

THE WORLD PRESIDENT'S REPORT

"Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and He will establish your plans." - Proverbs 16:3

It is with this assurance of God's faithfulness and grace that I present my report for the past three years. As we reflect on His guidance and abundant blessings, we thank Him for the achievements made possible through His strength and purpose. Our work remains rooted in His divine plan, and we give Him all the glory.

Theme

"Rooted in Faith... Reaching for the Stars" - This was our inspirational theme for 2023–2026. Members were encouraged and challenged to exercise initiative, aim high and embrace new opportunities; to try the seemingly impossible, take risks and step into unfamiliar territory with courage and faith; share the Good News and change the world; dare to dream and fly like an eagle!

I was amazed at the positive response I received to the theme and the way in which countries were determined to indeed reach for the stars! Thank you!

Goals

We set three ambitious objectives for our countries and branches, building upon the goals of the previous term as well:

GFS Goal 1: *Spiritual Development & Evangelism*

GFS Goal 2: *UN Sustainable Development Goal 3 - Good Health & Well-Being*

Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages.

Point 3.5 Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol.

GFS Goal 3: *UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 - Quality Education*

Ensure inclusive & equitable quality education & promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Point 4.4 Substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs & entrepreneurship.

Continuing goals from the previous term

GFS Goal 4: *Curbing of Climate Change by caring for creation*

GFS Goal 5: *Greening Project* - each household to have a home garden for food security and environmental preservation

GFS Goal 6: *Ending Abuse of Women & Children*

Members were encouraged to think innovatively about project implementation, aligning new initiatives with these goals. This encouraged communication with the World Office, enhanced skills and enabled the sharing of knowledge among countries. I am pleased to report that many countries responded creatively, demonstrating strong commitment and enthusiasm.

You will hear more about their efforts as each country presents its report.

Spiritual Focus

“Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” - Matthew 6:33

Spirituality remains the cornerstone of our organization. I emphasized that prayer is our most powerful resource, acting as a vital link for all members of the World Team and the broader GFS community.

Throughout this period, I shared reflections on significant days in the Anglican liturgical calendar, encouraging not only collective prayer, but action as well. I am glad that some link countries came together in prayer, reinforcing our unity and faith.

The World Council 2026 Prayer Calendar was published to serve as a dedicated resource for intercessory prayer for the needs of the World Council.

150th Anniversary of the GFS World

The purpose of the Society is to “unite girls and women in a fellowship of prayer, service, and purity of life, for the glory of God.”

In 2025, we celebrated 150 years of inspiring service by the GFS, and many countries observed this special milestone meaningfully. We thank God for Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Townsend, the visionary founder of GFS, and for the Society’s growth across numerous countries. We also honor the dedication of all those who have gone before us, whose selfless efforts laid the foundation for this remarkable organization.

The GFS gradually spread around the world, and today, it is active in 30 countries. Let us praise God for His blessings upon our Society over the past 151 years and step into the future with His guidance.

25th GFS World Council

"We being many, are one body in Christ, and each one a member of one another."
- Romans 12:5

The World Council was officially established in 1955 to connect independent GFS societies around the world. It was decided that the Council would meet every three years to promote fellowship, share ideas, and strengthen the global GFS community.

The 2026 World Council will be a historic milestone, marking the 25th gathering - our silver jubilee! And for the first time, the Council will be held in South Asia, in our island nation of Sri Lanka.

World Projects

The GFS World Project Fund continues to support innovative projects in member countries, fostering empowerment and capacity building among young women, as well as increase in membership. Recent projects :

Democratic Republic of the Congo: Inuwa Musichana Project – Vocational training center for young girls in pastry making and business skills.

Cameroon: Skill Acquisition Centre – Sewing project providing disadvantaged young women with employment opportunities.

Sri Lanka: English for Employment Prospects – English language lessons for young women to enhance job prospects.

We are grateful for the support and generosity of member countries that made these projects possible.

Growth and Expansion

The success of the World Projects can be measured by the direct impact they had on the growth of GFS in their countries.

New Countries

At this Council, we shall be welcoming two new GFS countries – Guinea and The Gambia.

GFS World Day of Prayer

Observed annually on September 29th, the GFS World Day of Prayer Service unites countries in prayer and worship. Each nation, nominated in alphabetical order, prepares a dedicated Service.

2023: Uganda

2024: USA

2025: Wales

2026: Zambia

Thank you to all countries that have diligently prepared and shared these services, fostering spiritual fellowship across borders.

Link Countries

Countries are grouped into smaller link groups to promote prayer and fellowship. The GFS has endeavored to find the ideal way of connecting countries – by categorizing them either geographically according to time zones or as developing and developed nations. However, there were various constraints to get them going.

In an effort to spice up matters, the link countries were represented with flora mentioned in the Bible as symbols of beauty, strength, purity and life, conveying deep meanings and spiritual lessons, with Bible verses highlighting their virtues.

Despite logistical challenges, some groups responded positively, and this initiative is gradually fostering greater connection and collaboration.

We invited link countries to get together to plan and conduct joint Services at Council and thereby look forward to further strengthening these bonds.

Handbook

There was a need for specific information regarding the GFS because it was found that many countries, even those in existence for many years had no knowledge of the GFS and its workings. Some tended to compare the GFS to companies with stringent rules and some countries found it difficult to adhere to any rules at all.

Our thanks to Canon Val Gribble for putting this booklet together. This is beneficial to new GFS countries and countries intending to start GFS, as well as to all those interested and involved in the Ministry of the GFS.

