

Sneak Peek
pages 147 - 151

Section Two: Middle Years, mid 1970s - late 1990s

Chapter 10 Sydney

Sydney's District Bible Study Groups



Reach Out, Build Up, Send Back

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10. Sydney

In 1974, OCF Sydney implemented a Priority Year to help members prioritise their busy lives. Of particular concern was that OCF Sydney no longer seemed to be effective in reaching out. Personal Evangelism Groups (PEG) were formed to rectify this. Both Priority Year and Operation PEG ‘fopped’, which led OCF Sydney part-time staff worker Peter Tow to remark, ‘failure lies in each one of us, for in the final reckoning, organisation cannot substitute for real spiritual concern for those without Christ.’⁹⁹ However, change was just around the corner.

Sydney’s District Bible Study Groups

In 1976, Chris Chua was the OCF Australia chairperson, and Koo Tuk Su the OCF Sydney president. Together, they led OCF Sydney through a period of growth and restructuring. By this time, Sydney was a huge city with thousands of overseas students. Advisors encouraged OCF Sydney to go to where the people were. Evangelism could be done locally, while public meetings would become teaching sessions. The OCF Sydney leadership saw District Bible Study Groups (DBSG) as the means to achieve this. The seed of the solution had already been planted some years prior.

Back in 1962, OCF Sydney had started two Bible study groups that were autonomous and decided on their own

⁹⁹ *OCF Sydney 1957-2007*, 10.

programs. They met fortnightly, alternating with public meetings which had lost their homely feel because of size—90 attendees on average, but it could reach 200 on special occasions. From 1962 to 1976, OCF Sydney ran between two to five such groups. As group leaders and members were all students, and meeting places were rented properties, membership composition and meeting locations kept changing. The health of the groups depended on a number of factors such as the calibre of the leader and the suitability of Bible study material. Furthermore, if churches in the area were running similar activities, interest in OCF Bible study groups waned. Church engagement was positive, as the needs of students were being met. In contrast, inadequately trained OCF leaders or unsuitable materials were problems that should be resolved. So, in the mid-1970s, when the OCF Sydney leadership saw DBSGs as key to outreach, they turned their attention to these groups to organise and resource them properly.

In 1976, Koo Tuk Su became the OCF Sydney chairperson. In October of the same year, an OCF Program Planning Committee was formed, led by Chris Chua. They sought to fulfil the OCF vision by training Bible study leaders well, so that when they went home, they could continue to serve the Lord in their churches. To do this, the committee developed a three-year Bible study series, suited to the average time students remained in OCF. The series systematically covered important topics through book studies, such as Mark (the ministry of Jesus), Acts (the birth of

the church), and Romans (Christian doctrine). Bible study leaders were trained in sound principles of Bible interpretation, and practical skills of facilitating small groups. This huge structural, training and resourcing change was accomplished through many leaders at OCF Sydney working together. Furthermore, at least five OCF Sydney members were studying at Moore Theological College at the time, including Tuk Su and Chris Chua. These two young men worked closely together. They led OCF Sydney with a macro view across many District Bible Study Groups. Tuk Su concentrated on counselling, pastoral care, and troubleshooting; while Chris focused on Bible study and training.



From left: Bruce Winter (7th, wearing a tie), Chris Chua (8th), Koo Tuk Su (9th). Circa 1978.



*The venue of CDG1 in the suburb of Lewisham.
Many OCF members attending Sydney University in the 1970s attended CDG1.*

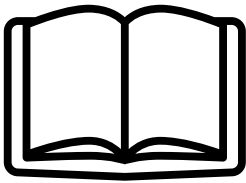
The DBSGs became known as the Northern, Central and Eastern District Bible Study Groups, or NDG, CDG and EDG respectively. They were located where the students lived, mostly close to universities they attended. NDG was close to Macquarie University, CDG to Sydney University, and EDG to the University of New South Wales (UNSW). There was no university in the southwest, but there were high school overseas students who lived there. Ho May Leng opened her home in the suburb of Campsie to these students, who were mostly from Hong Kong and Malaysia. Hence, there was a South West District Group for a time. Chris Chua helped lead Bible studies there, until those students went to universities, almost all of them to UNSW. By this time, there were already four EDGs, so they became EDG5.

All these Bible study groups met at the rented houses of OCF members. The homely atmosphere of the Bible study groups attracted many overseas students. Soon, hosts were not only tidying up the lounge, but also their bedrooms and sometimes even the laundry! After Bible studies, they ate supper from mismatching plates and cups. This humble just-as-I-am hospitality became an oasis of genuine friendship for poor overseas students, unable to afford glitzy entertainment or fancy restaurants.



South West District Group, late 1970s.

From 1974 to 1979, attendance at DBSGs quadrupled to 275. Much of the growth was in the east, near UNSW, where many overseas students were enrolled. The overseas student quota in Australia varied for different courses in different universities. Newer universities such as Monash in



End of Sneak Peek

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