

Center for Public Faith

ANNUAL REPORT 2025





MISSION

Equip government and faith leaders to collaboratively engage issues at the intersection of religion, security, and governance.

VISION

Catalyze freedom of faith worldwide so that everyone can live what they believe.



IGE 2025 Impact Report

IGE launched a new internship program in 2025 based in our Washington, DC office. The program hosted 11 graduate and undergraduate students from Pepperdine University, Northeastern University, Brigham Young University, Rice University, Washington and Lee University, the University of Hawai'i Law School, and Indiana University Law School. Throughout the year, the interns supported a wide range of IGE initiatives both here in the U.S. and abroad and provided valuable research, administrative, and organizational support.



2025 Highlights

- *Launched an internship program at IGE's Washington, DC office with 11 interns from seven U.S. universities.*
- *Former Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Rashad Hussain joins IGE as a Distinguished Senior Fellow.*
- *Made two trips to Syria to convene and collaborate with government and faith leaders in the rebuilding process of the country*
- *Hosted many ambassadors, international delegations at the offices with a highlight of greeting Kurdistan Prime Minister Masrour Barzani*



Vietnam

2025 Highlights

- IGE and its Vietnam partners celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Religion and Rule of Law initiative in Vietnam. Over the past two decades, this collaboration has fostered robust academic scholarship and contributed to a significant shift in mindsets—recognizing the vital role of religion in fostering a stable and flourishing society.
- IGE and the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics hosted an international conference on Cross-Cultural Religious Literacy. The forum brought together government officials, policy advisors, and religious leaders from Vietnam and around the world to focus on covenantal pluralism, religious freedom, and human dignity.
- IGE hosted a delegation from our Vietnam government partner, the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations (VUFO) at our Washington, DC office. During the visit, IGE



convened representatives from American faith-based charities and Christian ministries to share with the VUFO delegation the progress and challenges that foreign faith-based organizations face working in Vietnam.

- IGE provided multiple training sessions to Vietnamese church leaders on peacebuilding and conflict mediation skills, meeting a crucial need for healing divisions and broken relationships within the body of Christ.

Myanmar

In 2025, IGE, in partnership with the Kachin Alliance, launched the Burma Religious Freedom Consortium, convening five meetings with participants from the U.S. State Department, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, religious freedom NGOs, and humanitarian relief organizations, as well as Myanmar-focused organizations based in Asia. These forums provided an opportunity to assess the current state of religious freedom and to identify both immediate and long-term strategies to advance religious freedom in Myanmar.

2025 Highlights

- Conducted two Online Lecture Series for Kachin State Comprehensive University (KSCU) students and professors in partnership with the International Center for Law and Religion Studies at Brigham Young University.
- Interviewed and published a series of blog posts featuring KSCU lecturers and students.
- Launched the Burma Religious Freedom Consortium and convened five meetings during 2025.
- Assisted in drafting religious freedom provisions for Myanmar's Articles of Federal Transitional Arrangement (AFTA).

Laos

2025 Highlights

- IGE was able to work with the Lao government's Ministry of Home Affairs to conduct conflict mediation sessions in Synabuly and Champassak provinces. These sessions are held when there is an ongoing conflict between Christians and local authorities in order to help each side agree on what the conflict is about, remind them of the guarantees of religious freedom rights, and to encourage the two sides to work out a compromise. These events have been successful in preventing conflicts from escalating which usually end up in crackdowns on Lao believers.
- IGE conducted a Religious Freedom Education and Dialogue Seminar in Udomxay Province that convened representatives from 19 different government and religious organizations. We were encouraged to hear local authorities share that they accept Christianity as part of Lao culture and that often Christians obey the law better than non-Christians. Special note was made of the flood assistance provided by the Catholic community in southern Laos.
- This year IGE formed a new partnership with the Lao Buddhist Association to train a team of monks in Peace Building who will be capable of conducting Peace building workshops on their own all over the country. This will be crucial as Buddhism is the majority religion in Laos, so their support for peacebuilding will ensure positive relationships with Christians and other religious minorities.
- IGE hosted 16 church leaders and Christian scholars in Vientiane, Laos from July 1-3. Four delegates came from each of the SE mainland Buddhist nations of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand. Participants shared their experiences with persecution, witnessing to Buddhists, and building relationships with Buddhists and Buddhist governments. The consultation concluded with an agreement to meet again and collaborate on a book focusing on Christian – Buddhist Relations in these four nations.