Rules of Management

Additionally, we undertook a comprehensive review of the Rules of Management, with input primarily from Canon Val Gribble, Ms. Lois Frankforter and Ms. Alison Jackson. Two virtual sessions were hosted by Ms. Jackson to explain these rules, with the participation of several country representatives. Proposals for amendments will be considered at the Council.

Addressing Gender Violence

GFS remains committed to combating gender-based violence. We continue to observe "Orange Day" on the 25th of each month, encouraging countries to recognize and address this critical issue. We hope to showcase the good work of member countries throughout these past years with a special "Orange the World" programme at World Council.

Youth Engagement

"The eyes of the young are drawn to the stars..." - Radclyffe Hall.

Nurturing and empowering youth continues to be a priority for the GFS and is a subject close to my heart. As GFS World President, I thanked God for the opportunity to serve in this role and looked forward to harnessing the talents of young people for the benefit of the GFS.

To facilitate global communication among young members, a WhatsApp group was launched. However, we realized that forming friendships this way can be challenging for some, which prompted us to look for other ways to engage with youth around the world.

We thank God for the success of the four-part series on Christian Leadership, conducted on Zoom on the last Saturday of each month for four months. The sessions covered vital topics such as purpose, forgiveness and decision-making. They were each held twice to accommodate youth across all time zones. We are grateful to the countries that sent their youth to participate in these virtual gatherings.

A Youth Summit is planned during the World Council, with the aim of inspiring youth participation and leadership within the GFS.

Virtual Meetings

My sincere thanks to the countries and branches that included me in their programs virtually, reflecting the enduring strength of our international sisterhood. It was a pleasure to engage in these interactions, and as distances diminished, it highlighted how small the world is and how similar people are across the globe, especially when bound by a shared love for the GFS!

Overseas Visits

Thank you to GFS Australia, for inviting me to the GFS 150th anniversary celebrations. I had the privilege of visiting branches across Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Rockhampton. It was a memorable opportunity to connect with members of all ages, and experience the warmth and genuine fellowship within GFS.

Thank you to GFS of Guinea for inviting me to visit. I am sorry that it was not possible at that time. Your kind gesture is appreciated.

Communication

One of the primary responsibilities of the World Body is to facilitate the dissemination of important information related to various countries and to promote fellowship among members through the exchange of news.

We have endeavoured to stay connected with leaders and members worldwide mainly through our quarterly newsletter, sharing updates that would be of interest to member countries.

Additionally, to encourage members, I regularly shared motivating thoughts, poems and messages.

I am pleased that these efforts have always been a two-way process - the feedback and response from members and countries truly made me glad!

However, there have been instances where news from the higher levels did not always reach grassroots members. It is vital for country leaders to ensure that information is effectively communicated. We need well-informed, knowledgeable members to take the Society forward.

Newsletters

Over the past three years, we have successfully published 15 editions of "The Star Flash," our quarterly newsletter, aimed at keeping members informed and connected. It has served as a vital platform for sharing news, projects and inspirational messages.

It is exciting to read about the outstanding work being carried out by countries, to know how much the GFS has influenced, assisted, guided and encouraged girls, women and entire communities!

Thank you to member countries for sharing information about their initiatives, enabling others to learn from their experiences and benefit from their successes.

Please read and listen carefully to the country reports, as they offer inspiration for our collective growth.

Fundraising and Support

The World Office raised funds through the sale of pre-loved books, and was happy to support a delegate with her council fee.

Emergency

The GFS is not slow in responding to requests for help. A donation was made to the Diocese of Mthatha in South Africa during the floods, providing disaster relief and support to affected members.

Obituaries

We were saddened to learn of the passing away of several of our leaders and members worldwide and they will be remembered at a special Service at the World Council. Among them was a past World President (1999-2002), Ms. June Hillier from Australia, whom we remember with affection for her quiet strength, dignity and dedicated service to God and the GFS.

May they who have gone before us rest in peace and rise in glory.

President's Brooch Design Competition

For too long, the Cross of Canterbury has served as the official badge of GFS World. A competition was held to select a design for a new brooch, with the winner to be announced at the World Council. Watch out for the beautiful new symbol of the GFS World Presidency! Thanks to all those who participated – your creative efforts are appreciated.

The World Team

"Working together, tiny stars light the universe. That's the power of teamwork."

As time progresses and change continues to shape the world, the role of the GFS World Team has evolved and expanded accordingly.

Over the past three years, the Team convened monthly via Zoom to carefully fulfill the Society's mission, address challenges, develop strategic initiatives and set future goals. This ongoing commitment reflects our dedication to serving the community and adapting to the changing needs of our members worldwide.

My good wishes to the new World President and her Team for a successful and rewarding term!

Thank you

As I conclude my tenure as World President, may I extend heartfelt gratitude to my World Team and World Chaplain - your dedication illustrates the Christian values that underpin the GFS : compassion, unity and service across cultures.

To all GFS members, leaders and clergy worldwide - my thanks for your unwavering support, love and encouragement. Please know that you were the hands that held the GFS up!

Thank you, GFS, for the opportunity and the honour to serve as your President.

Closing Remarks

Looking back at my term, I thank God for what has been an incredible journey filled with growth, learning, shared successes and above all, complete dependence on Him. I note that some endeavours remain ongoing, but we trust in God's perfect timing and guidance.

Let us continue to reach for the stars and pursue our goals, seek His wisdom and remain steadfast in our commitment to His Kingdom. Together, let us work to make a meaningful impact within the church, in our communities, and beyond.

“Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.” - Harriet Tubman.

God’s love, peace and joy to all.

Jeanne Withanage

July 2026