

ACTS

**ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC
TERTIARY STUDENTS**

THE IDENTITY OF ACTS

IMCS SOUTH AFRICA

International Movement of Catholic Students

FOREWORD

June 1999

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

This booklet on the 'Identity of ACTS' is part of a series of *ACTS National Documents* that are being produced by ACTS National. These documents include, thus far, the ACTS National Constitution, ACTS Identity and a Manual of Procedures. Hopefully, more such documents will emerge which will serve to enhance the growth and development of the organisation.

This particular document on the identity of ACTS was originally published within the first two editions of *Actions*, the ACTS National Publication, during 1998. It was thereafter felt that it would be of benefit to new members of ACTS to have these articles published in a booklet so that there would be a document which could be used by the various ACTS branches to engage themselves as to the role of ACTS, not only within the local Institution of Higher Learning, but also on a national level.

The document contains a *brief history* of the organisation showing the background to Catholic student organisations in South Africa. Thereafter, the *elements of ACTS* as a student-driven faith community within the local Church are included. And finally, a reflection is included looking at *ACTS as a 'living and believing community' being challenged to respond to the "signs of the times"* in the context of the South African situation.

Hopefully, this document will serve not only to clarify questions around the role of an ACTS branch at the various Institutions of Higher Learning, but also help to challenge the members of ACTS to get involved in the many issues which face tertiary students especially during this period of transformation. It is during this period of transformation which gives national student structures like ACTS the opportunity to truly become part of the development of new youth policy for the country dealing with questions like the development of the Youth Policy 2000, COLTS or the National Youth Service Programme.

Lastly, it must be emphasized that the formulation of the identity of ACTS is an on-going process and therefore this document is only a first attempt to capture the elements which have emerged within the context of a process of life over the past six years. Hopefully, this process will continue so that ACTS can play its rightful role not only within the world of tertiary students, but also within the local Church of South Africa

Father Michael Hagan
National Chaplain to ACTS

FAITH IN ACTION

"...come home to the Father's House"

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Structure of ACTS and channels of communication

The Association of Catholic Tertiary Students was founded in Johannesburg in December 1993 when both CASA (Catholic Students Association) and NCFS (National Catholic Federation of Students) were dissolved.

