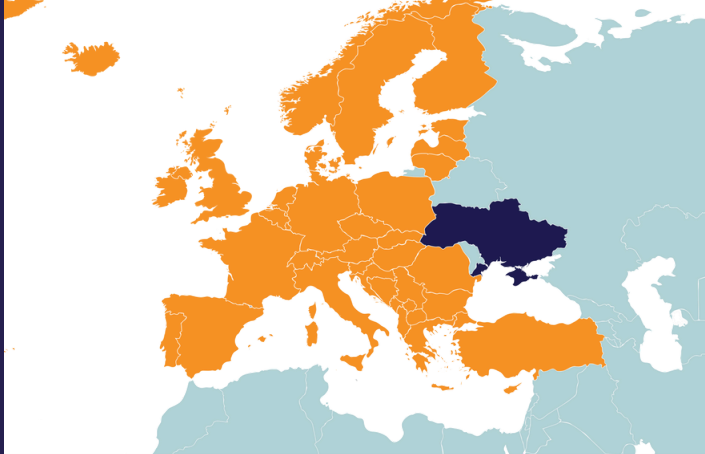


GRAPEVINE



The regional newsletter for IFES Europe
Autumn 2025



Monty writes...

Dear friends of IFES

Welcome to this latest edition of *Grapevine*. We are now a couple of months past **Kingdom Come**, an amazing experience for all who attended from over 30 movements. In this edition you will read first hand accounts of the festival. I am confident that these stories will encourage movements to make the next European Student Festival a priority for their students in 2028.

You will also be introduced to some new general secretaries and hear an inspiring testimony from one

member of staff currently serving in a very challenging context. On behalf of the whole regional team I want to thank you all for your ongoing prayerful and practical support for all the work our staff and students are doing to "proclaim the kingdom of God" to all nations.

Be blessed as you read.

Monty
David Montgomery
Regional Secretary, IFES Europe

Christ's Kingdom Comes to Latvia!

IFES European Student Festival

More than **500 students and leaders** from **42 nationalities** and over **30 countries** gathered in Latvia in August for five days of worship, fellowship, prayer and teaching about evangelism, before taking to the streets to share their faith in practice.

*"These five days were filled with joy, God's word, growth, fellowship, and a willingness [for students] to bring Jesus' message into their study environment. Thank you God, and every minister and supporter who helped turn this dream into reality – **we experienced God's Kingdom here on earth like never before!**"*

LKSB Latvia



Pray with us

...giving thanks for God's provision and for the real sense of his presence at the festival. Pray for his continued work in and blessing on all who came.

"It's so amazing to see that there is **one God, one faith**, but we are from so many countries and cultures... to **feel the love that God carries for each and every one of us.**"

Raul, staff member, OSCER, Romania



"We've received so much... it's been **amazing to be in unity**. That's something we want to bring to our country – to be able to **worship together with passion and fire** for the Lord."

Elena, student, BCSU, Bulgaria



"We are talking about the Kingdom of God and singing about joy and love... **I can really see that coming into students' hearts.**"

"It's just real joy... **to experience God's grace.** It's a real privilege to sing in [such a] diverse and excellent team – from Austria, Lithuania, Latvia, California...!"
Two worship leaders

"I learned that it's completely OK, when you have conversations with friends, to just suggest praying with each other. **I learned so much!**"

"One of the workshops was about how to study the Bible. I realised that **every single verse has a deeper meaning and you can apply it in your own life... I learned how to do that myself.** It's been amazing!"
Two students from IFES, Netherlands



Pray with us

...that this autumn, students would continue to grow in confidence and, supported by their movements, prayerfully respond to new opportunities to share their faith.

Find out more!



