



# ICDF Networks

## October 2021

### Network for Dance Teachers



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Dear Dance Teachers,

This newsletter comes to you at the end of yet another difficult year. We have all experienced the grace of Jesus in our lives and in the lives of students that we teach. Many of you only recently were able to go back to teaching lessons in studios. How grateful we are that we can do so again!

Both Beth and I are filled with gratitude for your dedication to and support of your students and one another. I (Sue) was sad to miss the Zoom conference with those of you who were able to attend, but I know that for those who did, it was a joy!

God bless you!  
Love  
Sue and Beth

# ICDF Network for Dance Teachers Webinar 2021

This webinar was attended by participants from various countries. Liesl Townsend hosted the session and provided an opportunity for participants to pose questions and engage in discussions with Beth Bluett-Spicer, the Joint-Coordinator of the Dance Teachers Network (DTN).

The session covered the following topics and focus points:

## **Dance and Faith**

This was a presentation by Cynthia Newland who covered how dance can prepare for school readiness, what the challenges facing a Christian entering the professional world are and the importance of maintaining your personal relationship with the Lord through dedication, devotion and prayer. Cynthia emphasised the importance of being anchored in your faith to weather any challenges that come your way as a teacher in the dance world and most importantly to understand your identity in Christ. It's about who we are as Christian Teachers, not what we do.

## **Creating Stronger Dancers**

Lisa Ward emphasised the importance of physical preparedness for the level of physical activity required in dance classes. She recommended that dancers do additional cardiovascular training such as skipping or even a full run through of dances without stopping for correction, building stamina and strength. She also explained the importance of knowing yourself, your limits and respecting your body by being consistent with your body, eg. regular exercise even when dance school shuts down for vacation.

## **Unregulated vs Regulated**

This session was led by Tina Sparks who shared that we as Christian dance teachers have a responsibility and an important role to play in the physical, emotional and spiritual development of the children who attend our classes. We have the opportunity to educate and guide dancers in the development of their self-worth and also protect them from being exposed to sexualised content in music, costumes and choreography which contradicts our Christian moral standards. She encouraged teachers to take a stand and speak out and not compromise our godly principles and biblical standards. She further challenged teachers to take action, our eyes to be open to the harm for our dancers, to inspire, educate and to do our part in being salt and light in the world of dance.

## **Being a professional and serving in Dance Ministry**

This session was led by Lisa Wilson who shared on the importance of taking care of the mental health of dancers. She shared that even in her secular dance (University) environment she will open in prayer and do a mindfulness exercise to assist dancers in dealing with the many challenges they are experiencing or exposed to outside of the dance class. They bring their troubles into the class and just by acknowledging or dealing with their emotional matters, produces a sense of caring and wellbeing as a teacher, beyond the training session.

Beth ended by sharing that dance teachers have a responsibility of guiding the public (parents of the dance students) and they also need to handle the success and opportunities that come their way. We must not allow it to go to our heads and must not depart from the vision, which is to positively impact dancers on all levels of their lives.



*The webinar was recorded and will be made available on the ICDF YouTube channel for public viewing at the beginning of 2022*

To become part of the ICDF Network for Dance Teachers contact Sue at ... [hodsonsue@gmail.com](mailto:hodsonsue@gmail.com)  
To find out more about the Network .... <http://www.icdf.com/en/dance-teachers>

## Recitals and Rewards

### - What's your motivation for teaching?

*“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”*  
- Colossians 3:23-24

I work at a dance studio where we have two big recitals a year: a Christmas recital at the end of the fall semester in December, and a Spring recital at the end of the Spring semester in May. The recitals are huge highlights of the school year both for the students and the teachers, and they've been a tradition at our studio for decades.

It's not just that the students love to perform and to show their loved ones what they've learned, but they also enjoy the excitement of the special day when they get to spend all day in the theatre rehearsing and getting ready and bonding with their dance friends in the dressing rooms. For us teachers the recital day is when we get to see the results of our work with the students, as the choreographies come to life and the dancers shine on stage. Parents often show their gratitude by bringing the teachers flowers, chocolate or other gifts and some of the students write or draw us cards or letters. It's a day with a lot of positive feelings and a great way to start either the Christmas holidays or the summer vacation.

Of course, we haven't had any recitals since Christmas 2019 because of the pandemic.

