

Sneak Peek
pages 65 - 71

Section One: Early Days, 1950s - early 1970s

Chapter 4 Vision and Leadership Creation of the OCF Handbook



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4. Vision and Leadership

Within five years, the ministry of OCF Australia had established steady organisational rhythms and patterns. It would have seemed so to members, who could look forward to weekly meetings and the highlight of every year—the annual OCF convention, which typically drew 200 to 300 delegates.

Leaders, on the other hand, were thinking about how to improve and what might lie ahead. The Inter Varsity Fellowship (IVF) staff and the OCF Australia leaders imagined different futures for the organisation. In a sense, all our human dreams of the future are presumptuous, and yet leaders must plan. Taking this a step further, spiritual leaders should motivate and rally God's people towards His purposes for them. How does one do this when only God knows the future?

Creation of the OCF Handbook

In July 1960, Ian Burnard wrote to Charles Troutman, 'There are two organisational things in which I think we can help the OCF at the moment. One is the almost redundant OCF Australia Committee.'⁴³ Three weeks later, Charles replied, 'The more I think about the OCF Australia committee, the

⁴³ Ian Burnard, Letter to Charles Troutman, 25 July 1960. MTC/IVF 159-24/ Burnard Ian 1959-60.

more I feel that unless it organises the annual conference, there is not much point in it.'

Perhaps the IVF saw the OCF EXCO as an administrative body only because the Evangelical Unions (EU) did not have a similar committee. The EUs did not need one as the IVF General Committee looked after national administration and leadership. Various local EU, operating out of different universities or teachers' colleges, were affiliates of the IVF. In some places, these affiliates had different names such as Evangelical Students.

In Charles Troutman's view, the Asian Fellowship (AF) had been formed as 'a department or sub-committee of the Adelaide University EU', because the 'grads had been unable to meet the needs of Asian students in Adelaide.' Since then, OCF Australia had affiliated with the IVF. Like other affiliates, it was an autonomous group. The IVF had given encouragement and every support to OCF Australia, and the results had exceeded expectations.⁴⁴

After Ian attended the 1960 AGM at the end of the year, he realised that, unlike other IVF affiliates, OCF did not have the resources of an alumni, such as the Graduate Fellowship, to draw on. Because of this, OCF had developed a drive, spirituality and organisational skills that were 'tremendously impressive'. He went on, 'On this fact alone I am convinced of the rightness of OCF being developed independently of the EUs. Very often I have reservations about too great a

⁴⁴ Charles Troutman, Letter to Ian Burnard, 16 August 1960. MTC/IVF 159-24/ Burnard Ian 1959-60.

separation of EU and OCF (and this concern needs to remain; especially with respect to the EUs) but the value of this must surely be that on their return home the OCFers continue to exercise this drive.⁴⁵

The word 'drive' was an apt one. It conjures images of cars and travel, momentum and leadership. In the mid-1960s, OCF leaders took the group further than what its founding members and the IVF had envisaged. This had not come about by high-level strategic planning, but by responding to the needs they observed and sought to meet. The 1963 OCF Australia president Shen Dah Cheong realised that the OCF was not just an arm of the IVF or the EU. He saw that OCF needed to articulate its identity and find a way to pass it on.

As noted earlier, the Australian Student Christian Movement (ASCM) was one of the two main interdenominational groups on Australian university campuses prior to the formation of OCF. The ASCM was the Australian branch of the World Student Christian Federation and existed as early as 1896 under different forms.⁴⁶ ASCM distinguished itself as a nondenominational movement, concerned with a range of social issues. A 1962 ASCM conference outlined the principle of 'maximum ecumenism', in which Christian groups should work together 'except where deep convictions compel separation'. There was a constant

⁴⁵ Ian Burnard, Letter to Charles Troutman, 29 December 1960. MTC/IVF 159-24/ Burnard Ian 1959-60.

⁴⁶ 'Guide to the Records of the Australian Student Christian Movement', <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-244226401/findingaid#nla-obj-244247683>. Accessed 17 Aug 2023.

struggle to free itself from the influence of 'conservative evangelicals' and 'fundamentalists', which led to the split from IVF.⁴⁷

The term ecumenism refers to a Christian commitment to the unity of all believers, in order to witness to and serve all humanity. In this sense, all Christians should be committed to ecumenism. However, biblical truths should not be sacrificed for the sake of enabling more groups to come under a 'Christian' banner.⁴⁸

The Inter Varsity Fellowship of Evangelical Unions (Australia), or IVF, had been formed out of a disagreement with the SCM in three areas: the inspiration and authority of the Bible, the content of the gospel and the doctrine of the church. Charles Troutman wrote that when the ASCM began, it was evangelical because it reflected the theological stance of the day. But because there was nothing in its constitution to affirm the authority of Scriptures, it had lost its original vision and moorings.⁴⁹ As a result, the IVF was doctrinally focused. They viewed the SCM as a student movement for ecumenism, while they were a fellowship of believing students for evangelism.⁵⁰ However, despite their strengths in Bible teaching and sincere efforts, the gospel had not

⁴⁷ Renate Howe, *A Century of Influence: A History of the Australian Student Christian Movement 1896-1996* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009), 13, 196, 319, 348.

⁴⁸ 'Ecumenism', *The Encyclopedia of Protestantism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1143, 1144, 1149.