"The festival has equipped me to answer hard questions like 'Why is there evil in the world if God is so good?' This is a very topical question for Ukrainian students. **It's prepared me to lead Bible studies and discussions with believers and unbelievers.**"

Anna, student, CCX, Ukraine

Welcome to new(ish!) general secretaries

Matt Lillicrap – “Palpable hunger” in Great Britain

“Student mission has been part of my family’s story since before I was born,” says Matt, whose mum had come to faith at a university mission week. “I heard about it when I was growing up, and so when I went to university I was determined to join the Christian Union.” Seeing students coming to faith and growing in faith had a big impact on Matt.

Qualifying as a medical doctor, he was eventually called into ministry as a church pastor, where he continued working with students. He joined UCCF as General Secretary in November 2024.

We talked to Matt after UCCF’s annual conference, Forum, in September, where he had been excited to see a significant growth in attendance. Especially encouraging was students’ response to the new Bible resource, Uncover Luke. “They loved it!” he told us. “The hunger was palpable. It addresses the big question that students are asking at the moment – ‘Is God good?’”



Pray with us

... for Matt and the team at UCCF, and that God would use the new Uncover Luke resource to draw many students to himself.



Jean-René Moret – a new beginning in Switzerland

Student mission is also in the family for Jean-René – his parents met as students in a GBEU group. Jean-René himself was a GBE student leader in high school. He studied for a masters degree in Physics but changed to Theology, achieving a PhD. He went on to work for GBEU on staff for three years, helping students integrate faith with studies, before serving as a pastor for eight years. Since August he’s been the General Secretary for GBEU (the movement in French-speaking Switzerland).

Pray with us

... that Jean-René would quickly establish good relationships with his team and the GBEU board, as well as colleagues across IFES Europe.

Jonathan Clark – positive about Greece

With a background in student ministry with UCCF, Jonathan has now been a staff member with SXEF in Greece for nearly two decades. This small movement lost its general secretary in 2024 and is undergoing a period of restructuring and waiting on God for a new leader. Jonathan is helping to lead during this interim period. “There are lots of opportunities,” he says. “The movement is very small but very positive!”

IFES Europe Regional Secretary. Monty, says “It’s great to have experienced folks like Jonathan in our fellowship, who are able to step in in times of flux.”



Pray with us

... for God’s appointed person to come forward to lead the movement in Greece longer term..

Lydia Adams – “standing in the gap” in Slovenia

Asked to take on the role of General Secretary for ZVES, Slovenia, Lydia felt inadequate and unqualified. Then she remembered the words in Esther 4:14: “And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” Had God brought Lydia to Slovenia to “stand in the gap” until a he provided a local leader? Lydia writes:



The team at ZVES: Lydia, Nova, Olivia, Boštjan, Terence

“I’m originally from Wales and grew up in a wonderful Christian, Welsh-speaking family. My time at university was significant for my faith, and after a year with UCCF Relay, I moved to Slovenia in 2012 to help restart the student movement. At the time it had no active students and a poor reputation among churches. I had no idea how difficult it would be, but by God’s grace, the movement has slowly grown.”

“Slow-venia”, but steady progress

“Slovenia, with its population of two million, is a small, beautiful country on the sunny side of the Alps. Yet behind its natural beauty lies deep spiritual darkness. Depression and suicide rates are high, and with only 0.1% of the population evangelical (around 2,000 people), we often feel insignificant and unable to make a difference.” “We often say ministry in Slovenia is very ‘slow-venia’. It’s hard to measure growth or point to dramatic change, but we have seen slow, steady progress.”

“We currently have about three student groups in the country, and while they’ve often struggled with stability, this past year we’ve seen increased commitment and attendance at our events. More students are eager to study the Bible and know God better. As they recognise they’re not at university by accident but sent there by God, we’ve seen greater boldness in evangelism, sometimes even initiated by the students themselves. For us, that’s amazing!”

An answer to prayer

“One of the biggest encouragements this year has been the addition of our new intern, Nova. She was once a student in our group and wanted to explore Christian ministry. At first, she struggled with time management, was quiet, and lacked confidence. But with a clear structure and mentorship, she has flourished. She now confidently leads groups, studies theology, and has even given an evangelistic talk and led a seminar on reaching Gen Z.”