Syria

2025 Highlights

- Visited Syria February 2025 to meet with leaders and determine if we can support.
- Visited Syria August 2025 for the first gathering of clerics and religious leaders of 17 different sects. Senator Sheehan, Congressman Wilson, and Ambassador Tom Barak all came to the gathering.
- Developed an action plan moving forward built around rule of law, humanitarian, civil society, and religious literacy.





Center For Women, Faith, & Leadership

- In March, IGE's Center for Women, Faith, & Leadership (CWFL) gathered eight women leaders of Muslim, Catholic, and Buddhist faiths from eight countries for its Spring Workshop in Hanoi, Vietnam. The weeklong event provided Fellows with opportunities to connect across faith traditions, visit historic religious sites, and learn from Vietnamese scholars. Through three days of intensive leadership training, Fellows deepened their understanding of religious literacy, mental health, storytelling, and advocacy—core elements of CWFL's mission to equip women of faith for sustainable, transformative leadership.
- In May, CWFL hosted its first West Coast Summit at Pepperdine University in Malibu, CA, bringing together 60 women leaders of diverse faiths to explore the theme "Women Leading Change: Narratives of Impact." The event featured powerful keynotes by Dr. Thema Bryant-Davis and Rabbi Sarah Hronsky, who inspired attendees to lead with courage, empathy, and conviction in a divided world. A dynamic panel and breakout sessions delved into the pressing issues of food justice, domestic violence, and the role of AI in shaping the future. Supported by Islamic Relief USA and the Hilton Foundation, the summit created space for women of faith to connect, collaborate, and advance shared visions of justice and leadership.
- This year, CWFL launched a new blog, titled: **Sacred Threads**. The first series of posts is exploring resilience as a cornerstone of women's faith-based leadership. Through reflections on growth mindset, perseverance, and grit, the series highlights how women leaders around the world draw strength from faith to navigate adversity, lead with courage, and sustain purpose in challenging times. In a world marked by uncertainty and polarization, resilience is not just a personal trait—it's a leadership practice that affirms the importance of cultivating inner strength and adaptability among women leaders. Read the blog here: <https://centerforwomenfaithleadership.org/blog>.

Publications

The Review of Faith & International Affairs

In 2025 IGE's pioneering journal, The Review of Faith & International Affairs (RFIA), published four regular quarterly issues, plus one special supplement issue:

Spring 2025, a special issue on "Possibilities for Covenantal Pluralism in Eastern Europe." Supported by a grant from the Templeton Religion Trust, this issue builds on IGE's growing engagement of former-communist Europe.

Summer 2025, a regular edition featuring articles by a diverse, international array of scholars and scholar-practitioners addressing topics such as: the Indian government's use of yoga in diplomacy, women driving in Saudi Arabia, environmentalism in Shi'a countries, diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Israel, the G20 Interfaith Forum, and much more.

Fall 2025, a special issue on "Artificial Intelligence: Implications for Faith, Ethics, and Human Dignity." This issue was produced in collaboration with the International Center for Law & Religion Studies (ICLRS), and is derived from a summer 2024 workshop at Oxford University.

Winter 2025, a special issue on "Religious Freedom Studies: The State of the Field and Recommendations for Future Research." This issue is produced in collaboration with the International Religious Freedom Secretariat's Global Academic Council (GAC), co-chaired by Jocelyne Cesari and Mae Elise Cannon. Special Supplement Issue: This special fifth issue will examine "Possibilities for Covenantal Pluralism in the West." It is part of the journal's ongoing covenantal pluralism series, which has covered numerous world regions including Eastern Europe, Southern Africa, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, East Asia, and South Asia.

Books

Eric D. Patterson and Robert J. Joustra, eds. *Likelihood of Success and Just War: Prudential Judgement, Geopolitics, and Just Statecraft*. Cass Military Studies Series. Oxford: Routledge. This edited volume features republished versions of articles that originally appeared in the *summer 2024 issue* of *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, along with several new chapters commissioned especially for the book.