When you do the work you've always done and even some extra (teaching online, etc.), but you don't get the final "prize" in the form of flattery after the show, you realise that you cannot depend on success in this world to make you feel good. It's not the glamour of the performances and the praise we might get at the end of the semester that should make us work hard and do our best. As it says in Colossians 3:23-24, our reward for the work that we do is the inheritance that we will receive from the Lord. For that reward, and not for some fleeting moments of pride and flattery, we should work with all our hearts!

To work as for the Lord is completely different from what it's like to work for human masters. The world encourages us to work for money, pride and other selfish reasons, so we can feel "successful". But when we work for the Lord the motivation is love and that actually changes the definition of the word successful. It's not the amount of admiration or money we get from outside that defines when we can feel like we've done a good job. When we work as for the Lord with all our hearts, we can bring love and light to the people we work with. By doing that we are actually serving the Lord Christ, as it says in Colossians 3:24.

Our pride and joy should be rooted in serving the Lord and shining His light around us, and not depend on any thank you cards, flowers or words of praise after a show. So whether or not there is any hope of a recital this semester, let's do our best to work sincerely and wholeheartedly to serve our students with love and light, not in order to be applauded, but to give applause to the One who truly deserves it.



*Photos: Päivi Salomaa*



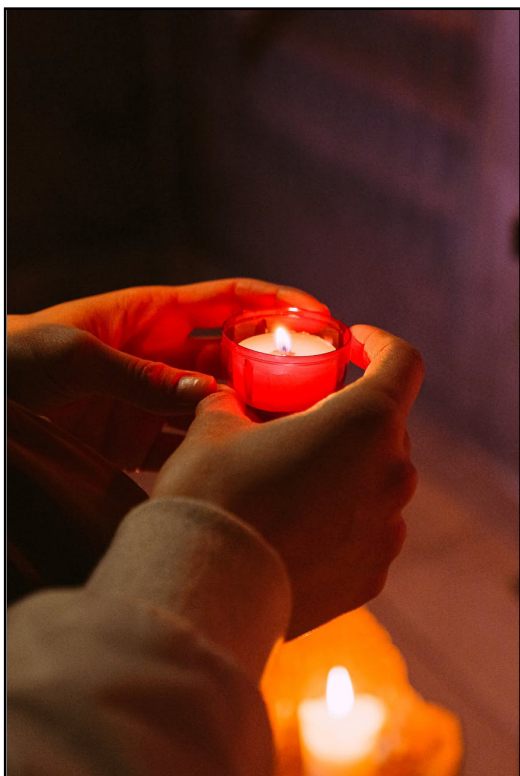
# An Open Letter to all Dance Teachers

*Adapted from Sarah Ferguson's letter ... <https://www.onstageblog.com/>*

There are never going to be enough words to express how thankful I am for everything you've done, though I sure can try. Thank you for the countless hours you've spent working with me. Thank you for your patience as I raced around the hall as a toddler or stared out of the window during barre as an older student. Thank you for understanding that I wanted to be there, but my brain was running at 100km and sometimes going in circles. Thank you for providing me with all the tough love I could ever ask for. Thank you inspiring, helping, and motivating me to achieve things I never thought possible. Thank you for providing me with a home away from home.

You have taught me so much that I will never forget. You've prayed for me and with me. You've taught me that it's okay to fail and fail again, and if something isn't working there's another solution. You've taught me that my strength doesn't lie in me, but in Jesus. You've taught me to be patient, to know that the greatest victories come only after the toughest battles. You've shown me how to be a leader; to aspire to inspire always and to never give up on people.

Last but certainly not least, you've taught me that blood does not define family. In the time that we've known each other you've become family to me, and you've shown me that dancers truly are family. You have welcomed me with open arms and even when I leave you, that bond will remain. You have truly shown me the love of Jesus.



Please don't ever think that I don't need you. You have made one of the greatest impacts on my life and there will always be a time when I need a kick in the butt or a helping hand. You are a big reason as to why I do what I do and you have touched not only myself but all your students in a special way.

With love,  
Your Student

## Prayer for all Dance Teachers

Dear Dance School Owner/Dance Teacher

The International Christian Dance Fellowship is just letting you know that we are thinking of you! We are a not-for profit, voluntarily-serving community, with dance enthusiasts from around the world, representing many styles, faith perspectives, ethnic backgrounds, and smiles!

We understand that the effects of the Covid pandemic have been particularly devastating for people involved in the performing arts. This may have affected you personally by limiting your ability to earn a sufficient living income. It may have exacerbated already stressful challenges to do the things you are so good at and passionate about... living your art, and training others in the world of dance!

