

Sneak Peek
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Section Three: Recent Times, 2000 and Beyond

Chapter 24 Reset Innovation and Increased Partnership



Reach Out, Build Up, Send Back

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The 60th OCF Australia Convention at Melaka, Malaysia, December 2019.

into the ministry. Each generation built on the work of those who had gone before and handed it on to those who came after. It was a wonderful night of singing, laughter and reminiscing. Many had become firm friends through their service together in OCF.

Innovation and Increased Partnership

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 to be a pandemic. Before the end of the month, Australia shut its borders to all except citizens and permanent residents. Strict social isolation rules were imposed to curb the airborne disease. As a result, seven OCF Easter camps were cancelled. Aunty Merrilyn flew back from Queensland where she had been ministering to OCF UQ and

quarantined in her home. For the rest of 2020, OCF moved to online meetings.

Meanwhile, Jason Ang Woon Seng from OCF Clayton led the 2020 convention organising committee. In the first half of 2020, the program and publicity officer Donovan Koh believed that a cure for COVID would be found, and that OCF Australia would be able to meet in person for the convention. However, from July 2020, Victoria entered the longest stay-at-home lockdown of any state—262 days in the next eighteen months. As the lockdowns dragged on, many people struggled to find the energy to carry out daily tasks. Donovan found himself sleeping at dawn and waking at dusk. His housemate had to wake him up on Sundays by saying, ‘Hey, let’s watch this livestreamed church service together.’ It was as if his body was waiting for COVID to be over so that real life could resume.

Finally, in the second half of 2020, the convention committee accepted that an in-person convention was impossible and they moved the AGM and convention online. The unprecedented circumstances encouraged innovation. Donovan’s OCF household at Arnott Street set up a live streaming hub for planning and meetings. Several states recorded worship sessions for online playback during the convention. Despite many challenges, they saw the goodness of God in helping them to meet online as OCF Australia.

As no overseas students flew into Australia and graduates continued to leave, centres became very small, some barely surviving. In this difficult climate, EXCO

prioritised caring for one another and for centre leaders. The 2021 OCF Australia chairperson Dansen Cho explained:

Part of the challenges of COVID was us starting to realise that the ministry and the students were basically crumbling under the weight of trying to do everything by ourselves. Maybe in years past, when you have a couple of hundred students nationally, then you have the critical mass to do events. But then, when the numbers start getting into the low hundreds and the number of people in centres are basically single digit for a lot of the centres, then you are really just spread so thin that the students can't do everything.¹⁸⁷



2021 EXCO. From left: Kimberly Gan (returnees officer), Dansen Cho (chairperson and prayer officer), Timothy Tan (secretary), Marcus Gan (treasurer and missions officer).

EXCO emphasised that even when fruit is not evident, and the survival of OCF is in doubt, God calls us, first and foremost, to be faithful. EXCO also forged partnerships with

¹⁸⁷ Dansen Cho, Interview with author, 2023.

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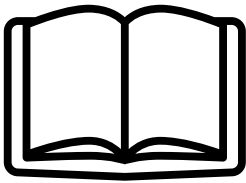
Screenshots from the 2020 AGM. Photos supplied by Dansen Cho.



other Christian organisations because they saw that the students needed more help. Notable partnerships were with publishing company YMI that provided Christian tracts and booklets, City Bible Forum that provided training on being a witness in the workplace, and with the OCF Alumni Network through financial support and support in other ways, such as to upgrade the website using professional services. Although students faced increased isolation on a personal level, OCF Australia became more connected to local and overseas Christians and groups.

The Blessing of Meeting Together

As restrictions eased in 2021, various states and centres found their own ways to meet together again. In Victoria, large indoor gatherings were still prohibited. So, OCF Victoria



End of Sneak Peek

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