

Australia-Based Ministry Teaches Believers to Worship Through Dance

The use of creative worship arts is gaining acceptance in churches around the globe, ministry leaders say

When Australian teacher Mary Jones picked up dancing in the mid-1970s she hardly anticipated that her eagerness to worship the Lord through dance would spill over from Australia to every continent. But today her International Christian Dance Fellowship (ICDF) links professional and amateur dancers in more than 25 nations as diverse as Ghana, Singapore and Sweden.

Thirty years ago Jones was living in the United States and part of a dance ministry called the Sacred Dance Guild. Their vision of the church as a dancing bride preparing itself for the Bridegroom's return sparked in Jones a dream of her own. Back in Australia at an educational conference in 1978 she boldly asked whether anybody present was interested in networking in the field of Christian dance.

That was the beginning of the Australian Christian Dance Fellowship (ACDF). Dean of dance studies at Wesley Institute for Ministry and the Arts in Sydney, Jones started a dance group called "Prepare," and accepted invitations to churches to teach about dance as an expression of Christian faith, which was a new concept then. By 1988 ACDF had representatives in every Australian state, and the ministry was growing internationally.

In 1991, the fellowship, now under the auspices of the

International Christian Dance Fellowship, held its first conference in Jerusalem. Since then, the ICDF has sent out its vision to advance the role of dance in Christian life to nations such as Zimbabwe, Namibia, Puerto Rico, the Fiji Islands, Barbados, Qatar, India, France, Italy, Ireland, England, Canada and the United States.

Illustrating the growing interest in Christian dance, in July hundreds of “creative movers” from around the globe are expected to gather in Dallas for the Every Tribe and Tongue creative worship arts conference (), which is hosted by ICDF’s U.S. chapter. ICDF international coordinator Lucy Jarasius said she expects the Holy Spirit to release “rivers of worship and winds of prayer.”

Pamela Rutherford, co-coordinator of the U.S. chapter, believes God is trying to release the whole body of Christ in worship. “A lot of times we look at [dance] as entertainment, and that’s not what it’s supposed to be,” she said. “We’re ministering God’s Word through movement—His love, His mercy, His grace.”

Jarasius noted that Christian creative movement is gaining acceptance worldwide. Even in notoriously intractable Sweden, the Australian initiative is making an impact.

“When we founded the Swedish dance fellowship in 1993 there were but a few Christian dancers in Sweden,” national coordinator Kristina Anderson said. “Today there are a number of professional dancers with a three-year university dance education to their name.”

Anderson, like most Swedish members, is not a professional

dancer but came to embrace dancing through the ICDF. "Some of us have much experience with dancing," she said. "Others none at all. But we all long to express our love for the Lord through dance. Since we started, the interest of the Swedish churches in dance has grown markedly. Today you find small dance groups in many charismatic church settings."

"There is a time to mourn and a time to dance, we learn in Ecclesiastes," Anderson adds. "Ours is definitely a time to dance. More specifically dance is a way to prepare the bride. The Bridegroom is coming soon, and there will be a lot of dancing at the wedding feast."

Herti Dixon in Ljungskile, Sweden