



**STRATEGIC PLAN  
2022-2025**

**'A GLOBAL VOICE FOR A COMMON FUTURE II'  
Promoting a Future of Hope for Catholic Universities  
2022-2024**

**PROEMIUM (2019)**

As the International Federation of Catholic Universities nears its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the celebration of the many accomplishments of the past must also be an occasion to develop a transformational framework to prepare Catholic universities for the changing conditions of the future. IFCU is a value-based federation catering to members working under widely different conditions and facing enormous challenges. Our task is to provide answers to different constituencies, at a time when universities are facing a brave new world of opportunities and disruption, as their mission, their education model, community engagement strategies and funding structures are being transformed. We aim to support global collaboration, binding the voices of our members in a global engagement for robust research and values-driven academic training. This requires convoking disciplines and different stakeholders across regions and professional sectors to produce knowledge that will serve the cause of justice and human rights, support the sustainability of our common house and defend humanity.

Universities are the focal point of a new economic model that is no longer simply based on manufacturing and commodities but is driven and led by those who own intellectual capital. This clearly requires stronger links with stakeholders in the community, and they will increasingly tap into the resources available in universities more effectively as universities must be flexible in catering to these changing demands. Our edge is that as Catholic

universities, we will act to meet these demands by means of value-driven education.

We are conscious that our future is common or it will not be. The global entanglement of environmental, economical, political, cultural and social challenges force a new role upon universities. Technological disruption is changing the nature of work, modes of sociality and interaction, strategies of political engagement and also the very idea of the human. In this economy, the uses of the university (what is the university for?), the nature of its stakeholders (who is the university for?), the role of organization and strategies (how does the university produce knowledge?) and finally its relevance (how does the university create value(s)?), force upon Federations, such as IFCU, a wider and deeper responsibility.

As a Federation that is global in scope, IFCU's task is unavoidably that of creating bridges across geographies and social realities, of inducing collaboration across disciplines and modes of knowledge production, fostering spaces of dialogue amongst its members (institutions, researchers, students) and between them and other societal actors. And to do so in the spirit of the Gospel, that enlightens our endeavors. As Pope Francis argues in *Evangelii Gaudium*: "Universities are outstanding environments for articulating and developing this evangelizing commitment in an interdisciplinary and integrated way." (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 134). To "act in concrete terms", as he challenges us to do, means to take up challenges where they are diagnosed. To act in concrete terms, then, also means to be ambitious in leveraging global outreach.

A Church that goes forth requires universities that go forth, that are on the move. This means precisely articulating the local with the global, leveraging our local presence with a wider international network of universities, bound together by their identity, and committed to jointly create impact in a world that increasingly needs institutions that create value informed by values.

IFCU may only be effectively global if it listens and hence advocates for its many and richly diverse internal voices. A voice of many voices, we pledge to foster spaces of sustainable solidarity to work together for a common future.

## **OUR CURRENT CONDITION (2023)**

In 2019, IFCU approved a Strategic Plan with clearly defined goals and objectives aimed at making the Federation more efficient, more accountable, more relatable and visible. Titled 'A Global Voice for a Common Future', the SP builds from a vision of IFCU as a platform for advocacy of the many voices that shape the rich and diverse reality of Catholic universities worldwide, while mirroring a joint commitment to science and education as drivers of a future of hope and opportunity for all. Placing science at the service of the common good means taking up the challenge of improving the human condition while respecting the whole life of the planet, it requires taking up the challenges, the threats and the opportunities where they are placed. And it involves working across disciplines, across nations, across institutional cultures and divides.

The goals set out by the SP were carried out along the four years of the expanded term, resulting from the impact of COVID. 2019-2022 were particularly complex times for a global federation whose work dwells on continuous collaboration and exchange, not least due to the effects of the long lockdowns but also later due to the outbreak of war in the Ukraine, the energy crisis and global inflation. Global uncertainty and instability are affecting and reshaping the strategies adopted by institutions and signaling a moment of crisis for higher education in general. But this moment signals as well the specific value proposition of Catholic higher education, bringing wisdom to the world in light of the Gospel, not least in the staunch defense of human dignity, integrity, social justice, peace, equity and the rule of law.

