

"AT THAT MOMENT I SAW THAT I HAD BEEN
TAKING GOD'S GRACE FOR GRANTED."
FROM BEIJING
TO ATHLONE



"BELIEVING IN THE
VISION"
Stephen Gardiner
FROM THE BOARD



IFES Ireland: the Christian Unions

REVIEW



DIRECTOR'S REPORT

I have just finished lunch with a dear friend of mine whom I have known for some time. We were work colleagues for several years and as friends we have shared many conversations and life experiences, good times and not so. I have not stopped praying... hoping for him. Today he told me tentatively that he had become a Christian. Today our conversation was different. Today, we understood that his life was changing forever. So with joy, I write these words to you knowing once again that the gospel is good news for today's world; now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation. (2 Corinthians 6:2)

...and IFES Ireland : The Christian Unions is about students reaching students with the gospel worldwide

This year the IFES World Assembly, the quadrennial gathering together of national IFES movements from around the world, takes place in Poland. This will see Christians from over 150 countries gathering for teaching, envisioning, fellowship and prayer. It will be a time for us all to re-commit ourselves to this great task of taking the gospel to this generation of students. It will also be a foretaste of that day to which we all look forward, when people from every nation and tribe will assemble before the throne in praise. We are part of a worldwide ministry and mission!

IFES Ireland: The Christian Unions is about students reaching students with the gospel worldwide

Just as IFES Ireland is part of a fellowship of national IFES movements, so the Christian

"...WORKING TO SEE **THE GOSPEL**
TRANSFORM THE LIVES OF THEIR
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Unions in Ireland's colleges and universities are in fellowship together, working to see the gospel transform the lives of their fellow students. It is wonderful to be able to review this academic year by sharing with you that students have found faith in Jesus in all four provinces of Ireland. CU students have shared Jesus on campus, through their friendships, supported by an array of very engaging and creative initiatives: The Mark Drama, 'text-a-toastie', Thanksgiving meals, to name but a few. More missions have taken place this year, following on from last year's FREE gospel project. (For example at: UCC, Queens, Jordanstown, Coleraine, UCD, Magee, Belfast Art College, Trinity and NUI Maynooth).

Worldwide...

In a true sense, our mission is worldwide, our universities and also our CUs are full of international students here for a semester or longer. It has been incredibly encouraging to see the ministry of the IFES InterAction team develop and flourish this year, with international student cafés (i-café) in partnership with several churches and CUs. A number of students from overseas have come to faith. We hope you will enjoy Hannah's story. We are also working hard to partner with IFES movements in Spain, Slovenia and Thailand, where graduates from Ireland are currently serving with IFES.

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Thinking.... engaging the university

In recent months, student leaders have asked for apologetics support and training. In DCU, Queens, NUI Maynooth and RCSI special apologetic events took place, all designed to get students to think about and engage with the issues of today. Currently we are exploring ways of linking up with UCCF (see www.bethinking.org) to enhance the training on offer to students in Ireland.

IFES Ireland: The Christian Unions is also about discipleship

We continue to seek to help students follow Jesus, prayerfully depending on His grace in every area of life, for all of life. CU Staff and Relay Workers are meeting individual students all around Ireland to read the Bible and explore issues of faith. The SLOBS (Smallgroup Leaders Own Bible Study) programme continues in large CUs in Belfast and Dublin. We also continue to be blessed by many willing church leaders and graduates who are part of the CU teaching programmes. We must remember that these few years spent in University are often strategic years of growth and spiritual formation.

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IFES Ireland conferences are strategic to the ministry of the fellowship. This year's Joint Colleges conference was full with speaker Ed Vaughan a real highlight! We look forward to Lindsay Brown joining us later this year. You will read elsewhere of our plans to have a new all-Ireland conference next Easter, which we hope will greatly strengthen the mission of our fellowship.

IFES Ireland: The Christian Unions is about supporting and developing student leadership

The input and consultation from both the President's Forum and the Student Board Reps has been outstanding this year. So too have the teams of CU leaders serving right around Ireland and it is so encouraging to support such enthusiasm and hard work. Another commitment to developing leaders is our Relay programme; discipleship training in a student context, delivered in partnership with UCCF. This year saw the introduction of ASWs (Associate Staff Workers), a scheme which enables volunteers to be involved within the fellowship.

