Starting a Church Library

BY RON MANESS

Are you thinking about starting a library in your church? If so, this article sets forth some suggestions and some preliminary issues that you should consider.

Here is a recommended resource: The Church Librarian's Handbook by Betty McMichael. This book is very helpful and deals in detail with many of the issues discussed in this article. However, it is not currently in print. You can often find used copies at online or through other used book sources. Used copies of even earlier editions will still prove worth having.

1. Determine the specific groups you

have available: books, magazines, audiocassettes, DVDs, videocassettes, CD-rom, etc.

3. Determine whether you wish to begin with donated books, or with donated books plus a budget to acquire new books.

4. Determine the classification system to be used (the Dewey Decimal System is generally recommended for church libraries). If you use Dewey, then you need the three reference books listed below:

A. Sears List of Subject Headings, 18th Edition

then you can get by without item B, but if you want to use the wider range of Dewey classifications (for example, the 900 classification for history), then you will need item B as well. Most of the church libraries I consulted before using Dewey used the whole range of Dewey classifications.

This next book is not essential, but it is very helpful and not expensive: A Classification System for Church Libraries (Based on Dewey Decimal Classification System), Revised. It contains the Dewey classifications used most by church libraries to classify their entire stock.

- Book jackets for hard-cover books
- Tape for book jackets
- Date stampers and ink pads
- Boxes for checkout cards of books in circulation

Other supplies that can be purchased at more general locations include: clear contact paper to cover paperbacks, if desired (available at grocery stores with shelf papers), and a rubber stamp with church name, if desired (available from office supply stores).

6. Here are some sources for books and videos:
- Local seminary bookstore
- Christian bookstores (some give discounts for church libraries)
- Catalogs/Mail Order

7. Consider categories of books that you may wish to emphasize:
- Commentaries (individual, one-volume or sets)
- Books on systematic theology
- Books on various theological topics
- Reference books (concordances, Bible dictionaries)
- Books on church history

- Bible handbooks, guides to Bible study and interpretation
- Christian living—popular authors
- Books on leadership
- Books on specific areas of ministry
- Counseling
- Apologetics, Bible and science, creationism
- Christian biographies
- Puritan and other Christian classics
- Adult Christian fiction
- Books on families, marriage, child rearing
- Christian psychology
- Christian living, focusing on men, women, teens
- Christianity and culture/current issues
- Cults
- Missions, including missionary biographies
- Books for various age groups of children and youth (Bible stories for various age levels, fiction for various age levels, issues books for teens)

8. Inform church members of new book titles in library via bulletin inserts and/or the church Web site library section.

9. Define any desired parameters or limitations for doctrinal stance of commentaries and theology books for library. Reformed? Covenant? Dispensational? Charismatic? Or is conservative evangelical sufficient?

10. Determine whether you will use a) a manual card catalog with typed cards for author, title and subject or b) a computer-based catalog and circulation system.

11. Functions to be performed (will relate to staff requirements) include:
- Identifying types of books you want to acquire
- Visiting bookstores; purchasing books (or ordering from catalogs)
- Classifying books (using Dewey Decimal and Sears guides)
- Processing books (preparing and installing pockets, date due slip, checkout card and spine label; covering paperbacks with contact paper or adding clear book jacket covers to hard-backs)
- Preparing catalog cards, or entering

data in computer

- Typing description of book for "New Book List"
- Having someone to handle circulation; monitoring past dues; filing cards; inputting into computer
- Sending notices on past-due books
- Processing returned books and replacing them on shelves
- Filing checkout cards of newly checked out books

12. If you will have videocassettes, you will need to get a supply of empty plastic boxes to put the videos in, like the ones at Blockbuster in pre-DVD days. The video boxes have clear plastic sleeves, so you can cut up the cardboard box the video came in, and insert into the sleeves for easy identification. Most DVDs that you purchase will come in a plastic case, in which you can leave the DVD for circulation.