If there is anything in particular you would like us to pray for in regards to your dance business or dance-teaching role, PLEASE let us know so that we can be of service. We are just making contact so you know that we care about your contribution to the well-being of your local community.

If you are interested, we also invite you to see if any resources or links on the ICDF website [www.icdf.com](http://www.icdf.com) may be of encouragement and inspiration to you. We leave you with this dance that the ICDF Foundation sponsored during Covid Lockdown restrictions ... [https://youtu.be/QIIB\\_W9JuIU](https://youtu.be/QIIB_W9JuIU) ... as a sign of hope and spiritual support in these challenging times!

Dancing with you,  
ICDF

## From Teaching to Ministry During Workshops



As teachers we sometimes find it difficult to change hats once we get going simply because we are so focused on what we are presenting that we can forget to change track. I have however experienced a beautiful example of how we can move from teaching to ministry recently without it being forced.

After many months of no in-person workshops we arranged for a day of dance workshops on 30 October 2021 facilitated by the Christian Dance Fellowship of South Africa, Gauteng Region.

The day was worked out to introduce some of the many different facets of dance and the dancers who attended were a mixture of experienced and new, young and old. The sessions briefly touched on dance technique giving tips for executing the movements correctly and safely, CaraMayan (meditation through movement), flag ministry and choreography incorporating different dance styles and the use of flags.

The final session for the day started off with a Messianic Dance. This was different from the previous sessions in that it was relaxed and made no demands on the dancers – they could just relax, let go and enjoy. Without any of us realising it the stage was being set for ministry. This was followed by an introduction to props through spontaneous dance using worshipful music and movement, flowing into a time of soaking, prophetic prayer and prophetic movement.

While thinking back to the events of the day I realised that everything that happened in the last session was orchestrated by the Holy Spirit. We worked on one level and the Holy Spirit on a deeper and much more subconscious level. The value of the meeting was not about how much technique or steps or dances the participants remembered but about the seeds that have been planted in souls – about the breakthroughs and the fruit that will be seen many years from now. The ending to the day that was planned did not happen but it was a greater privilege to be in partnership with the workings of the Lord of lords and King of kings!!

*Saartjie de Wet*

# Teaching Children with Special Needs

Treat your students all as equals and love them as Jesus loves them... they are all precious and you will find the exuberance and energy special children bring to class is inspiring and contagious!

## Inclusive Dance Practice

Twirling, skipping and ballet shoes have long been a part of many children's dreams. The anticipation and excitement that a small child feels when dreaming of being a ballet dancer, and attending their first class, is a right of passage for many little people. As ballet and dance teachers we have the incredible privilege of being able to hold the key to their love of dance for the future. Dance companies such as Restless Dance (Australia), Candoco Dance Company (UK), Infinite Flow (US) and Oriente Occidente (Italy) are performing on the world stage and changing the landscape of dance accessibility. They are challenging the perception of dance, and who can perform, away from the traditional classical ballerina. As dance teachers we are given the opportunity to foster a wide range of students who will go onto having lifelong dance careers, both on and off the stage.

To articulate, to perform a disabled body, thereby positing disability as a cultural construction as a way of being in the world, the disability performance artist must refute the need for medical cure and assert the right of the disabled body to exist. Cheu, 2005, p.139

The increase of accessibility has seen parents of neurodiverse and children with disabilities seek access to the same experiences as those available for each neurotypical child. As a result, dance teachers are having to reexamine their dance practices to ensure they are able to best facilitate all those wishing to learn. Gone are the days of dance being a lifelong dream only for a select few. It is important to remember that the unique needs of each individual are not barriers to learning, rather as dance teachers we are required to change our mindset and use our creative abilities to facilitate and adapt what and how we teach.



In education settings, studies have shown that ALL students benefit when students with disabilities access the same curriculum in a mainstream environment. Although the private dance studio setting differs from mainstream education settings, some of these same principles can be applied to creating accessible and inclusive dance environments. The benefits for the studio community as a whole far outweigh the changes

required. As Christians we share in our sameness and differences, and we are called to welcome diversity.