CU leaders continue to be supported by their CU Staff Workers, who train, advise, support and, in many cases, teach the students. This summer we will say farewell to Cosmin Pascu as he moves back to Belfast to marry Rachel Maxwell. Congratulations to you both! We are delighted that Catherine Read has joined us from our Australian sister movement AFES, through CMS Australia. We are also getting used to our brand new Student Resource Centre, in Dún Laoghaire near Dublin. We welcomed Sarah Keene, who is based at the centre to support the team and the director. Sarah replaced Karen Buttimer, who now works with Latin Link.

Resourcing IFES Ireland: The Christian Unions

As you will see, our fellowship faces significant financial challenges and we are working hard to meet these prayerfully and faithfully. We are immensely grateful to our growing number of supporters, graduates and partner churches who do so much to pray and resource this ministry. In particular we congratulate the Bearded Presidents who shaved so little to give so much! It is also worth noting that over 50% of the team involved with IFES in Ireland raise 100% of their own support, from within and beyond these shores.

However you are involved, may I say thank you for all your prayers, support and encouragements. Today is the day of salvation!

Adam Jones

NEW ANNUAL CONFERENCE PHIL HOWE

This April was the final e:con as we know it, but what next? Why a change?

E:con was our all-Ireland leadership training conference to encourage those going onto committees, coming off committees, those helping out with small groups and others who serve within the CU body.

History shows that at one time e:con ran alongside an all-Ireland conference, known to many as 'Irish Conference'. However, staff and students found that running two conferences left everyone over-extended and the decision was taken to focus on e:con. E:con has been a faithful helper of CU leadership training over the last number of years but, upon reflection, we ask, are we missing something by not coming together as a fellowship of CUs for all students?

After consultation as a staff team, listening to the board and hearing ideas at Presidents Forum (the day when we try to get all the CU presidents to come, encourage one another, thrash out ideas and potential future events), we decided as a fellowship that it was time to bring back an event that allowed everyone, regardless of leadership status, to come together to see the 32 county fellowship-the full picture of all the CU's coming together for one conference annually and to visibly experience IFES Ireland: The Christian Unions.

It was decided through discussion at Presidents Forum, and looking to the history, that running both e:con and an annual conference would not be effective and would over-stretch student commitments. So after much deliberation, we went for an all-Ireland conference to replace our Easter conference.

Its purpose will be to gather together as one body, to grow in Christ through the teaching of His word and to go out with the gospel to our campus' and beyond! We believe a core part of this will be to exhort one another through faithful Bible teaching so that students will be built up in the knowledge and love of God.

The new conference will be starting next Easter, so please pray for guidance and wisdom for the sub-team that is to aid the planning of this event, for students to

realize the opportunity to come together as the full body of CU's around Ireland and for the wider team and the IFES Ireland board that we will be clear about the purpose. Please pray that it will bring everyone closer, showing what God has been doing through the ministry of the CUs and that we can share the mission of IFES Ireland beyond individual campuses, catching the vision of students throughout IFES Europe reaching their fellow students with the transforming gospel of Jesus Christ.

What a privilege it is to be involved in God's ministry, it is only by His grace towards us that we are able to do anything, and so we seek His grace for this event and hope that students from next year and the year to come will think back to their college years and remember the influence the CU had on them and how awesome it is to see the wider fellowship-CUs north and south, coming together to show we are glorifying God!

More news to follow – including the name of this new conference. Watch this space!

TO GATHER
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FROM BEIJING TO ATHLONE HANNAH*



My name is Hannah* and I have written a short article describing how I became a Christian and how God has strengthened my faith. Although it wouldn't be possible to describe everything God has done for me, I truly hope that my story will be of encouragement to other Christians.

I WENT TO a school which has a programme through which some American teachers come to teach English in Beijing. I heard them talking about God sometimes when I was in school but was never interested in the Bible. In my school I never doubted evolution which we spent years studying.