“Training one person may seem small, but in a country where churches are under-resourced and future leaders are few, it’s a significant answer to prayer. It’s exciting to see God raising up new workers ready to bring the gospel to the next generation.”

Pray with us

... that more Sloveniain students would be drawn to faith and be compelled to share the good news with others.

Indian students explore faith in Bosnia

The movement in Bosnia shares some incredible stories. Since the war in Ukraine they have seen many Indian students coming in. Very quickly the team was able to build trust with them. Earlier this year they ran both an Alpha course with Indian and local students and a course on how to deal with trauma: a very much felt need.

Pray with us

...for fruit for these new connections and initiatives.



Walking the path of leadership – together

Being a General Secretary for a national Christian student movement is a unique privilege – but also sometimes a lonely one. That's why one of the best expressions of our international fellowship is our "cluster groups", led by members of the European regional team.



Sem (Belgium), Thomas (Austria), Chris (Ireland), Jakob (Denmark), Craig (IFES Europe), Desi (Bulgaria), Annemiek (Netherlands)

A safe space to learn and develop

These four groups offer a safe space where general secretaries can connect openly and honestly with each other, sharing, learning and growing together.

"It's a community of people who understand... and are able to help me process my experiences, support me in my growth and simply help me on my journey."

Desi, BCSU, Bulgaria

This level of support is especially valuable for those new to the role. Chris from CUI in Ireland recalls how, as a new general secretary, he felt "the opportunity to share and be vulnerable with those who understood [was] such a source of encouragement." Sem from ICHTUS in Belgium agrees: "It reminds me why I love IFES so much: being one family in Christ."

Walking together through real challenges

Craig Weyrens is one of the leaders: "We meet online once a month to catch up, offer support, pray together, and enjoy fellowship. Twice a year we gather in person (once in one of the members' countries for a couple of days), when we'll discuss issues that are important for people at the time... These are really good, deep conversations that help shape what each person is doing."

Sometimes the group will study a book – this year it was 2 Corinthians. "For some new general secretaries, the 'honeymoon period' was over, and they were facing some of the messy reality of running an organisation. Paul's reflections seemed to speak directly to this experience."

One of the highlights of the IFES Europe year is our General Secretaries' Gathering. "The cluster groups,

will get together during the conference," says Craig to catch up, discuss what we're learning and check in on how we're getting on with our goals."

Partners in ministry

These regular gatherings have sparked valuable connections across borders – such as when Chris from Ireland invited Desi from Bulgaria to speak at their annual conference. In return CUI collected an offering for BCSU – a reflection of the kind of mutual support that the apostle Paul encouraged.

Growing in grace and strength

Thomas from OSM in Austria, appreciates the openness of his group: "I love that you can just be who you are and have fun while also having deep and honest conversations." In such a culturally diverse context, this truly is a mark of the grace that permeates the interactions. "Cluster groups give us an opportunity to practice humility and extend understanding to each other," notes Craig. Most importantly, perhaps, is the chance for general secretaries to bring the kinds of issues that can't easily be shared elsewhere – especially in times of stress. Here they can be guaranteed compassion, understanding, advice, reassurance and prayer.

Leaders really value this depth of fellowship. "Cluster group meetings are a good combination of study, fun, support and prayer," say Annemiek, from IFES Netherlands, "It's so helpful to have lovely people who know your situation, and to learn from each other." Jakob from KFS in Denmark agrees: "We support each other a lot... It's inspiring and gives me strength", adding "Craig is a great leader – and we laugh a lot!"

Meet Craig Weyrens! Craig was born in California, where he also studied. He has worked with IFES since graduating, first in America for seven years and then in Bulgaria for 17. Craig now has the joy of serving as the Associate Regional Secretary for Leadership Development in IFES Europe. His favourite part of the job is leading students and staff in understanding the greatness of God's word. Craig lives with his wife in Sofia, Bulgaria.

