

MYGUEL SANTOS E CASTRO PORTUGAL

IFCM member 4498

Candidate for IFCM President 2026 elections

1. Identity and connection to IFCM

My name is **Miguel Santos e Castro**. I am from **Portugal**, I was **born in Angola**, and I spent part of my childhood in **Boston, USA**. My first contact with IFCM was through the **World Symposium on Choral Music in Minneapolis in 2002**, and since then I have attended every IFCM symposium. This long and continuous participation has given me a deep, personal understanding of IFCM's international community, its strengths, and the challenges it now faces.

2. Motivation and personal mission

Choral music is not a hobby or a part-time activity for me — it is a mission.

I began conducting choirs at the age of 16 in church communities, and over time this path has grown into my full professional life. Through this journey, I have developed a deep commitment to the transformative power of choral singing — not only artistically, but socially and humanly.

I believe that one of the main challenges we face today is not a lack of resources, but a lack of ideas and vision. As Jim Rohn says, “the problem is not a lack of money, but a lack of ideas.”

Throughout my life, I have created and led projects that brought people together, generated impact, and, in many cases, also generated financial sustainability. Some projects brought more resources than others — but all of them were built on creativity, initiative, and purpose.

This is what I want to bring to IFCM: a mindset focused on possibility, innovation, and action.

3. Motivation and leadership vision

My motivation is simple: to serve people and contribute to leaving this world better for the next generations.

I believe that we are stronger together. There is space for everyone, and every person has value. Leadership is not about replacing people, but about placing them where they can contribute at their best. As Jim Collins suggested, the role of a leader is to help people find their right seat.

Throughout my life, I have learned that I am not better than others — I am better *with* others. This principle guides how I build teams, projects, and communities.

At the same time, I believe leadership today requires asking the right questions, not just giving answers. One of those questions is essential:

Is IFCM still as relevant today as it was when it was founded in 1982?

The world has changed. Access to music, knowledge, and networks is now immediate. The reasons that once brought people together every three years may no longer be the same.

If we want to move forward, we must be honest, look at the data, and be willing to adapt. As Dan Sullivan says, “*the skills that got us here will not get us there.*”

My motivation is to help IFCM evolve — with clarity, courage, and a strong focus on people, relevance, and impact.

4. Experience and professional background

My experience is deeply rooted in both life and leadership.

I am a father of six children and the eldest of thirteen (13) siblings. From an early age, I learned how to create value with limited resources. This mindset has guided my entire journey: it is not about having more resources, but about using what we have with creativity and purpose.

I have founded and led several choirs and artistic initiatives, including **Vox Laci**, which is now celebrating nearly 30 years of activity. Throughout my career, I have made difficult decisions, led teams, and built sustainable projects grounded in real impact.

I have organized festivals in Portugal and internationally, served as a jury member, and delivered workshops in both artistic and corporate environments. I constantly travel to learn from outstanding choirs and organizations around the world, believing that leadership starts with continuous learning.

During the COVID-19 crisis, through Vox Laci, we took early and decisive action, prioritizing people's safety even before official measures were implemented. This reflects my approach to leadership: act with responsibility, courage, and long-term vision.

I strongly believe that choral work is not a secondary activity — it is a serious profession. One of my long-standing messages is that we must move away from a “working for free” mindset and build sustainable, respected professional environments.

My international network and experience have shown me that IFCM, as a global organization, must be more present on the ground — supporting local realities, sharing knowledge, and empowering communities. Often, what is needed is not funding, but connection, guidance, and new ways of thinking.

Finally, this decision to run for President was taken with my family. I do not need this role — I choose it. I am ready to serve, to reach more people, and to contribute through small but meaningful changes that, over time, create lasting impact.

5. Key challenges and opportunities

One of the key challenges I see today is not a lack of talent or activity in the choral world — it is a challenge of **communication, connection, and relevance**.

Communication is at the heart of leadership. When communication is not clear, even strong organizations can feel distant, inefficient, or disconnected from their members. This is not a criticism, but an opportunity.

I deeply respect and am grateful to the many leaders who have dedicated their time and energy to IFCM over the years. Their work has built a strong foundation. However, I also sense that some valuable voices have become less engaged, sometimes due to a lack of connection or clarity.

One of my priorities would be to reconnect with these experienced and committed individuals — to listen, to understand, and to bring them back into active dialogue.

At the same time, the global choral landscape has changed significantly. Today, there are countless high-quality initiatives, festivals, and networks around the world. This raises an important and necessary question:

How can IFCM remain truly relevant in a world where access, information, and opportunities are already widely available?

Nothing should be taken for granted. Even our most important structures, such as the World Symposium, should be continuously re-evaluated to ensure they respond to today's realities and needs.

This is not about changing everything — it is about evolving with purpose, clarity, and openness.

6. Vision for IFCM

My vision is rooted in something I have pursued since childhood: bringing people together.

I believe that one of the deepest human needs is to feel useful and connected to others. When people feel that they belong, they grow, and when they grow, communities become stronger. This is the true power of choral music.

In today's world, connection is more important than ever. An event can be just an event — or it can be a life-changing moment. The difference lies in how deeply we create meaningful connections between people.