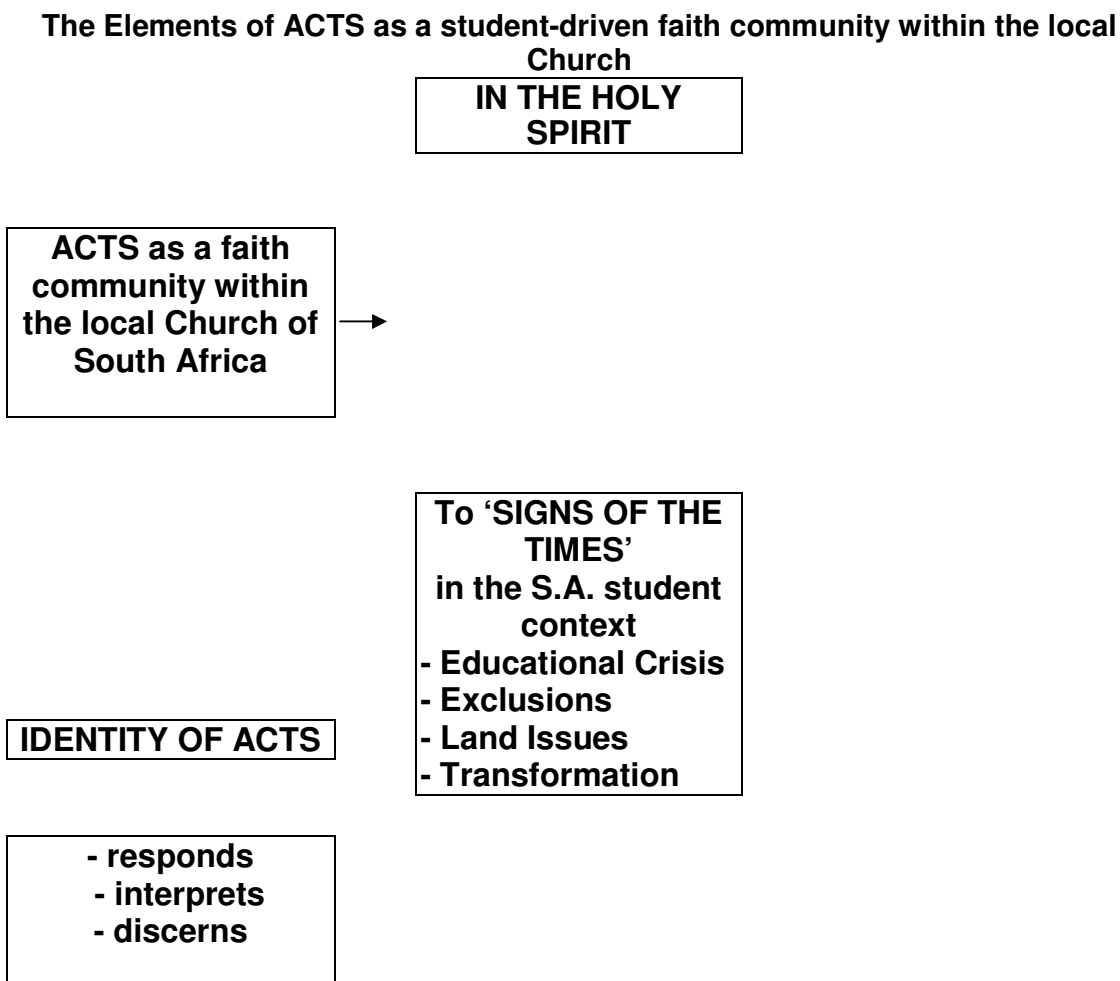
Initially, NCFS was the only Catholic student body in South Africa, however,

this changed when students attending black campuses broke away in the early seventies to form CASA. Consequently, CASA then existed at historically black campuses whereas NCFS existed at historically white campuses.

Following the changes within the country in 1990 attempts were then made to merge the two student bodies into one unified student movement. However, eventually after various attempts had been made to unify, it was decided to form a new Catholic student body called the Association of Catholic Tertiary Students that includes students from Universities, Technikons and Training Teacher Colleges.

The Identity of ACTS

A student-driven faith community within the Church responding to the “signs of the times” within the context of South Africa.



The elements of the identity of ACTS have emerged over the past five years of its existence within the context of a process of life rather than being decided upon by a small group of individuals. The following represent the most important aspects of its identity, whilst acknowledging that other elements could develop in time.

The Catholic student organisation of South Africa is called the Association of Catholic Tertiary Students

All branches are to be called ACTS and the names CATHSOC or CASA are not to be used. This name change has been a difficult and lengthy process at some institutions, however, where considered necessary, creative compromises have been reached. e.g. ACTS KOLBE at UCT.

What is essential, is that each branch is ACTS itself. Whereas in the past NCFS had Cathsoc branches which were affiliated to the national body. Within ACTS, each branch, similar to CASA, is already ACTS itself.

Catholic organisation that is Christ-centered

The organisation is Christ-centred within the Catholic Church. Non-Catholics may belong to the organisation but not within the leadership of the organisation. All chairpersons, provincial representatives and national executive members are to be confirmed and practicing Catholics.

Each branch of ACTS is called to become a faith community, that is, to become a “living and believing” community. This community is where students should experience a sense of acceptance, belonging and love. At the same time this faith community, is challenged to be instrumental in the integration of life and faith by engaging itself in attempting to respond to the “signs of the times.” Where considered necessary ACTS is to take a prophetic stance to a particular situation in the light of the Gospel.

Non-sexist and non-racial

The organisation is non-sexist and gender issues are to be important to all branches. ACTS is challenged to change the paradigm within the Church and society from masculine domination to the inclusion of feministic values thereby, creating a holistic view.

ACTS is non-racial. Non-racialism with the realisation that South Africa is part of Africa and that we are developing a student organisation within the context of a developing African Church.

