimension of IEF came about in 2013 when the fellowship was launched through an international conference in Mbarara, Uganda. The theme of ‘Healing Wounded History’ reflected the perceived needs of working together ecumenically to resolve problems of peace and development in Africa. Following the success of that conference, there are groups in formation in Uganda, Burundi and Kenya, where it is hoped the next conference will take place in Nairobi.

The inclusion of Christians with different experiences of freedom and oppression, Church and political life, not least of those from Orthodox majority countries, has invigorated and enriched us.

2. Structure

Between international conferences, the life of IEF continues throughout the year with each region organizing groups, lectures and meetings, including the regional annual general meetings.

Ten *regions* make up IEF at present: each of these having its own officers, council of management, and local and national organization, and being ecumenical in principles, aims and composition.

These regions send their president and one other member (the international representative) of their national council as representatives to the *General Assembly* (GA): this main decision-making body usually meets twice a year.

The GA elects a *Council of Management* (CoM), consisting of a president, vice-president, treasurer and secretary (elected for three years), which takes executive action between GAs, and may appoint different officers, for example a webmaster.

Apart from our annual budget, the *Gustave Weigel Fund* (GWF), established by the Fellowship, provides the means for the international participation of those who otherwise could not afford it.

IEF members keep in touch through a website (www.iefnet.info); many regions have their own websites and newsletters, and they support each other through prayer and intercession as well as the exchange of visits and hospitality. Different aspects of IEF’s calling and vision can be found in written declarations and publications.

III.

International Conferences

Our life finds its central source and inspiration in the *international conferences*, which we arrange each year around a particular theme in one of the countries of Europe, mostly in places of ecclesiastical, ecumenical, cultural and historical significance.

These meetings are organized by our regions in turn, and on behalf of the Fellowship as a whole. In these events, three to four hundred people meet together to experience something that we could not do in our local situations.

At the heart and core of each international conference of the Fellowship is daily worship and prayer. We normally begin each day with a morning office, and a healing service is also part of our week.

We celebrate the Eucharist in the conference centre and in local churches, and since our members come from many different churches, we translate all our services into different regional languages, so that everyone of us is enabled to understand.

Within this framework of worship we seek to understand the ecumenical situation together by hearing lectures from leading theologians and speakers, and sharing our reflections together in discussion groups.

We meet together in workshops and visit places of special interest, and we make an effort to meet local traditions and cultures. We seek to

be inclusive and open to people of all ages, and young people make a special contribution to our life together.

From time to time, in the place of a larger international conference, some mini-conferences are arranged in different regions. As well as exploring a specific theme, these smaller gatherings offer more intimate opportunities to get to know one another better.

Our conferences have left their mark on the places where they have been held, and memorable lectures and liturgies have contributed to the pilgrimage of individual participants towards Christian unity and to the life of the Church in general.

IV. Hopes and Vision

Living today the Church of tomorrow mean that we experience the richness and variety of different Christian traditions through prayer, study and action; as well as constantly learning and following the various ecumenical dialogues.

To help inform and engage members in Church and theological issues, as well as recent ecumenical developments, we offer lectures and workshops concentrating on crucial topics at conferences. These are conducted by leading specialists and spiritual leaders, and always seek for conciliatory solutions.

IEF enables its members and friends to overcome the barrier of painful divisions by removing the fear of the 'alien' in our midst. As its consequence, worship together gains joy, depth and integrity.

As a learning fellowship of laity and clergy, we are able to make a valuable contribution towards unity and reconciliation. It is our aim to press for the conservation of basic ecumenical teaching in the different churches and ecumenical bodies at the national and local level.

Our rich experience leads us to the conviction that we are already one, with the consequence that, as disciples of the will of God, we are empowered to move forward and never to be without hope.

So, as an ecumenical fellowship, IEF has a special prophetic responsibility in reminding, calling upon and challenging our churches to work more effectively, by the power of the Holy Spirit, for the visible unity of the Church.

IEF lives in the hope that together with all Christian churches, we may witness to the gift of Pentecostal unity, and that we all may commit ourselves to the various statements in the *Charta cumenica*:

“– to follow the apostolic exhortation of the Letter to the Ephesians (4,3–6) and persevere in seeking a common understanding of Jesus Christ’s message of salvation in the Gospel;
– in the power of the Holy Spirit, to work towards the visible unity of the Church of Jesus Christ in the one faith, expressed in the mutual recognition of baptism and in Eucharistic fellowship, as well as in common witness and service.”

*Come, taste and see how good the Lord is!
All are welcome to this experience.*

International Ecumenical Fellowship
Internationale Ökumenische Gemeinschaft
Internationale Oecumenische Gemeenschap
Asociación Ecuménica Internacional
Amitié Œcuménique Internationale
Międzynarodowa Wspólnota Ekumeniczna
Mezinárodní Ekumenické Společenství
Medzinárodné Ekumenické Združenie
Nemzetközi Ökumenikus Társaság
Asociația Eumenică Internațională