Churches For Religious Freedom

- The Churches for Religious Freedom program works to advance religious freedom worldwide by building trusted relationships with governments and helping create environments where faith can flourish without fear. Rather than sending missionaries into restrictive contexts without support, IGE partners directly with national institutions to train officials and faith leaders on the value of religious freedom, the positive social role of faith communities, and international standards for protecting these rights.
- In places like Vietnam, this approach has opened doors for ministries such as the Aquila Center—a Christian drug rehabilitation program—to operate and expand in ways the government alone has not been able to achieve.
- While global progress in religious freedom has grown, the Church's involvement in this work has often been limited. IGE invites churches with a heart for global missions to partner with them, helping create safer and more open environments for missionaries, local believers, and Christian ministries around the world.
- We have multiple churches signed up to be a part of Churches for Religious Freedom in 2025, but looking to add on more partner churches in 2026.

STORY OF IMPACT



Dr. Aung Naing Thu, Pro-Chancellor and Co-founder of Kachin State Comprehensive University

Starting Up a New University for Displaced Students in Myanmar

By Seng Mai Aung, Hyeyeon Park, and Tala Alnasser

This is the second in a series of articles telling the stories of students and teachers in Myanmar who have forged on with education in spite of being displaced from their homes due to the ongoing civil war that is stretching into its fifth year.

Dr. Aung Naing Thu is the co-founder and pro-chancellor of Kachin State Comprehensive University. His life is one marked by resilience, shaped by hardship, and yet fueled by a deep commitment to education and human rights. He was born in Dagwin Village, Ho Pin City, in Kachin State, as the fifth of seven siblings. His family's struggles began early—his father was a drug addict, and his mother left the family. His eldest sister took on the responsibility of raising her younger siblings, working tirelessly to ensure they received an education.

Aung Naing Thu's eldest brother passed away when they were still in elementary school, and another brother succumbed to drugs in Hpa Kant while trying to provide for the family. Amid these losses, their father, whose health deteriorated, became a monk. Before he passed, his final wish for his children was to become educated. His eldest sister took this

responsibility to heart, sacrificing her own ambitions to ensure her younger brothers could continue their schooling. Despite being raised in a broken home, the siblings held tightly to each other through every hardship.

Aung Naing Thu lived in a monastery as an acolyte until the seventh grade. He withstood the mockery of those ridiculing his circumstances and used his experiences as motivation to become educated, empowered, and capable of controlling his own circumstances. His perseverance paid off when, in 2003, he became a lecturer at Yadanabon University in Mandalay. By 2006, he had moved to Myitkyina University, where he eventually became an associate professor in the geology department.

When the 2021 military coup struck Myanmar, it changed everything. At the time, Aung Naing Thu

was managing the men's dormitory at Myitkyina University, responsible for about 150 university students. Along with his colleague, Dr. Yan Myo Naing, he protected the students and lecturers during the protests. He led chants and participated in demonstrations, making him a focus of the military's ire. An arrest warrant was issued against him, and one day, security forces surrounded the university, targeting him. However, with the help of his students, he managed to escape, jumping over fences and seeking cover at night under the cover of darkness, narrowly avoiding capture.

He fled to Laiza, arriving on March 27, 2021 — the same day many protesters were killed in Bago. There, he found refuge with other Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) members, but life was far from easy. Compounding a military siege with a world-wide pandemic, isolation permeated the community. With the COVID-19 lockdown, he and his colleagues found themselves not just cooking for their own survival, but for an additional 450 people in their community as well. Despite the hardship, he continued to teach, this time at Alen Bum High School. Devoting his life to serve others, he maintained his commitment to education even as plans for establishing Kachin State Comprehensive University (KSCU) were beginning to take shape.

KSCU started modestly, with little more than a few desks and chairs purchased on loan. Aung Naing Thu and his colleagues, including Dr. Aung Ko Ko Lin and Dr. Yan Myo Naing, often taught distance learning courses because not all faculty could be there in person. Additionally, funding was a constant struggle. Barely getting by, they relied on support from local ethnic leaders and the Kachin Education Foundation, allowing the university to grow. By the second year, KSCU had expanded to include colleges of medicine, nursing, technology, and economics. They now plan to add a college of agriculture in 2025.