Student Organisation within the Church

ACTS is a movement for tertiary students, which exists at Institutions for Higher Education within South Africa. Each ACTS branch has to be affiliated to the local SRC and is to be a prophetic presence challenging the life of the institution. It is a student-driven organisation empowering students to lead within the Church, within Institutions of Higher Education and within society as a whole. Only full-time students may be members, however, this requirement ceases in the case of Correspondence Universities, e.g. UNISA.

As a student organisation, ACTS should where possible involve itself in the Youth Structure within the Diocese thus contributing to the development of the Youth of the local church.

Development of the local Church of South Africa

As part of the local Church, ACTS is challenged to participate in the development of the local Church by contributing to the pastoral plan with its vision to be a 'community serving humanity'. The organisation should in particular be a vehicle of enculturation whereby faith and African indigenous culture be given space to develop a local Church free from its colonial past.

Academic Movement

ACTS is an academic organisation engaging in a critical analysis of the dominant ideas and trends of the times, trying to contribute to the development of justice, peace and human rights.

Political unaffiliated

ACTS has agreed to remain neutral with regards to the Freedom Charter so that all students belonging to various political backgrounds can find a home within ACTS.

In terms of the 'interior rules and procedures of the Pan African IMCS', ACTS whether nationally, provincially or locally, may not be affiliated to a particular political party. Added to this, however, it must be emphasised that this does not mean there should be no involvement in political matters. Rather, ACTS should address all issues, but its view as an organisation to a particular issue should be a view in the light of the truth as seen within the Gospel and not based simply on the view of a particular political party.

ACTS as its name says is an Association. Its inner structure has been taken from both CASA and NCFS. On the one hand it is a MOVEMENT with centralist features from CASA and on the other hand it is a FEDERATION from NCFS. What is important is that ACTS is a new organisation whereby the tension between a movement and federation will always exist. Communication should run in two directions. In the first place, communication should be channeled from the central body through the provincial representative within the province and from the general-secretary through the National Office creating space for the initiatives of the local branches.

Within the auspices of the South African Catholic Bishops Conference-nationally, provincially and locally

Nationally ACTS, functions within the auspices of the National Youth Department of the South African Catholic Bishops' Conference. Ultimate responsibility for ACTS lies with the Bishop responsible for the "Laity and Youth" acting in conjunction with the National Chaplain to ACTS.

Locally and provincially the organisation lies within the auspices of the Local Chaplaincy / Parish and diocese and therefore strong links should be developed and maintained with the local branch Chaplain and with the Bishop of the Diocese.

ACTS is affiliated to the International Movement of Catholic Students (IMCS)

ACTS is the name for IMCS - South Africa. ACTS is part of the International Movement of Catholic students (IMCS), which has its head office in Paris. South Africa is part of the Pan-African Region with its African coordinating office in Nairobi. The region of Africa is divided into four sub-regions, namely: Western, Central, Eastern and Southern. South Africa belongs with Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Swaziland, Malawi and Zambia to the Sub-Region of Southern Africa, the headquarters of the Southern African Sub-Region until December 1998 being in Harare, Zimbabwe.

ACTS is recognised as a National Youth Structure within South Africa

ACTS is recognised by the National Youth Commission of South Africa as a national youth structure. This recognition gives the organisation a similar status to other national youth structures, for example, political parties. This

has the consequence that no SRC within the country has the power not to affiliate to an ACTS branch.

As a national youth structure the organisation is affiliated to the South African Youth Council (SAYC) and is also recognised by the South African Union of SRCs (SAUSRC).

ACTS as a student-driven faith community within the local Church responding to the “signs of the times” within the South African Context.

ACTS as a student-driven faith community is challenged to participate in the development of the local Church of Southern Africa by contributing to the accomplishment of the Pastoral Plan with its vision to be a “Community serving Humanity”. As a ‘living community’ comprising a group of believers, each faith community whether nationally, provincially or locally, is challenged to be instrumental in integrating faith and life by engaging itself in attempting to respond to the “signs of the times within the South African context.