## Ideas to be more inclusive

- Enrolment forms should ask open ended questions, allowing the parent or caregiver to communicate any specific needs their child has. Questions such as: 'How does your child best learn?' or 'Does your child need any supports to access learning?'
- Before each student begins lessons, information should be given to the family which includes photos of the teacher and the facility, and an outline of how the class will be run, and what the student can expect
- Families should be given the opportunity to familiarise with the space before class begins
- Provide seated or barre supported alternatives for each exercise, where possible
- Consider installing a feedback loop system for those with auditory disabilities
- Set individual goals for all students, and scaffold learning appropriately

- Communicate with examination organisations, and discuss what adjustments they will be willing to make, and ensure families are aware of the benefit of disclosing their child's disability for this process if appropriate
- Add additional support to the room, an assistant teacher or volunteer can aid in the smooth running of a class with differing learning needs

On a personal note: As a parent of a neurodiverse child with motor planning and muscle tone limitations, I have witnessed the positive impact of creative thinking from coaches and trainers in the surf life saving and swimming communities. Their flexibility has enabled my child to be an active and valued member of their communities. Through small adjustments during weekly training, he is given the opportunity to compete on even footing with his peers. As a ballet teacher who has taught in private studio settings that welcome diversity, I understand the challenges this can bring to teaching practice. However, the benefits of inclusive dance far out way the negatives and enable all to benefit.

*Cheu, J (2005) "Performing Disability, Problematizing Cure"*  
*Sandhal, C & Auslander, P (eds) "Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance"*  
 University of Michigan Press

*Monique Saywell*

*Monique Saywell holds a BA Creative Arts Dance and Disability Studies and has worked in private dance studios and churches for the past 14 years. She is a wife and mother to 3 children in South Australia.*

## Love, Patience and Perseverance

It is such a privilege to teach dance! It is so wonderful to share our love of music and movement with others! We learn more about dance and the body as we explain it and the longer one teaches, the more it becomes clear not everyone thinks the way we do.

From my personal experience, I find teaching thrilling and I learn more about myself and about dance each week. I also learn more about the Lord and love and patience and kindness with us, as I am challenged to love, be kind and patient with all my students, some of whom are more challenging than others. I have always thought ballet [my passion] is the great equalizer – no one is perfect at it, no one can do any step well the first time, and we all have things we need to work on, skills we need to improve, and also gifts in different areas. Some of my students are neurodiverse and are on the autism spectrum or have ADHD, others are 'neurotypical', and some of my students display features of these but do not have a diagnosis. ALL of them are beautiful, created by God, and able to dance and express themselves through it and receive the many physical and mental benefits dance provides.

A student with ADHD can be challenging as they struggle to focus, and often struggle to stand or sit still while you correct others or explain things to the class. Some will hang off the barre like a monkey, others will talk and interrupt constantly. However, loving your students and having a good deal of patience will go

a long way in helping you to recognize patterns and perhaps change how you manage a class to be able to help the student focus and participate better. The structure, routine and discipline of a ballet class can be extremely beneficial to a child with ADHD and the predictability of lessons can provide security in the routine. You may need to change some of what you do, to be able to give each child the attention they deserve in class. There is a good chance that at least one or two of your 'normal' students may have some sensory processing issues, be on the ASD spectrum, have undiagnosed ADHD, anxiety or other issues. All of your students will benefit from your routines and care.



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Keeping things moving without long breaks can help. Sometimes music is distracting. Sometimes it helps them focus better. I always have the same expectations of behaviour. I expect all of my students to learn to take turns and I expect them all to try their best. Children who are not 'neurotypical' can succeed in dance and achieve equally as well as others, but they may take a bit longer to learn not to fidget, to stand still, to not interrupt etc. The key is to get to know all of your students as individuals. To find out how they tick. To work out how you can encourage them and show them that they are precious and loved. I had one student who could not concentrate on complicated steps when music was playing, and another who could ONLY concentrate when music played. You may need a helper to stand with a student and help them to keep on task.

Children with special needs often have lower self-esteem and it is important to find things each lesson to affirm in them (this should be our goal with every student). Love all your students and support them and believe in them and encourage them. It is SO worth it! Yes, you will sometimes question your ability as a teacher. Yes, you will be tearing your hair out and pray and ask God what to do. Yes, you will be challenged in your skills and have to think and sometimes you will make mistakes as you go. But persevere! The exuberance and energy and love a special needs child brings to your class is contagious!

## *Michelle Edwards*

***Michelle Edwards is the Principal and founder of Becoming Ballet and has experience in jazz, contemporary, tap and liturgical dance. Michelle also holds a medical degree. Combining her medical background and ballet experience, Michelle has a special interest in dance physiology and is passionate about providing a safe, encouraging and caring environment in which students can learn.***



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