⁴⁹ Charles Troutman, 'General Secretary's Report' (IVF, 1958). MTC/IVF 159-27-28/Reports and Committee Papers 1948-68.

⁵⁰ *The IVF and SCM in Australia: A Brief History and Background*, Produced by the Inter Varsity Fellowship of Evangelical Unions (Australia), Sydney, August 1958.

gained significant headway among non-Christian overseas students on campus.

In contrast to the IVF, OCF had been formed by Christian overseas students who wanted to help other overseas students. They shared not only the gospel but their lives. Seniors knew how it felt to be bewildered by the strangeness of a new land. Anecdotes abound: dishes washed without rinsing off the suds. Some felt that sleeping between two sheets tucked in tight was very constricting compared to the single bedsheets and loose blankets that they were accustomed to. There was a student who had dry cornflakes for breakfast until he watched Australians pouring milk over their cornflakes the following day.

Mastering English was difficult, especially for those who had attended school in other languages. Even Dah Cheong, who had attended an English-medium secondary school, struggled to understand the Australian accent. Not understanding and not being understood led to all sorts of difficulties. It could make people feel inferior or appear timid and shy. Even if English was not a problem, many missed the sounds of their mother tongue. In Melbourne, Year 12 student Irene Yek tuned in to the radio just to hear Mandarin spoken. Fortunately, she found out about Friday night Mandarin Bible studies in an OCF household in Parkville. For two years, she travelled by train and tram to hear Brother Huang Ee Yuen teach from the epistle of Romans in

Mandarin. As not all OCF members understood Mandarin, Timothy Yung interpreted for Brother Huang.⁵¹

In the overseas student community, it became known that if you wanted help or friendship, go to OCF. Unlike national clubs, OCF welcomed people of all nationalities. National tensions and rivalries could be overcome in this community centred in Christ. Indonesian and Malayan members enjoyed fellowship despite the Confrontation, a conflict in Borneo from 1962 to 1966. Australian associate members opened their homes and churches to OCF, making local expertise and resources available. Older OCF members carried out this time-consuming work of care, looking out for younger members. OCF was like a big family of brothers and sisters.

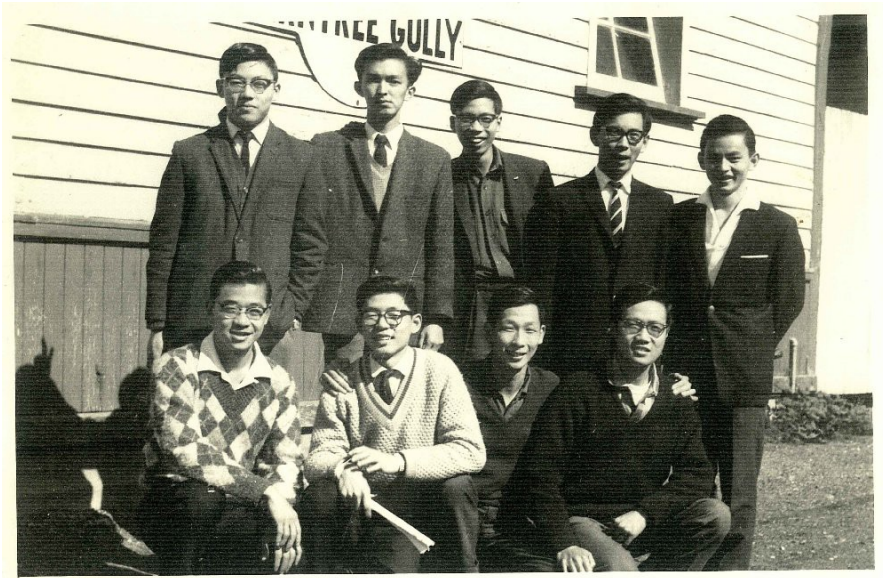
This had been Dah Cheong's experience when he had arrived in Melbourne in 1959. He found OCF meetings homely and comfortable because they were put together specifically with overseas students in mind. Soon after, he moved into an OCF household, a narrow Victorian townhouse in Parkville. It was nicknamed the Borneo Longhouse because Dah Cheong and another housemate, Jonathan Lee, were from North Borneo. They learned to cook and clean, and to put up with one another's shortcomings.

Dah Cheong first served on the local OCF Melbourne committee, where he would greet each member at the door with a warm handshake. His memory for names was a great asset. His household hosted monthly OCF fellowship meals.

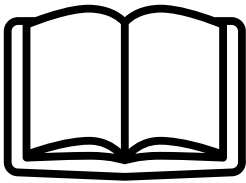
⁵¹ *Pioneering with a Purpose*, (OCF Alumni Network, 2022), 63, 104.

The menu began featuring rabbit curry, passed off as tender chicken (rabbit was much cheaper than chicken at the Queen Victoria Market). Sometimes an observant sister-in-Christ asked why the 'chicken' had so many drumsticks!

Unlike the IVF which focused on university students, OCF was concerned for all overseas students, including high school students and nurses. OCF ministered to those who were outsiders, culturally speaking. By meeting the need for connection, OCF introduced many non-believers to Christ, and many Christians caught a vision of lifelong service to God.



*OCF Melbourne committee retreat, April 1963, at Ferntree Gully Station.
Shen Dah Cheong is in the front row, second from the right.*



End of Sneak Peek

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