The process of responding to the “signs of the times” requires that each ACTS faith community be open to the workings of the Holy Spirit. It is only as a believing and praying community that each community is able to discern as to how the organisation should interpret a particular situation. It must be stressed that ACTS itself should address all issues, including those issues of a political nature, however our response as an organisation should be in the light of the truth as seen within the Gospel and not based simply on the view of a particular political party.

Whilst realising that each Institution of Higher Education faces different problems, it is essential that ACTS attempts to look at the “signs of the times” which in some way affect the organisation as a whole. The following is an attempt to list some of the challenges that are present within the South African context:

The Primary “Sign of the Times”: The process of transformation of South Africa

Whilst ACTS is challenged to engage itself with the trends within the global context, namely the issues surrounding feminism, ecology and the search for the spiritual especially as manifested within the “new age” movement, the primary “sign of the time” within the South African context is that of participating in the process of transformation by contributing to its reconstruction and development, addressing the imbalances of the past.

As a tertiary student organisation ACTS is challenged to attempt to change the mindset of “resistance” to the apartheid state to that of the “development” of an African country free of its colonial past whilst at the same time being non-racial.

This implies that where possible all ACTS branches should try to participate in the “broad transformation forum” of the local Institution of Higher Education. The organisation should attempt to become an agent of transformation on the campus attempting to be part of the process of shifting local institutions from that of Euro centric bodies to that of African centered institutions.

Nationally ACTS is challenged to contribute to the formulation of National Policy within structures such as the National Youth Commission and the South African Youth Council. As a youth structure ACTS nationally, provincially and locally is challenged to commit itself to the comprehensive and holistic vision for the development of the young people of South Africa. (Youth Policy 2000)

Implications, in particular for ACTS, resulting from the transformation process of South Africa.

Holistic Paradigm

South African society and thereby ACTS is challenged to be aware of the global shift from a masculine dominated paradigm to a holistic paradigm through the inclusion of what is an ecological and feministic mindset. Such a holistic paradigm calls for a new look at all aspects of life including, for example, the understanding of leadership and authority; the relationship between masculine and feminine values; the role of technology and the inclusion of emotional. ACTS is thereby challenged whether nationally, provincially or locally to be sensitive to a holistic outlook when dealing with all issues of the organisation especially with regards to gender issues.

Economic Empowerment

At the SACC Youth Forum Conference in December 1997 it was stated that ultimately the wealth of the country is controlled by five companies. These statistics have been supported by the statistics supplied by the “Poverty and Inequality Report” (RIP) produced during 1998 where it is stated that about 18 million people can be considered poor earning R 352.53 per month per adult. Added to this about 10 million people can be

considered as being “ultra-poor” who earn R 193.77 per month per adult.

The issues relating to economic empowerment which ACTS needs to look at, are amongst others, as to how the organisation should address poverty, in particular, poverty amongst students; the life-style of members, generally or, for example, the relationship of privileged and poor students at national gatherings. Ultimately ACTS needs to engage itself around the issue of the *re-distribution of wealth* so that a more equitable society can emerge and added to this, debate and discussion should be encouraged around the questions of economic policy, e.g. GEAR.

Land

According to statistics given at the SACC Youth Forum in December 1997, it is believed that Christian Churches own about 7% of the country’s land. Possibly the issue of land does not affect ACTS directly, however, it is important for students to be aware of the issue of land especially the issue of land owned by Christian Churches and therefore, where possible, debates and discussions around the reclaiming of land should be encouraged.

Ecumenical / Inter-Faith

It was the experience of the youth structures during the eighties and early nineties that the Christian Churches together with other Faith Communities were able to form a unified body of resistance against apartheid. However, with the emergence of democracy in 1994 the ecumenical movement has had to re-discover its role in general but also the role, played within Institutions of Higher Education. Where possible ACTS locally should attempt to be instrumental in developing “Religious Student Councils” so that an Inter-Faith body can play a meaningful role within student structures. Where possible ACTS should also try to involve itself in the activities of the SACC Youth Forum and thereby be part of the youth ecumenical body.

