

ACSF HISTORY:

THE TRANSITION YEARS—1987 THRU 1989



Left to Right: Ibinabo Dick Sr. and Merleanna Dick

Details about the formation of the African Christian Students Fellowship have been widely shared by Brother Meshack Ilobi, the organization's first president. He has documented his experiences before and during the fellowship's inception.

Who would have known that what began as an informal gathering of students from Africa in the late seventies and early eighties in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and in other cities across America, would blossom into what we now recognize as African Christian Fellowship USA (ACF USA)? When I first attended a prayer meeting at the Wesley Foundation on the University of Tulsa campus on a chilly autumn evening, I certainly didn't foresee it. The room was filled with fellow African students, many of whom, like me, were navigating the complexities of studying in a foreign land, far away from home. Thank you, brother Charles Igwe, a fellow Nigerian student, for inviting me to the fellowship meeting.

The primary driving forces behind the evolution of the organization were multifaceted, but two stood out prominently: the prompting of the Holy Spirit and the necessity for African students to stick together and share their faith in Christ Jesus with others. At this juncture in our lives, in a foreign land, sticking together not only made sense but was essential for survival. The sense of community we fostered was a lifeline amid cultural and academic challenges.

In piecing together the history of ACF USA, it is vital we retain its essence as a collective ministry--a body of believers that are driven by the Holy Spirit to gather the end-time harvest for the Lord Jesus Christ. As the writer of the book of Hebrews acknowledges, "faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Our collective faith produced what is now ACF USA. This article will document how the ACSF transitioned into ACF USA.



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The constitution and by-laws that governed the ACSF initially catered exclusively to students. During that time, non-students could participate in the affairs of the fellowship but couldn't contest for elective office. In addition, part of the complexities that existed at the time was the conflict between when national and regional conferences were scheduled. Suggestions made to curb conflicts included alternating conferences between the national and regional bodies every other year. The demand to translate these ideas into a new ACSF arrangement was a source of friction among members for years.

From 1982 through the summer of 1987, discussions in our leadership, business, and national meetings often centered on how to reorganize the fellowship. These debates continued through successive administrations, from the late Joseph Ali (1983–summer 1985) to Riase Jakpor (summer 1985–summer 1987). At this point, the vision that propelled ACSF in North America among African students has been sustained for well over a decade, sparking the need for restructuring as the organization grew.

As a student at the University of Tulsa and a member of the Tulsa chapter, I participated in outreaches in the Tulsa metro area, Oklahoma State University (OSU), and the University of Oklahoma (OU) campus in Norman. There were many others, including brother Ekpo Ekpo, who contributed to this effort. We were not specifically motivated by any individual; rather, the Holy Spirit spurred us to share the Gospel message of reconciliation, organically. Inspired by Billy Graham's delivery of the gospel, I attended his InterVarsity Christian conferences in Champaign Urbana, Illinois every other year, along with other fellowship members. African students from around the world attended these conferences, and these conventions became fertile recruitment grounds for African students. When I became the National President of ACSF in 1987, I continued to attend these conferences to connect with like-minded Africans and to expand membership in the organization. One notable conference during my presidency was Urbana '87, where I met several African student delegates. As a result, seven African Christian Fellowship chapters were planted on different campuses by seven individual volunteers.

I was honored to be elected National President of the fellowship in 1987. I accepted the role with humility and a profound sense of responsibility, fully committed to our shared vision of evangelizing, discipling, and empowering African men and women to embrace God's vision for the world. I had the privilege of serving alongside fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who played a crucial role in setting a clear direction for the organization. We established objectives to create new chapters in colleges, universities, and states where there was no ACSF chapter. We intentionally diversified the leadership membership in order to reflect the



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character of different nations in Africa to participate in the ministry at local, regional, and national levels. Under my leadership, these objectives were realized, with new local and national chapters established on various campuses and an intensified focus on outreach. However, we reached a critical juncture as many of the African students graduated and entered into professional fields. We had to decide whether to expand our membership to include non-students or to continue as a student organization.

From our experience, change often brought friction and tension, but expanding ACSF to include non-students could bring overwhelming benefits. By incorporating professionals, we would enhance the organization's reach and objectives with valuable skills and marketplace experience, helping ACSF grow more efficiently and effectively. We needed participants from various levels of society working together, and limiting our approach by excluding non-students wasn't ideal for our goal of impacting the world.

Therefore, we decided to reorganize and include non-students as full members of the fellowship, granting them voting rights and eligibility for elective office. This transition, which occurred under my leadership, transformed ACSF into ACFUSA in the summer of 1989, marking one of the most fulfilling times in my life.



