



Oxford
Centre for
Mission Studies

Research Forum for Faithful Witness

An introduction

Executive Summary

The **purpose** of the OCMS Research Forum for Faithful Witness is to be a dynamic environment where mission researchers in different parts of the global Church collaboratively address the need for ongoing research regarding the changing nature of faithful witness in service of the Church. It builds upon OCMS's expertise, reputation, and understanding of God's mission. It encourages ecumenical relationships, interdisciplinary enquiry, amplifying the voice of those less heard, innovation, dissemination of knowledge, partnership, and service on behalf of others.

The Research Forum **aims** to:

- Catalyse vibrant conversations between scholars and practitioners to identify research needs and address research findings;
- Provide an environment for researchers that nurtures spiritual discernment, attentiveness to the Holy Spirit at work in the world and throughout the Church;
- Foster and support cutting edge research with intellectual curiosity and openness concerning the witness of the people of God;
- Make knowledge and scholarship available in ways that are accessible to the Church.

The Research Forum's **focus** is exploration of overlapping spheres of faithful witness: 1) *Local Christian Community Witness*: The Body of Christ in a local context gathered in worship and witness as well as visible through members of the Body involved in their communities in faithful witness. 2) *Cross-cultural mission movements*: Individuals and teams moving from their own ethno-linguistic communities and cultures into other cultural spaces in faithful witness. 3) *Integral witness*: Individuals and groups of Christians whose focus is on the kingdom of God, seeking to bring the Lordship of Christ into every sphere of life. 4) *Public Missiology*: Is the intersection of the three spheres.

The Research Forum is **structured** under OCMS leadership and operates with a steering group of 3-5, and a Director(s) to develop research priorities. Senior Researchers and Research Associates carry out the actual research assignments, based around agreed research themes. Findings are made available to various audiences through platforms sponsored by the Research Forum that include conferences, workshops, webinars, publications and published materials.

Role Descriptions within the Research Forum

The Research Forum operates with three levels of volunteers recognized by OCMS. These are:

Co-Directors

- Serves part-time, holds a PhD or equivalent, volunteer status recognized by OCMS;
- Brings credibility to the work of the Research Forum;
- Ensures that the Research Forum is meeting its objectives;
- Reports to the Executive Director of OCMS;
- Works with steering group of Senior Researchers and Research Associates in producing a running list of research topics that the Research Forum will address over the next 1-2 years;
- Works with steering group in identifying potential new additions of Senior Researchers and Research Associates;
- Supports the Senior Researchers and Research Associates in prioritizing research themes and their research process;
- Co-ordinates all the work of the Research Forum including research objectives, projects and proposals, planning, coordination and implementation of research programmes in accordance with Research Forum strategy, policy and procedures, and funder requirements.
- Communicates about the activities of the Research Forum with its participants, OCMS leadership, and other interested parties;
- Collaborates with other interested parties on the work of the Research Forum.

Senior Researcher

- Appointed by the Research Forum Directors and OCMS Executive Director, with input from the steering committee;
- Holds a PhD,
- Accepted part-time, volunteer status recognized by OCMS;
- Supports the aims and objectives of the Research Forum;
- Coordinates assigned research activities of the Research Forum with the Directors;
- Is able to function as champion, researcher, convener and facilitator;
- Is the 'gate-keeper' in terms of quality – he/she should be the principal editor of whatever is published;
- Develops and leads a collaborative research team based around a research theme agreed by the Steering Group;
- In launching the research theme, the senior researcher develops a prospectus that includes:
 - Research theme title
 - Introduction to the research theme and why it is a priority within the parameters of the OCMS Research Forum
 - Research objectives
 - Expected outcomes

- Application procedure for potential Research Associates wishing to join the research team
- Presents research at Research Forum sponsored workshops, webinars, and conferences;
- Ensures research output is published as appropriate;

Research Associate

- Appointed by the Research Forum Directors, in consultation with a Senior Researcher;
- Holds a degree that required some form of academic research
- Accepted part-time, volunteer status recognized by OCMS;
- Supports the aims and objectives of the Research Forum;
- Assists a Senior Researcher in collaborative research projects for the Research Forum;
- May conduct independent research under the direction of a Senior Researcher;
- Presents research at Research Forum-sponsored workshops, webinars, conferences, and through published works.

Research Topics and Plans

Initial outcomes and activities

The Research Forum plans to offer various means of engaging with its research interest, Faithful Witness, which may include:

- The Research Forum sponsors/supports Senior Researchers and Research Associates to pursue investigation, research, presentation, and publication covering themes of interest to the participants of the Research Forum. (April 2021 onwards)
- The Research Forum hosts an annual conference on a theme about faithful witness. (October 2021 onwards)
- The Research Forum hosts online webinars / face-to-face workshops on themes arising from the research of the Senior Researchers and Research Associates. (late 2021 onwards)
- The Research Forum's Senior Researchers and Research Associates produce publishable research coming out of the Forum's work. (2022 onwards)
- The Research Forum offers a process to mission executives to provide research on areas of key interest through Forum research; and then a process of engagement with these issues with a structured approach and timeline. (Mid 2021 onwards)

Guidelines for research cohorts:

Cohorts will be:

- led by a senior researcher with a team of associate researchers (see separate document on Roles)
- composed of academic, as well as praxis-focused researchers

- diverse in terms of age, gender, and nationality
- have seasoned, as well as emerging scholars and reflective practitioners
- prepare research deliverables for diverse media – presentations, articles, group studies for churches, blog posts, etc.
- focused on both knowledge and praxis. The research aim is both the generation of knowledge and understanding that is translatable into activity that results in transformation

Mission Research Themes:

The Research Forum Director works with the Steering Group and Senior Researchers to produce a running list of themes they want to see developed over the next 2-3 years. These are prioritised and responsibilities are assigned to participants to explore the themes through research, writing, presentation, and publishing.

Examples (illustrative, but may be pursued if of interest):

- *Defining faithful witness:* Terminology matters. Therefore, what does the term 'faithful witness' really mean, and how does it compare with 'mission'?
- *A missiology of progress:* Exploration of theological, missiological and socio-economic perspectives and contexts that influence how the progress of faithful witness is mapped out, measured, and interpreted.
- *The complex intersection of relationships between cross-cultural, multicultural and intercultural:* One can trace many different mission movements but, historically, they have been either cross-cultural or multicultural and rarely intercultural. How are intercultural concepts changing this, and how does that affect faithful witness?
- *Relational collaboration as the new future:* The post-COVID19 world provides research opportunities for how collaboration for God's kingdom is taken in new directions, including values of mutuality and respect, indigenous mission, whole-life discipleship and transformation, and development of younger leaders.
- *Decolonising mission:* How does discipleship and mission look like from the perspective of those who have not been brought up on Enlightenment ideals and values?