Challenges facing young people in particular

Identity Crisis

At dawn of the year 2000 we live in a “global village” with the result that a uniform culture based on economic domination is developing throughout the world especially in Africa. The danger exists in particular that the youth will loose their identity by being flooded with foreign values through the

media. The issue which ACTS as a student organisation will have to address, is that the process of “de-Africanisation” will largely be carried-out by the youth themselves.

Youth Unemployment

One of the major issues facing all young people including graduates is that of unemployment. According to the CASE Research for the National Youth Commission based on the “1995 Survey” conducted by the Central Statistical Service, unemployment among the youth of South Africa stands at 43%. The issue facing all young structures including ACTS is, whether the organisation can attempt to provide its members but possibly also young women and men in general with a wide range of vocational and life skills so as to equip them to find employment or to create employment for themselves.

Spiritual and Moral Renewal

During the eighties and early nineties the majority of the youth of the country were focused around the issue of ending apartheid by to a large extent making the country ungovernable. Now that through democracy legitimacy exists within the country, it is the responsibility of youth leaders to ensure that a re-orientation of the young people of the country takes place through the re-claiming of spiritual and moral values. Where possible ACTS at a local level should set-up “faith-sharing” groups where students can try through discussion and prayer to integrate their life experiences and faith as they grapple and struggle with the God of Life on their spiritual journey.

AIDS / HIV Virus

Based on government statistics it is evident that South Africa faces a crisis with regards to AIDS and the HIV Crisis. At present (1998) about 1 500 people, especially many young people, contract the HIV virus daily. It is the responsibility of ACTS to ensure that all branches engage in serious debate around the issue of AIDS in its entirety. Added to this, ACTS is challenged to be instrumental in developing a “culture of human relationships” based on the truth of the Gospel.

Challenges facing students of Institutions of Higher Education.

The Educational Crisis

Many of the Institutions of Higher Education especially the “historically disadvantaged institutions” also referred to as the “historically black institutions” are facing the effects of apartheid caused through the lack of resources. Local ACTS branches are challenged to respond to the various situations so that the imbalances and inequities of the past can be addressed. Issues relating to *curriculum development* and *student financing* should especially be addressed by ACTS National on the level of Policy Development within the National Youth Commission and the South African Youth Council.

National Youth Service

Whether nationally, provincially or locally, ACTS should continue the discussion around the issue of the concept of a National Youth Service Program for South Africa as being considered by the National Youth Commission. Each branch should attempt to engage in meaningful debate and discussion around the issue of contributing to the development of the country as a whole especially by “ploughing back” into the community from the skills attained at a tertiary level.

Challenges facing the youth, within the local Church of South Africa.

Youth as a priority

As a functioning youth organisation within the auspices of the SACBC, ACTS has the responsibility to co-operate in partnership for the development of the youth of the local Church both nationally and also within the dioceses. ACTS should where possible ensure that the needs of the youth are catered for and that the youth be given a high priority with regards to vision and to resources.

Inculturation

The fact that ACTS branches meet as liturgical communities regularly, means that a creative space is available for experiencing liturgy as Africans whereby the full meaning of inculturation can manifest itself. As academics; reflection and discussion can accompany this process. Whilst inculturation of the liturgy must be given priority, sensitivity to include all students of different cultures must be considered. In fact ACTS has the potential to become an instrument of enculturation within the local Church of South Africa.

The role of Women

Like society as a whole, ACTS inherits the patriarchal mindset and is therefore called to be prophetic in ensuring that women experience the organisation on all levels as embodying an openness to develop a mindset where both women and men are included. All committees within ACTS should reflect the sensitivity to gender and where possible ACTS should participate within the gender portfolios of the various SRCs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, ACTS has the task in the first place of being an expression of the Kingdom of God and not simply to be an institution or a structure. It is through ACTS that students studying at the various Institutions of Higher Education in South Africa should be given the possibility of encountering the God of life so that the Gospel can truly take on root within the youth culture of South Africa and thereby become relevant for the young people of the country.