In December of 2008, in my first year at university, I decided to pay a visit to my school and the department where the foreign teachers helped students practise their English. I just knocked on the door and there I met my friend Liz who had just been in Beijing for a couple months. I asked her whether it was OK for me to study the Bible with her. She was delighted and said yes. Looking back, I am not sure why I asked that question but to some extent I think I should be honest that I just wanted to practice my English.

For a long time I was always amazed and confused by the fact that those "foreign teachers" were so different from the others. Gradually I came to know that it was because they were something called "Christians".

In July 2009, I was about to attend an internship in a marketing department in a company. I knew that it would be really hard but I didn't have a choice, which left me feeling upset and very low. I asked myself who would ALWAYS be there for me all the time. I thought of my friends but this

answer didn't seem good enough. And my parents? I suddenly realized that they had their own things to do and even though they loved me and cared about me they wouldn't be with me all the time. Every option was abandoned and the only answer left was God. That was the moment I "decided" to become a Christian.

I say I "decided" because until today, I still don't know if that was truly the moment I was saved by Jesus and the moment God really converted me. It seemed much harder to really live a Christian life than "making a decision" like that. I read the Bible sometimes, but obviously not enough. Looking back, I can see that this was only the first step on the path to understanding what it means to be a Christian and I guess I took for granted for the grace God gave me.

Before coming to Ireland I prayed. In the first two weeks in Athlone I was greatly disappointed. Being used to living in a huge city, life here in Athlone was so different. Especially at the weekends, we were so bored and I complained about coming to such a place. What's more, we found ourselves in an international class and half of the students were French. I was tortured by the French and Spanish accents and didn't understand why God sent me to this place.

Things got better after I joined the CU and started going to the church every Sunday.

One weekend, I paid a visit to some friends in another city and it was the first time I heard anyone debating predestination. It was kind of shocking for me to hear "we were chosen" instead of "we decided". I began to feel a tremendous sense of fear, because I started to doubt strongly whether I was truly saved. If I wasn't

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saved, I might go to hell after I die! It was such a horrifying feeling. The next day, I spent large amount of time sitting there thinking about Jesus. He came to the earth and died for us. He came to the earth and died for me. At one particular moment I suddenly came to realize He actually died on the cross for ME.

Some days later, I attended IFES Ireland's Joint Colleges Conference. There, the speaker said that “grace is not cheap”. At that moment I saw that I had been taking God's grace for granted.

Apart from that, in Joint Colleges it was the very first time I met so many Christian young people. They were real and all the conversations around were also real. It was a blessing to talk to Christians who were born in a Christian family, grew up with Christian parents and had always had Christian siblings to talk to and went to a good church publicly. All of that is almost non-existent in China. It was the very first time I started not wanting to go back to Beijing.

Until now it still doesn't make sense to me why I was chosen and why

God has maintained His grip on me through all this. Now the verse “I will never ever leave you, I will never ever forsake you” has special significance to me I know for sure that He will never ever abandon me in the future.

I have noticed there are people who claim to be Christians but still hesitate to say that God really exists, God created the world and humans and Jesus really came to the earth to save us. I feel truly sad for those who are still undergoing that uncertainty. I know maybe the only thing I can do is just to pray for them and show them my faith.

As a matter of fact, I've realized the more I grow in faith, the more divergence of view I'll have with non-Christians. This is particularly obvious when a decision is to be made. I'd admit it actually makes my life harder because most of my friends around me in China are non-Christians and I am the only Christian in my entire family. However I do believe God will make a way for me and all I need to do is trust Him. For Christians, I know there'll always be a cost. We either follow the world or follow God and there is no way we can be Christians and not feel uncomfortable being with non-Christian friends who are partying all the time. The great friends I made in Joint Colleges make me realize it really doesn't matter how we don't fit the

world. Those parties, the people who are partying without believing in the one who created them and the whole world, will perish. It's the truth and the fact that we were saved that matters. I have many friends who don't know anything about Jesus, and who won't understand my choices. But I feel confident that I will be able to hold onto my faith, by God's grace.

I want to thank Catrin and Tim who have been so helpful and encouraging to the CU in Athlone and to me personally. I have made some amazing friends through the CU and I am so grateful to God for all I have learned during my time in Ireland.

* Name has been changed.