The challenges of running KSCU are immense, but the mission is clear. For Aung Naing Thu, KSCU is more than just an educational institution — it is a beacon of hope for students whose futures otherwise seem bleak. He constantly reminds his students that they are significant, that their rights are equal to those of anyone else in the world. Apart from this university many of these students have few options beyond joining the ethnic army, working

in low-wage jobs in China, or falling into cycles of addiction or early marriage. KSCU is a harbor amidst the storm.

Aung Naing Thu is determined to give these students more than just an education. He wants to equip them with the confidence and skills to break free from the limitations imposed on them by circumstance. He dreams of sending some of them abroad for exchange programs to open their eyes to a world of possibilities. In his work at KSCU, he sees the power of education not just to transform individual lives but to rebuild a future for a nation in turmoil.

“From the first day of struggle until today, those who stand with the people of Myanmar carry a shared responsibility and a shared hope,” he said. “At KSCU, we welcome every friend who has walked beside us in this journey, and who remains committed to standing with us until freedom is achieved. We invite you to bring your skills, your knowledge, and your heart into our classrooms — to teach, to guide, and to strengthen the spirit of a people who will never give up on their future.”

Despite the hardships Aung Naing Thu has faced, from a broken family to a coup-torn homeland, his story is one of unyielding hope and commitment to a greater cause rooted in the cause of human dignity.

Seng Mai Aung is a Senior Program Officer at the Institute for Global Engagement.

Hyeyeon Park interned at IGE and is a senior at Pepperdine University majoring in Psychology and double minoring in Industrial Organization and Social Work.

Tala Alnasser interned at IGE and is a senior at Brigham Young University majoring in French Studies and Communication with an emphasis on Public Relations and minoring Sociology.

An aerial photograph of a tropical town, likely in Southeast Asia, with numerous houses and palm trees. In the background, there are large, forested mountains under a blue sky with scattered white clouds. A layer of white mist or smoke is visible in the valley between the town and the mountains.

Institute for Global Engagement

ACTION PLANS FOR 2026



IGE

- Diplomat Roundtable
- Capitol Hill Engagement
- Regional Hubs in South Africa, Vietnam, Middle East (UAE/Qatar)
- Turkic World Engagement - Azerbaijan & Central Asia
- Peacebuilding Program

Vietnam

- Religion & Rule of Law Training: Convene scholars, government officials, policy advisors, and faith leaders to discuss policy making and proper implementation of the legal landscape to improve religious freedom.
- Peacebuilding & Conflict Resolution Training: Equip church leaders, pastors, and government officials with practical skills to navigate religious tensions peacefully.
- Role of Religion in Holistic Development: Highlight how faith traditions contribute to culture, women's dignity, education, economic development through tourism, and community cohesion.

Myanmar

- Hold an online Religion and Rule of Law certificate training programs (partners: Kachin Alliance, BYU ICLRS).
- Convene quarterly meetings of the Burma Religious Freedom Consortium (partner: Kachin Alliance).
- Support the drafting of a Religious Freedom Law for Myanmar under the Articles of Federal Transitional Arrangement (AFTA).
- Launch an online faith and leadership program for Myanmar diaspora youth in the United States and other countries (partners: Kachin Alliance, BYU ICLRS, GlocalNet, Myanmar Policy Institute).

Laos

- Interfaith Peace Building Workshops with the Lao Front – 4 events for 100 delegates
- Religious Freedom Education and Dialogue Seminars – 4 events for 240 delegates
- Religious Exchange and Dialogue Event – 1 event for 50 delegates
- Christian led Peace Building Workshops – 3 events for 80 delegates
- LBO led Peace Building Workshops – 3 events for 80 delegates
- SEANET Conference – send 4 church leaders to the Conference in Thailand
- SE Asia Consultation on Christian – Buddhist Relations – 16 delegates in Cambodia
- Train a Christian Peace Building Team in Myanmar – 1 event for 25 delegates

Syria

- Raise Funds for the project
- Build a strong partnership and network of locals
- Launch our platform for engagement and civil society building.



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