Pray with us

... that through their cluster groups, general secretaries will continue to grow together in wisdom and grace.

From darkness to light: one staff worker's journey into ministry

Throughout Europe God has called young people from all backgrounds to full time student work. Volodymyr from CCX, Ukraine, told us his story of finding Jesus in the midst of war.

A long and winding search for truth

Raised in the Eastern Orthodox Church, Volodymyr's faith journey was not straightforward. He embraced atheism, then agnosticism and eventually New Age, with its occult practices. Instead of providing clarity, his search led him into darkness, suicidal depression and medication that wrecked his ability to study. Yet, while Volodymyr may have abandoned Christianity, God remained faithful to him, providing a good job in an IT company that served both Orthodox Jews in Israel and evangelicals in the USA. Once again Volodymyr's thoughts turned to faith and belief.

Then war broke out. Its horror and injustice shook Volodymyr deeply. "I could see that some could destroy, steal, and harm others without facing consequences... something was fundamentally wrong with the world." He began to recognise the emptiness of living only for himself.

A powerful encounter in the midst of war

"A week into the war, I was giving technical support to this pastor from the United States," Volodymyr recalls, "when I heard rockets in the distance. I thought, 'If one hits me, what will this man think? Would anyone really care if I died?'" He was touched when the pastor prayed right there and then for his protection. Back home, he was overwhelmed with anxiety and despair. "I wanted a rocket to hit me and end the pain, but was afraid of what might follow."

Suddenly he heard a voice like thunder – filled with power, justice, and love. It simply said: "Be still."

At once, Volodymyr was filled with an indescribable peace. The fog of depression and confusion lifted. The next day, God surprised him again when a friend reached out, saying "I want you to know that God loves you!" Even if Volodymyr had rejected God, *his* love was unconditional – like the love of a father.

Volodymyr resolved to dedicate his life to doing good; yet he felt he no longer knew right from wrong. Then came an intriguing invitation – to meet a priest who was also a scientist. When Volodymyr finally agreed to go along, he was astonished to meet a very untypical Orthodox priest: clean-shaven, with short hair, who explained clearly the gospel and how God still works miracles today. It all made sense. "I realised God had reached out to me. All I needed to do was put my faith in him." Finally Volodymyr surrendered his life to Christ.



"I realised God had reached out to me. All I needed to do was put my faith in him."

Bringing peace in a time of trouble

Two years later, Volodymyr had completed his degree and was praying for a way to serve. Again God provided a job – as student worker at CCX – as well as a financial partner.

In the last year Volodymyr and the team have persevered in evangelism, amid ongoing drone attacks and constant exhaustion. "Students are searching for meaning," Volodymyr tells us, "Asking questions like, 'Where is God in this war?' or 'Why did God create me?'" In the midst of conflict, there are signs of renewal as more and more students are finding peace in Christ.

"Being part of IFES means CCX is part of something larger, something global, not limited by borders and cultural differences. We are united under a common goal to make a difference in the whole world for God's purposes and kingdom!"

Volodymyr, staff worker, CCX, Ukraine

Pray with us

...for strength and rest as the CCX team faces regular night-time drone attacks and constant fatigue.
...for encouragement and growth, despite challenges
.... for protection and provision for staff, students, and ongoing ministry in Ukraine.

A tidal wave of prayer sweeps through Europe

... and the rest of the world!

Around 2000 students, staff and supporters from Europe took part in a wave of intercession for IFES student ministry that swept across the world on Thursday 16 October.