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FROM THE BOARD



STEPHEN GARDINER – NEW CHAIRMAN

I can still remember that sense of anticipation as I began my student journey at Queen's, studying mathematics (what joy!) and sampling university life. However, my most formative experience came through the Christian Union. It was there that I gained confidence in God's word and found encouragement to share the gospel message.

Over thirty years later I'm still at university (now UCD) enjoying mathematics, and still thrilled to hear from CUs of students coming to faith. I really believe in the vision of IFES Ireland: The Christian Unions, to see students transformed by Jesus and transforming their campus and beyond. That's why I'm delighted to support this strategic ministry through the work of the Board. I take up my new role as Chairman with deep appreciation to Brian Callan for his wise and prayerful leadership over the past four years.



BRIAN CALLAN – OUTGOING CHAIRMAN

This is my fourth and final review as chair of the IFES Ireland Board, as the Lord has opened up a new opportunity for me in the US where I moved in January. As I reflect on the last year and indeed my last eleven years on the Board, I am humbly grateful for the opportunity to be involved in this inspirational ministry. I am constantly challenged by the faithfulness, boldness and perseverance of our student leadership, as they take every opportunity to raise Christ high on their campus.

While the work of the Board is in many ways invisible, the Board members bring a wealth of student experience to the stewardship of our organization. It is encouraging to have Board members such as Rev John Woodside speak in so many CU meetings or Prof Stephen Williams who is keynote speaker at the IFES European Theological Students conference, similarly Joan Singleton, whose work in IBI brings her into very close contact with many CU leaders. We welcomed Jim Crookes (Belfast church leader and Queens chaplain) to the Board in 2010 and I am delighted to hand over the chair to Prof Stephen Gardiner, whose contribution on the Board over the past few years has been a great personal encouragement. I have delighted in his solid wisdom, practical support and godly leadership.

Much Board time in 2010 has been devoted to the topic of fund raising, which continues to be a great challenge. Alongside many Christian organizations, we have felt the squeeze on incoming gifts. We feel a great debt of gratitude to those who faithfully covenant funds each month, without whom our work would not be so effective. Less visible but even more important are your prayers for the work on each campus. It continues to be an objective and challenge to have as many supporters engaged in regular prayer support groups as possible. We continue to be thankful for the very practical support of the greater IFES movement, not least in the continued provision of the IFES InterAction Team based in Dublin, and led by Jonathan and Kah Foon Gillespie. Finally, we also welcome Catherine Read to our staff this year, who comes as a gift from the Australian CMS movement. We look forward to your continued support and the opportunity to glorify God in all we do.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY 2010

The figures summarised here are based on the audited accounts for the year ended 31st August 2010 of IFES Ireland (NI) Trust and IFES Ireland (ROI) Trust.

Following on from a surplus in 2008/09, we have returned a deficit in 2009/2010. In part this has been due to the changing economic climate, which has impacted on our support base, and the continued fluctuations in value of sterling against the euro, which puts pressure on the monthly financing of IFES Ireland. In November Adam wrote to all those who receive IFES Ireland information stating that £3000/€3500 extra per month was needed to stabilise our finances and secure our current and future ministry. We were encouraged by the response but we are still along way off meeting this target. Please continue to pray that our support base will grow to meet current and future ministry needs.

We are grateful to all who continue to partner with us prayerfully and financially. Thank you. Please continue to pray for the Board and Staff of IFES Ireland: The Christian Unions as they work on fundraising initiatives including 'Plant a seed' (our legacy pack), Team support raising and encourage student-led initiatives such as 'The Bearded Presidents (see Prayer News). All of this enables more students in Ireland to be inspired and equipped to follow Jesus.

INCOME	£
Gifts (individuals)	194,908
Churches	29,393
Trusts	18,475
For IFES	21,648
Tax (Gift Aid)	37,312
Other	3,287
Total	£ 305,023

EXPENDITURE	£
Salaries	247,962
Travel	24,925
Training	5,804
Student Conferences	1,093
Communication	12,532
Office	4,870
Promotion	4,788
Fees	7,278
To IFES	21,345
Miscellaneous	7,530
Total	£ 338,127
Deficit	-£ 33,104

Exchange rate of 0.87 as per average 2009/10

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