I also believe that organizations, like nature, are either growing or declining — there is no true stagnation. Growth requires reflection, adaptation, and sometimes difficult decisions. As leaders, we must have the courage to rethink, to evolve, and to act.

We must honor the past, but we cannot depend on it. As has been said, *“hope is not a plan, and nostalgia is not a strategy.”*

My vision is to help IFCM grow as a living, dynamic, and responsive global network — one that listens, connects, and empowers people across all regions of the world.

I am committed to being present, to engaging directly with communities, and to building relationships that create real impact — because sometimes a single conversation can change a person, a project, or even a whole organization.

7. Concrete priorities

My priorities are focused on making IFCM more relevant, inclusive, and connected to today's reality.

1. Expand representation beyond members

IFCM should not only represent its members — it should aim to represent **all people who sing**. Today, many choral leaders around the world are still unaware of IFCM. This must change.

2. Strengthen global visibility and communication

IFCM's platforms should not belong only to the organization, but to its community. We must actively showcase inspiring work happening everywhere — not only in major concert halls, but also in schools, churches, and local communities.

3. Increase accessibility to events

Many people want to attend events like the World Symposium but cannot due to financial barriers. We must rethink formats, locations, and support systems to ensure broader participation. What matters most is not the venue, but the people and the connections created.

4. Build a culture of belonging

We need to create environments where people feel connected and valued. The success of any event or initiative depends on the quality of human connection it generates.

5. Shift mindset: from volunteerism to professionalism

Choral work is not a hobby — it is a serious profession. IFCM must promote a mindset of sustainability, value, and respect for artistic work.

6. Modernize communication and digital presence

We must update our communication strategy, including the website and digital platforms, to reflect today's world — more dynamic, accessible, and impactful.

7. Go to the field

IFCM should not wait for people to come to it. It must actively go to different regions, understand local realities, and support growth on the ground.

8. Learn from global trends

The world is changing rapidly. We must adapt — as other sectors have done — embracing digital transformation and new models of sustainability.

8. Sustainability and financial model

A global organization like IFCM cannot rely on a limited and unclear financial base. Sustainability must be built on **transparency, value, and innovation**.

One of my priorities is to ensure **maximum transparency**, so that members clearly understand how resources are used and how decisions are made. Trust is the foundation of any sustainable organization.

At the same time, we must ask important questions:

Is a model based mainly on membership fees still effective? Or should we evolve towards a **service-based model**, where IFCM creates real value that people and organizations actively choose to support?

IFCM has a strong legacy and a valuable global brand, but it must communicate its value more clearly and consistently. We need to develop **relevant services**, partnerships, and collaborations that respond to real needs across the choral world.

Accessibility must also be part of sustainability. If people cannot afford to participate, we must rethink formats, support systems, and partnerships to make participation more inclusive.

I also believe in a **holistic approach**, where events consider not only professionals but also their families — strengthening the human dimension of our community.

Finally, sustainability is not built alone. The best decisions come from collective thinking. I am committed to working closely with the Board to design a model that is realistic, innovative, and future-oriented.

9. Global inclusion and decentralization

Global inclusion must become visible, tangible, and immediate.

IFCM must actively go to people — not wait for people to come to IFCM. Around the world, there are extraordinary choral initiatives already happening, often with limited resources, but with immense impact. These communities need recognition, connection, and support.

Today, technology allows us to be present without always needing to travel. We can listen, connect, and collaborate more efficiently than ever before. This should be used to strengthen global inclusion.

We must also rethink our model of engagement. Instead of concentrating efforts in a single global event every three years, we should explore more **decentralized and regional approaches** — supporting and partnering with existing high-quality festivals and events around the world.

There are powerful examples already: large-scale choral movements in Africa, national song celebrations in the Baltic countries, conventions in North America, and dynamic festivals across Asia and Latin America.

IFCM should help amplify these realities — bringing visibility, support, and international connection — rather than duplicating what is already working.

Inclusion also means addressing inequality. In some regions, even basic resources are missing. Supporting these communities does not always require large funding — often it requires attention, knowledge, and connection.

If IFCM wants to be truly global, it must embrace diversity not only in representation, but in action — empowering each region to grow, lead, and inspire others.

10. Closing statement

We are stronger together.

Beyond cultures, countries, and systems, we are human beings. What connects us is our shared desire to belong, to contribute, and to make a difference.

At the same time, we must look at the world as a whole. The choral landscape is only one part of a much larger reality — our families, our societies, and our global challenges. If we want to grow, we must learn not only from within our field, but also from the world around us — from both its best and its most difficult examples.

As Yuval Harari reminds us, what made human beings thrive was not strength or speed, but our ability to collaborate. This is our greatest power: working together, across differences, to build something meaningful.

I believe that IFCM has the responsibility to bring people closer, to connect organizations, and to create a truly global community where everyone feels valued and included.

I am ready to work. I am ready to listen. And I am ready to build with those who want to build.

Because leadership is not about recognition — it is about impact. We are not important because of visibility, but because of the difference we make in the lives of others, often quietly and without recognition.

My commitment is simple: to serve this community with energy, honesty, and vision — and to help ensure that IFCM becomes more relevant, more connected, and more impactful for the future.

Because ultimately, our role is to leave things better than we found them.