In this environment, IFCU has succeeded in adapting to the new conditions. The period signaled the beginning of technological transformation with the collaborative platform and the online training activities as its main flagship deliverables.

## **MOVING FORWARD**

The Strategic Plan for the 2022-2023 period is necessarily a follow-up of the previous one, continuing the path to improve efficiency, promote transparency and advocate for global Catholic higher education. And yet, the conditions under which universities, and particularly Catholic universities, operate have changed, under the duress of the pandemic, war, climate change

and growing threats to societal cohesion prompted by a system of economic, cultural and political crises. What is at stake is clearly the sustainability of universities (financial, environmental, institutional) and also the autonomy and freedom to pursue their mission. Catholic universities provide a unique service to society as institutions called upon to engage and analyze the signs of the times and contribute to the solution of its many complex problems in the light of the Gospel, as emphasized in *Gaudium et Spes*. As such, IFCU shares a commitment to support members in devising strategies to widen access and advance the outcomes, making education affordable and inclusive.

For the next term, IFCU's Strategic Plan is committed to advancing robust institutions, prepared to face the challenges and opportunities of digital transformation, with governance structures adequate to the pursuit of their goals, promoting excellent research and quality education, furthering the capabilities of faculty and staff and boosting the potential of our students with the ultimate goal of creating human value and inspiring our communities to do better, to aim high and to be professionally relentless in the pursuit of the common good. In addition, IFCU shall continue to foster global collaboration contributing to the development of better institutions and their impact, while respecting the diversity of each member.

## **I - MISSION STATEMENT**

IFCU's mission is to contribute to the development, transformation and the resilience of Catholic higher education worldwide, working towards the betterment of society, the advancement of learning and the promotion of the Christian and humanist values of justice, solidarity and sustainability. The Federation works to develop better institutions, that are sustainable, well governed and strive to provide ethically robust answers to the complex issues facing contemporary societies.

## **II - VISION**

To strengthen the voices of global Catholic higher education and work for the common good by supporting quality higher education institutions.

### **III - VALUES**

**PROMOTION OF QUALITY EDUCATION AND RESEARCH** - The Federation abides by the best internationally referenced criteria of research and teaching and fosters their reflection in its members' activities keeping in mind that the goal of Catholic higher education is the promotion of the integral development of the person.

**GLOBAL COLLABORATION AND SOLIDARITY** - We believe that life-changing science and the education of future-oriented professionals requires collaboration across disciplinary fields and solidarity in an internationally robust and networked higher education environment.

**INTEGRITY** - Our activities are determined by a commitment to support ethical integrity in governance, leadership, research and academic environment. We are committed to support human dignity, and foster respect in the academic communities, regardless of gender, group, age, religion and ethnicity.

**COMMUNITY BUILDING** - The global catholicity of our endeavors does not obscure that the primordial responsibility of our members is with their local communities. The Federation will also work to raise the social responsibility practices of its members and support them in collegial engagement with the communities and the populations they serve, while also promoting a wider dialogue with other societal actors (NGO's, companies, professional associations, government, research institutions).

### **IV - GOALS**

1. To strengthen the global voice of the Federation in all matters concerning higher education, research trends, professional development and societal impact;

2. To implement a strong model of academic collaboration amongst its members and serve capacity building, promoting advocacy in environments at risk;
3. To promote robust and autonomous institutions and support leadership strategies aimed at developing human capital and guarantee sustainability;
4. To promote the quality of research and education for the common good at Catholic higher education institutions;
5. To render IFCU a more efficient organization, improve communication with its members and modernize its structures;

To serve the Church and its mission.

