

STELLENBOSCH PHD TWO-WEEK SEMINAR

OCRPL and Stellenbosch University Post-graduate researchers meet online for two weeks

Church leaders in Africa, Asia and Latin America, especially in countries where Christians are not only a minority but also where the dominant religious culture puts heavy pressure on them either through restricting their civic and religious freedom or through the violent activity of some groups, are doing careful research on how these challenges are being addressed.

OCRPL with Barnabas Fund has a programme of doctoral level research with the Universities of Pretoria and Stellenbosch in South Africa in which 50 candidates are enrolled. These include men and women from a range of denominations with significant experience: bishops, senior pastors, heads of national institutions and teachers in theological training programmes.

Each year since the programme began in 2017, participants have met for up to four weeks in South Africa for an annual seminar with faculty from OCRPL and the Universities.

This October, due to COVID, twenty researchers who have been in the programme for over two years, met for two weeks by Zoom with faculty members. They are all registered with the University of Stellenbosch and most have their research proposal accepted. They are at various stages of doing their investigations and of beginning to write up their findings.

They received input on the skills needed to present a compelling argument through their thesis, on how to access online library materials, and how to use various computer programmes related to their studies. They received guidance on how to contribute the insights of theology to issues of public concern through 'public theology', and how to make the results of research contribute to strategic action. Candidates are doing research while still involved in active ministry which has a very positive contribution to rooting their study in real-life ministry so they were able also to share how they faced and overcame difficulties involved in the many responsibilities they still carried.

A particular feature of the two-week 'Zoominar' was that participants had 25 minutes to make a presentation of the heart of their research work. The research development officer of the faculty of theology at Stellenbosch singled out this aspect as a very valuable opportunity for researchers to lift their eyes off the details and crystallise their project such that others could engage with what they are doing. Through this, we had fascinating discussions on the contribution of Nigerian Anglicans to current Anglican disputes, the relation between 'spiritual warfare' and some aspects of African Traditional Religion, how to bring justice in post-apartheid Namibia, understanding

the power play of politicians in South Sudan, engaging in the light of the Bible with domestic violence where women attack men in West Africa and how the church should respond to attacks that seek to wipe them out.

Every day began with fifteen minutes of worship with a hymn, a Bible based reflection and prayer.

As the world of education comes to terms with internet-based education from junior school to advanced postgraduate research, the OCRPL/BF seminar provides an important example of enabling people who are often studying on their own in difficult circumstances to overcome loneliness and isolation by taking part in an online community experience with others with whom they are learning. This will be the future of much advanced theological education in the Global South.