



Mrs. Robert L. Stevenson, librarian of Centenary Methodist Church, helps to meet the reading and research needs of one of the state's largest churches. Membership at Centenary exceeds 3,000.

AIM OF CENTENARY CHURCH LIBRARY: GREATEST FACILITY, MAXIMUM USE

By

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For many years Centenary Methodist Church, whose membership at present exceeds 3,000, has had a library. Ten years ago the books were scattered, and a small group of volunteers gathered them together, processed them, and put them into circulation. In the intervening years we have moved from a crowded fifth-floor storage room to a bright attractive room on the sanctuary level, centrally located. We have also established four other branch locations. From a collection of about 1,000 rather old books, we grew to over four thousand, including many new and attractive volumes. Once comprising only books, the library now maintains an audio-visual department as well. Serving at first just members of the church, we now honor requests from all over our district, and some even from beyond its boundaries.

Because of the volume of work involved, it was necessary for the church to establish the position of part-time librarian. Volunteers still come from time to time to work on

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special projects, and they share the work of attending the library on Sunday. Duties of the librarian include: preparation and maintenance of the book collection, preparation of exhibits and displays, circulation duties, including the collecting and organizing of materials for special meetings and classes, reference work, informational services, reports, and work with volunteers.

In the selection of materials and services offered, our basic principle has been to provide teachers and leaders in the church with the best that is available and that we can afford, supplementing the teaching ministry in a way that makes for greatest facility and maximum use. Our library, however, is not limited only to teachers and leaders, but is available to any church member who wishes to use it, as well as to the whole community. We make an effort not to duplicate the services of the City-County Library, which is next door, but to augment it by expanding certain areas used most frequently by the church, and not covered sufficiently by the public library. In particular, we make good use of the public library's collection of 16mm motion picture films, since we do not buy these for our audio-visual department. We reciprocate by honoring requests for filmstrips that are passed on to us by the public library.

Our criterion of greatest facility and maximum use implies a minimum of limitation and restriction. Consequently, only the audio-visual room is kept locked when an attendant is not on duty, borrowing is done simply by signing a card and leaving it in a box, membership files of church and church school serve as registration, no fines are imposed, but overdue notices are sent every two months, and there is no specified time limit or limit to the number of materials that may be borrowed, with the exception of children as borrowers. Losses are relatively few.

Branches are placed in locations of greatest convenience. The children's library is in the children's wing; curriculum materials are in the leadership classroom; a small portable collection, changed frequently, is in the adult church school area; and one of the adult classes maintains a collection of books of inspirational character. All branches are available to everyone. The main library and reading room houses a collection of various Bible texts; books about the Bible, Jesus, doctrines, devotional literature, Christian life, Christian art and symbolism, prayer, the minister, the church worship, missions, Christian education, church history, denominations, Methodism, comparative religion. These subjects cover three-fourths of the adult collection, the remainder representing the fields of social sciences, nature and camping, religious drama, family life, psychology, ethics, etc. A vertical file covering the same subjects is also kept in the main library. The children's library includes a collection of especially purchased for the Through-the-Week School Kindergarten.

Completing the procedure of processing, the librarian makes a shelf-list card, and an author card for the catalog, assigning a classification number to the book. Classification is precise only to small groups of books, not to exceed approximately one shelf. In other words, we do not use Cutter numbers, nor do we often carry the classification number beyond one decimal. Because of pressure of other duties, the typing of subject cards has lagged, a task that is sometimes given to a volunteer, when a good typist can be found. Information on the cards includes only the author, brief title, publisher, date, with the accession number and inventory date on the shelf-list card. We find excellent aids to processing and cataloging in the publication, *YOUR CHURCH LIBRARY*, and the periodical *CHURCH LIBRARY NEWSLETTER*, both issued by the Methodist

Publishing House. The latter also serves as a guide to materials selection. We have supplemented these tools with the SEARS LIST OF SUBJECT HEADINGS, and an abridged DEWEY DECIMAL CLASSIFICATION. Eventually, it is our plan to have a master catalog that will include file materials and audio-visuals together under each subject.

The members of Centenary Methodist Church are very much aware of the contribution our library makes to our overall program. We receive the finest support, financially and otherwise. Our church paper, *THROUGH CENTENARY WINDOWS*, covers library news thoroughly. Many members donate books as memorials. A library committee composed of members of and working through the Commission on Education acts as a policy-making body. Scarcely a day goes by that someone does not make the comment, "Whatever would we do without the library!"

Books, pictures, records, puzzles, and films are in constant use by the lower grades in the day-to-day teaching program. In addition to the church school classes, there are four week-day kindergarten classes, which use materials and equipment daily. The church school teachers make a point of spending a morning or afternoon a week at the church, making preparations for Sunday, and are in and out of the library frequently. The director of children's work holds quarterly briefing meetings in order to acquaint the teachers with the coming quarter's recommended resource materials, which we collect and place on display so that they may be examined.

The subjects covered by our filmstrips are approximately the same as those of the book collection. A catalog, *AUDIO-VISUAL RESOURCES*, 1966, recently issued, containing a subject list of all audio-visual materials with a short descriptive paragraph for each entry, has proved invaluable, particularly to a group of students from the Duke Divinity School who worked in churches in this area during the past summer. They used the catalog and our filmstrips in planning and carrying out their summer programs. This catalog is put into the hands of our teachers, who can see at a glance what we have, thus facilitating planning and obtaining of materials. A small fee is charged for rental of filmstrips and recordings outside the church.

We also try to encourage the use of pictures in the church by exhibiting from time to time those in our collection, particularly the fine prints of art masterpieces. A special dinner meeting for teachers introduced and featured these reproductions.

All these and many more have expressed appreciation for the services provided, and we who work with the library find it an especially rewarding experience. Truly there is a need, and we do our best to fill it.

"Are we to have a censor whose imprimatur shall say what books may be sold, and what may buy? And who is thus to dogmatize religious opinions for our citizens? Whose foot is to be the measure to which ours are all to be cut or stretched?"

—Thomas Jefferson
Letter to Dufief,
a Philadelphia bookseller
1814