Altogether the annual World Student Day of prayer drew in 30,000 people from 135 countries and territories

Using digital "prayer cards", individuals and student groups from our region's 36 countries shared specific prayer needs for their campuses. We prayed for a mission week in **Salzburg (Austria)**, for united witness in **Oulu (Finland)**, for doors to open in **Warsaw (Poland)**, for students' mental and emotional health in **Pisa (Italy)**, for courage for seekers in **Dublin (Ireland)** to go deeper, and for daily prayer to be an integral part of ministry in **Spain**. And our pioneering movement in **Kosovo** asked, "Please pray for new contacts with students who don't know Christ during this new academic year. Our people have a great need of the truth of Jesus Christ."

As students gathered to pray, many in difficult circumstances around the world expressed their joy at being part of something bigger – from the violence of South Sudan to the remoteness of Vanuatu.

GBU in Spain planned a nationwide World Student Day online prayer meeting



"To be effective in evangelism and fruitful in discipleship, our students need prayer! World Student Day is a vital part of gospel ministry in our universities. It not only points us to God as the Lord who empowers gospel witness, but it also encourages our movements that they are part of a bigger picture of what God is doing."

Monty, Regional Secretary, IFES Europe



Students from SEAM in North Macedonia encouraged people to pray using prayer cards - or to ask a student they know about their needs.

"When we look at the map with the names of other movements, and we read their names and use the prayer cards, we truly feel that we're part of something bigger. It's different from our other meetings when we focus on our group and our situation. You get a sense that you are part of a bigger movement."

David, student leader, SEAM, North Macedonia

Pray with us

... by downloading the World Student Day [devotional guide](#) and [prayer cards](#)
.... every two weeks, when you subscribe to [IFES Prayerline](#) – available on email or via podcast.

This year was the 50th anniversary of IFES annual global prayer days, and took the theme "Immeasurably More" (from Ephesians 3:20-21). George Ogalo, IFES Chief Operating Officer, explained: "Fifty years ago, IFES had fewer than 40 national movements, but today there are more than 160 – God has done 'more than we asked or imagined'.

Transforming student evangelism in Europe

Training for a sustainable future at the annual conference of the Fellowship of Evangelists in the Universities of Europe.



Pray with us

...that all who attended FEUER will have wisdom and courage in applying what they have learned on campuses around the region in the year ahead.



Members of IFES European ministry team have just returned from an immensely encouraging annual FEUER conference training students and staff in evangelism. Our regional secretary, Monty, writes:

"Around 200 of us met in Calpe, Spain. Nearly all European movements were represented, from the Faroe Islands to Israel, as well as guests from Eurasia. As well as the evangelists' track, there were tracks on small group bible-based evangelism, on planning an events week, and as usual one for post-graduates and academics, facilitated by our Good News for the University (GNU) staff."

The news from the GNU team is that this FEUER was "the best ever!". They are excited to see more people in the network progressing from postgraduate to academic work, and are hoping to develop a year-long mentoring program to help them share their faith throughout their career. They are also encouraged by a number of enthusiastic people from around Europe taking an interest in academic ministry; the GNU team plan to provide seminars to envision and train them to develop the work in their own country.

Jonathan Clark, currently interim general secretary for SFEX in Greece, was teaching at the conference.

"It's great to be part of a wider network of people who are trying to do the same thing in different ways in different contexts," he said. "It's a really fertile place to get ideas, inspiration for how to do our work in our situation by learning what people do in their situations and it's great to hang out with like minded people." Other speakers included Becky Pippert, Peter Williams, Mark Meynell, Stefan Gustafsson and Ann Brown.

On the evangelism track, participants were put in small groups where they had the opportunity to practice presenting evangelistic talks. Yvonne from the Netherlands said "It's really helpful to hear some sample talks and also get some feedback on my own talk," and a student from Poland added "I learned a lot – it helped me to get to know what my gifts are."

"This conference has completely transformed my approach to academics and evangelism!.. Every year at FEUER the opportunity to worship with people from 42 different countries in so many languages is the highlight of my year."

Daniel Gilman, IFES GNU staff member, Professor of History at Redeemer University, Hamilton, Canada, Director of the Centre for Public Speaking and student at the University of Cambridge, UK.