13. It is very important to have full support from the pastor and church leaders. They can encourage the members to establish regular reading habits and can recommend specific books. Prepare a booklet giving a basic list of recommended reading. There are already several booklets available that you could refer to for ideas or even use.

14. Visit different church libraries and see how they function.

15. Join a church library association or discussion group.

16. Encourage usage through the following methods:

- Put displays of new or recommended books somewhere outside the library.
- Encourage Sunday School teachers to bring in their classes for visits to the library.
- Encourage men's and women's groups, ministry groups, Bible study groups, etc. to recommend books to their members.
- Have the pastor occasionally recommend books from the pulpit.
- Encourage the formation of reading groups to read and meet to discuss one book each month.
- Do book reviews and make them available for library patrons.

- When a patron reads a book, and tells you how good it was, type up a card saying "Recommended by John Smith" along with a sentence or two about why. The card can be affixed to book or below it in a plastic sleeve on display shelf.
- On our library Web page, we maintain a list of accumulated quotes by well-known Christian leaders throughout church history on the importance of reading and Christian literature, and the influence particular books have had on their lives. **RPN**

Ron Maness and his wife Kay have been managing the library at Community Bible Chapel in Richardson, Texas, since 1981. They began their library work with several boxes of donated books and have seen the library grow to more than 11,000 volumes of books, along with more than 1,000 other media items such as videos, audios and DVDs. They have also seen the library develop from a manual card catalog system to a computerized system offering patrons online access through the Internet (www.communitybible.org).

Why Automate?

BY EVA NELL HUNTER

1. To keep up with the trends

People notice if we stay up with times and technology. Even though our libraries have a different purpose for existing, we are compared to public and school libraries as far as operations are concerned.

2. To make librarians' job easier

No one—including some church staff—has a more overwhelming job than church librarians! Churches owe it to their librarians to make their jobs as easy as possible. Automation is one of those answers.

3. To save both time and money

Many jobs can be done more efficiently. Think of card catalog files and catalog cards! One input in the computer will allow you to do multiple functions and give you the information needed for all cards. An online catalog makes the printing, filing and expense of cards obsolete.

4. To help to better organize

Steps for the operation of and responsibilities for the library functions are greatly enhanced because you do things in an orderly way. It is easier to delegate.

5. To increase usability of libraries

Because of the fantastic operation of a good software program, it is much easier to find what you need. Ease of searching online catalog for title, author, subject headings, memorials, honorariums, etc. makes it fun as well as very informational to search.

6. To make more efficient librarians

Think of mediagraphies. They can be made on the spot in minutes—or made ahead and placed in your vertical file. What about the counting of each piece of media checked out?

7. To make reporting a simple task.

Circulation reports can be a snap with the circulation feature of software. A holdings report can give the insurance committee the information needed for coverage of the library. Tracking and contacting patrons with overdue media is done with ease. An instant list of titles, accession and shelf lists, subject headings and other such lists make reporting more fun.
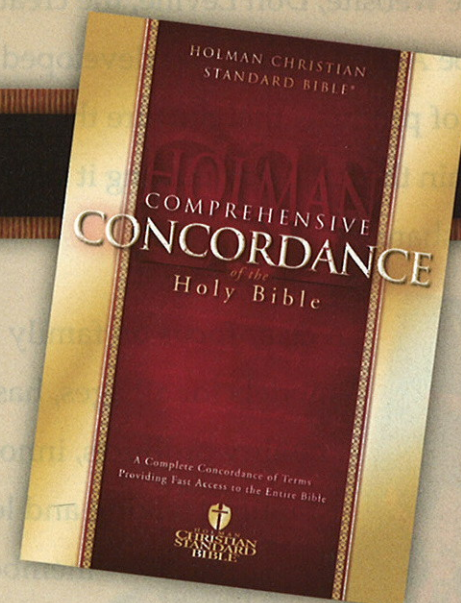
These are only a few of the reasons for automation. Perhaps you can name others. One thing stands out—if we do not want to be left behind in the area of automation and reaching people through media, we must add another dimension of service to our church library program.

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