

THE CHURCH LIBRARY: Your Church's Resource Center

By

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"Try to build a reputation for service."

This challenge was recently given to a group of church librarians by a fellow library worker. He spoke from experience, for it was to the library in which he worked that a teacher came with an unusual request. Said the teacher, "I need a live horned toad for one of my conferences." Replied the librarian, "Could you give us a little time?"

Thanks to the efforts of a 14-year-old son, the toad was had and the teacher was glad—and the library enhanced its reputation for service.

This experience says a lot about the ministry of church libraries. It says that the *raison d'être* of a church library is to supply the resources needed by all workers in the church it serves. The term "library" is being replaced in many educational circles with "educational media center" or "instructional media center." Perhaps modern church libraries could more accurately be called "church resource centers."

This broadened concept is needed today because churches are trying now, as at no time in the past, to carry out an intensive program of Christian education. Churches are faced with the dual task of reaching the educated and educating the reached. Nothing can be done best without proper resources. The church library is the logical service to supply, maintain, and circulate them.

Just what are these resources? They can be loosely divided into two areas: (a) printed materials, and (b) audio-visuals. Printed materials can, in turn, be divided into two groups; (a) books, and (b) non-permanent printed materials.

The majority of books in a church library will be church or Christian oriented. As much as 75 percent of the total budget may be spent on materials directly related to the church's ongoing educational program. However, not all books need to be strictly "religious" in their outlook. They should not be anti-religious, but there is a real need for clean, well written books relating to the vocational and recreational interests of those whom the church serves.

Many church libraries have also discovered the vast wealth of material which, through printed, does not appear in book form. This includes magazine and newspaper articles, denominational and government pamphlets, letters from missionaries, and many similar loose-leaf materials. If this material is clipped, saved, and filed under appropriate subject headings, it can offer current data on any number of subjects. In many cases such printed matter is pasted on 8½ by 11" sheets of paper, identified as to source and subject matter, and filed by subject in manila folders in an office-type file.

In addition to the handling of these printed materials, the practice of including audio-visual materials and equipment in the church library is becoming increasingly popular. When these materials are cataloged along with the printed resources, a person who is looking for resource material will find all available materials indexed in one card catalog.

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Whatever his area of interest or need, he knows from one visit to the library what his church has to offer.

Audio-visual resources of a church library will also include the learning aids which, in many churches, lie unused for periods of time and are often wasted or misplaced because no one in particular feels responsible for them. Included are flat pictures, maps, portable chalkboards, cling boards (felt and others), spotlights, flip charts, sentence strip charts, and objects such as globes, candles, miniature church buildings, and strips of cloth for table draping.

When all of these materials are properly housed and cataloged, anyone who wishes to get resource materials soon learns to turn to his church library for whatever he wants (even for horned toads).

But a library ministry is more than materials. Materials and shelves make a library. Materials and shelves and dedicated workers make a library ministry. Sad indeed is the case of a church who must say "Resources, resources everywhere, but not a drop of interest in persons."

Any library of any size should try to have at least three workers. There is a tremendous amount of work in maintaining an effective library ministry, and one person will find himself either giving up or giving out in the face of an impossible task. A church library staff may vary in size from three to thirty or more persons. Work loads can be delegated according to interests and abilities. In a large library, not all workers will be involved in the actual circulating of materials when the library is open. The jobs of making catalog cards, pasting, marking, accessioning, and repairing can all be done in the "off hours" and behind the scenes.

The qualifications for church library workers should be the same as for any other church officers. Too often the question "Does he like to read?" is given more weight than, "Does he love God and his neighbor as himself?" A worker who is more interested in neat shelves and clean books than in the lives of persons who come to the library is out of place in a church library.

A church library should be an integral part of the church's educational organization. It should be provided for in the church operating budget, and the librarian should feel a stewardship obligation to make regular reports to the church.

The membership of a church will have greater respect for the church library if there are definite rules and specific hours by which it operates. Who may use the church library? Will fines be charged for overdue materials? Who is responsible for lost or damaged materials? How long can an item be kept out? All of these questions need to be clearly answered and the church membership should be made aware of the answers.

In addition to these administrative matters, a church library must decide what system of classification it is to use. Most church libraries will find the Dewey Decimal system of classification most adaptable to their use.

Moreover, for consistency in assigning subject headings to all material, a library will want to follow some recognized authority. *Sears List of Subject Headings* (9th ed.) published by the H. W. Wilson Company is excellent for this purpose. Whatever system of classifying or cataloging a library uses, consistency is a virtue not to be abandoned.

One further matter of consideration for church libraries is community relations. How

will the church library relate to other institutions and libraries in the area? The answer to this will vary with the size and location of the church. A large church in a busy metropolitan area, especially an inner-city church, will find many opportunities in a reading room ministry. Some church libraries are able to relate to college students by offering material not found in abundance in state-supported libraries.

A church in a rural or small community may be the only library available to residents of the area. In other locations the church library can make known its willingness to work with small public libraries in meeting requests not usually directed to public libraries.

The church is primarily interested in meeting the needs of individuals. The church library is the means of providing the resource material which will meet these needs most effectively. The material may be used to train workers, to extend the teaching-learning process beyond the classroom, or to offer help in meeting everyday problems of church members. A church that cares will provide through its church library materials to match the multiple needs of its people.

TWO THESES WRITTEN AT UNC

Two theses treating church libraries in depth have been written by students in the School of Library Science at UNC in Chapel Hill since the opening of the School in 1931.

The authors and titles of these theses are as follows:

1. Durrance, Joan C., *A Survey of Church Libraries*.
2. Whitehurst, Lillonteen, *A Survey of the Purposes and Trends of Church Libraries in the Southern Baptist Convention in North Carolina*.

Both theses were written in 1964.

The major portion of the study by Mrs. Durrance is devoted to a discussion of the 22 church libraries in the cities of West Palm Beach and Lake Worth, Florida as revealed through questionnaires and interviews. The writer attempts "to present an overall picture of the church library" coupled with "a picture of denominational church library service and its influence on and relationship to the local church library." In the final chapter of this thesis, the writer raises the question, "What is the responsibility of the library profession toward the church library?" Her answer is "the dispensing of accurate information both through professional literature and on the local level concerning the church library." She contends that "the professional librarian should become familiar with the materials and services made available to the local church library by the denominational church library departments."

The Whitehurst study is an analysis of the responses to a questionnaire sent to 83 church libraries which are members of the Southern Baptist Convention in the Tar Heel state.

In her thesis, Miss Whitehurst describes "the purpose of these libraries, their organizational framework, qualifications of the librarians, the nature and size of the book collections, and the preparation, organization, and use of the book collections in 32 of these churches." She concludes her study by offering suggestions "in an attempt to delineate the