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ACSF Officer Shares Ideas To African Delegates At Urbana '87

Although the ACSF in North America is more than ten years old, most Africans have never heard about the existence of the organization. In an attempt to

change that state of affairs, Ibinabo Dick, the National President of the ACSF in North America met with some of the African delegates at the recently concluded Urbana Missions Convention in Champaign, Illinois. He explained the purpose and history of the ministry to the delegates. As a result, several of the delegates were enthused about the organization and pledged to be part of the ministry. At least 7 people indicated their interest to be used as contact persons in establishing new chapters in their schools and cities. They are:

1. Yao Worlanyo—Oxford, Ohio
2. Haile Hussein—Deerfield, Illinois
3. Lavinia Mlobana—Gratham, Pennsylvania
4. Esther Kamua—Omaha, Nebraska
5. Agnes Atiemo—Detroit, Michigan
6. Jonathan Ikoba—Dekalb, Illinois
7. James Kimani—Victoria B.C., Canada

Mr. Ibinabo Dick appears (standing first row, second from the right) with the enthused Africans in the picture above.

I'd like to share some of the steps taken to initiate the reorganization effort. It's important to remember that before my election in the summer of 1987, there was an ongoing debate about the need to transform the fellowship. I've previously discussed the reasons behind this call for change, and a more detailed explanation can be found in the published article, "ACSF Officer Shares Ideas To African Delegates At Urbana '87," which is partially visible in the above photo.

It's important to recognize that previous administrations had strong reasons to maintain ACSF as a student organization. Presidents Wilson Awosu (1982), Joseph Ali (1983-1985), and Riase Jakpor (1985-1987) supported this stance to preserve the focus on student development and leadership opportunities. They believed that keeping the organization student-centered would ensure that the unique challenges and perspectives of students remained at the forefront, avoiding dilution of their specific needs and priorities. In their view, reorganizing the ACSF needed to wait so that these concerns could be adequately addressed.



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On the other hand, a valid objection was that ACSF no longer represented the interests of a sizable number of people who were no longer students. We risked losing the valuable skills of professionals if they decided to leave the fellowship. To cater to everyone's interests, the structural makeup of the organization had to change. This change would bring valuable skills and experience, helping ACSF grow and usher the organization into a new level of impact. After my election in the summer of 1987, we appointed a restructuring committee led by Brother Samuel Umunna. The committee included Dr. Chibu Ozor, Edward Cuartei, Charity Agorsor, Jane Serwanga, Dr. Joe Omokwe, Lawrence Mbanda, Ekpo Ekpo, and Riase Jakpor. The committee's detailed report was submitted to the national executive board and circulated among all ACSF chapters for feedback.

From April 29th to May 1st, 1988, we held a leadership meeting in New Jersey to review the report, but it was too complex for members to endorse and was rejected. We then appointed another committee chaired by Dr. Boma Afiesimama, who quickly produced a simpler reorganization plan. In early 1989, during a leadership meeting in Houston, Dr. Afiesimama's team presented the new structure and its new organizational name, "ACF USA" (African Christian Fellowship USA). With the details understood, we reached a consensus to adopt the recommendation.

Thus, in the summer of 1989, during our last national conference as ACSF in Austin, Texas, the transition to ACF USA was actualized with a new organizational structure. Subsequently, a new election was conducted, and Brother Adiele Nwankwo was elected as Chairman of the new board. For those who would like to read Umunna's report, I sent the only copy I had to Brother Sam Ogbonnaya, who was the board secretary during Jasper Nzedu's term. Any member of the fellowship may request a copy.

Additional details about our journey to reorganization can be found in the ACSF's Newsletter, Vol. 1 No. 6, published in the spring of 1988. A copy of the newsletter has been sent to Dr. Tonye Briggs to assist him in the ACF USA Ambassador's project. I suggest the newsletter be published in its entirety, for it will provide clarity about the ACSF journey.

As I reflect on the journey from those initial gatherings to the robust organization that ACF USA has become, I see the hand of God guiding us at every turn. Our collective faith, our reliance on the Holy Spirit, and our commitment to each other and to the message of Christ have been the pillars supporting this incredible journey. The challenges we faced and the debates we had were all part of the process that shaped us, strengthened our resolve, and expanded our reach.



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ACF USA stands today as a testament to what can be achieved when a group of committed individuals, driven by faith and the Holy Spirit, come together with a common purpose. Our journey continues, and as we look to the future, we do so with the same faith and commitment that have brought us this far.

Respectfully presented,

Mr. Ibinabo Dick Sr. National President (ACSF, 1987-1989)
President/CEO, Chipset Investments Company