## 5 - STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- A. To strengthen the organization's global voice and increasing public advocacy for Catholic universities (Advocacy Initiative).
- B. To develop quality institutions and further social responsibility, autonomy and sustainability at Catholic universities (Capacity Building Initiative).
- C. To promote the continuous improvement of IFCU to better serve the needs of its members (Transformation Initiative).
- D. To enhance solidarity and support to universities and scholars at risk (Solidarity Initiative).
- E. To support the contribution of the universities to the *Laudato si'* Goals (LSG), the UN's SDG's (Sustainability Initiative) and Francesco's Economy.

## 6 - IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

ADVOCACY INITIATIVE - Engaging with the diverse voices of the Federation to strengthen the organization's global voice and increase public advocacy for Catholic universities.

A.1 Strengthen the collaboration with the Dicastery for Culture and Education and with the Pontifical Academies.

A.2 Strengthen the regular engagement with international organizations and other university associations (AUF, AUAP, IAU, EUA, ASEAN University Network, Association of Arab Universities, Global University Associations Forum etc,).

A.3. Advocate for Catholic universities as institutions that go forth and raise awareness about their impact for society.

A.4 Promote the media presence of IFCU officials in their regions.

A.5 Further foresight and trends' initiatives to support transformation of universities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A.6 Implement and disseminate activities that promote the Catholic intellectual tradition and its entanglement with the care for the common home.

CAPACITY BUILDING INITIATIVE - To develop quality institutions and furthering social responsibility, autonomy and sustainability at Catholic universities.

B.1 Support and diversify the executive training activities, adapting to the changing needs of institutions and using new technological formats (Webinars and online platforms) to boost global outreach.

B.2 Work with the Dicastery of Culture and Education on best practices of governance at Catholic universities.

B.3. Defend the full development, autonomy and diversity of Catholic universities in the light of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*.

B.4. Contribute to the development of guidelines for career and research assessment.

B.5. Support the internationalization of Catholic higher education (e.g. through training seminars for international relations officers, disseminating information on different academic systems and cultures, promoting diversity training, supporting joint representation at international venues such as NAFSA and EIEA).

B.6 Support diversity and inclusion policies at Catholic universities and promote equal opportunity.

TRANSFORMATION INITIATIVE - To promote the continuous improvement of IFCU to better serve the needs of its members.

C.1. Rethink the scope of activities offered by the Federation and recenter its mission around the support and development of initiatives to promote better institutions.

C.2 Promote the work of CIRAD and of the Foresight unit.

C.3. Improve the work with IFCU's regional associations of Catholic Universities.

C.4. Produce policy papers and recommendations on the new research and education frontiers, with a special focus on ethics, A.I. and open science.

C.5. Work towards the continuous improvement of the Federation and improve measures of quality assessment of its performance.

C.6. Guarantee the financial stability of the Federation and improve grant competitiveness and fundraising.

SOLIDARITY INITIATIVE - To enhance solidarity and support to universities, scholars and administrative staff at risk.

D.1. Propose support to universities at risk through counseling, capacity building, international student and staff exchange.



D.2. Devise mechanisms and policies to support migrant and refugee students, faculty and staff.

D.3. Support the work of Catholic universities in community and peace building programs.

SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE - To support the contribution of the universities to the *Laudato si'* Goals (LSG), the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and Francesco's Economy.

E.1 Align the work of the Federation with the LSGs and SDGs. E.2 Promote de development and internationalization of the *Laudato si'* Observatory (LSO), and its Humanist Integral Ecology Index (HIEI).

E.2. Raise awareness about Francesco's economy.

E.3. Create an environmental sustainability strategy for IFCU (e.g. measure energy performance, reduce residues, etc) and set goals to minimize its carbon footprint.

E.4. Commit to a global university sustainability policy, disseminating best practices and working with regional associations for the drafting of a joint compromise.