

MINISTRY OF THE MONTH

SPOTLIGHTING YOUR GROUPS



Developing Your LIBRARY MINISTRY

By Ramona Brown Monsour and Helena Watson

A vital, visible and relevant library can be a significant resource to many areas of ministry, as well as a ministry itself. Spanning the generations of a congregation, modeling Christian stewardship, and encouraging outreach are all benefits of developing your church library ministry.

The concept of the library as a vital ministry is reinforced at Virginia Beach United Methodist Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia, by making it part of the Media Center's slogan: "Ministering

through Print, Audio and Visual Media." This congregation is invited to be part of the library ministry through active involvement.

"We have it listed as one of the possible ministry opportunities when people finish the Spiritual Gifts class offered by the church," said Betty Bridges, a member of the Media Center Team. "When you have staff mentioning library resources, referring parishioners to materials that are there, and even using it themselves for sermon preparation, you have made them members of your team!"

By reaching across all generations with

the resources in the library, there is an appeal to everyone. This can easily be accomplished by offering age-appropriate resources and materials.

Whether it is books to reinforce sermons and Sunday School lessons, reference material to aid those in Bible study groups, books on Christian living, or current Christian novels, your library is a place all congregants should be able to look for support and resources.

Specific age-appropriate resources for children and teens make the library relevant to many families. A visible and attractive library with tangible materials and audio re-

sources will also appeal to all learning styles. Ideally, your library should provide different materials for those at different stages in their faith-walk.

Michael Fink, Jr., author of *Life Way: Biblical Solutions for Life* writes, “Resources for the earliest experiences...should focus on (God’s) grace. As believers mature in their faith, that love will be expressed through avenues such as Bible study, worship, piety and stewardship.”

Your library provides an excellent model of stewardship to your congregation. Through the wise purchasing and display of current resources, the congregation is encouraged to use the library.

One copy of a book can serve a multitude of families and individuals. For those struggling financially, a current and relevant library provides opportunities for learning and growth that might otherwise be neglected.

Donations of resources and books and budgeted funding can help to build this vital ministry. Barry Moore, interim minister at Metropolitan United Church in London, Ontario, has donated books to the library to tie in with his sermons.

Any books he would like returned to him are offered to the library on temporary loan. This means that people in the congregation get the benefit of further reading on a particular subject without having to buy the book themselves.

Having the library ministry team oversee what is being used provides indicators to guide them so they can wisely purchase new resources and do so in a financially responsible way. The team will often know who the main users of the library are and can look for new materials with these people in mind. Ministry leaders and staff can also add valuable information to the purchasing decisions.

Your church library is also a place where outreach can happen naturally while talking about a book or video. It is easier to initiate conversations with newcomers when talking about something neutral, like a book, video, or DVD.

Heidi Ross, co-ordinator of the Family Resource Centre at Moncton Wesleyan Church in Moncton, New Brunswick, sees

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this as fitting in beautifully with their church’s outreach statement, which is “to use every available means, to reach every available person, at every available time.”

A visible and accessible library with comfortable places to read or browse, as well as places to gather or linger to talk, encourages relationships and provides a more neutral environment than the sanctuary for those new to the Christian journey.

Besides being physically visible and accessible, the library must also be visible and searchable on your church website. Can newcomers and long-time churchgoers find it easily? Is there a link for the church library directly on the home page of your website? Individuals will use the library when they have easy access to it.

In addition to visibility and accessibility, the most effective library ministries are current, automated, and stay connected to all its users and potential users.

In order for the resources in the library to stay current, the ministry team needs to have opportunities to learn and grow from training and conferences. The budget needs to allow for purchases of new releases and other significant resources. Also, the team must know what is or isn’t being used in the existing collection.

“Old books (unless they are classics), should be regularly discarded,” said Patti Tan of the Kortright Presbyterian Church library team in Guelph, Ontario.

An efficient and easy way to stay current and knowledgeable about the collection is to have the library automated. When information about the library is only a mouse click away, it is easier to find specific resources, make suggestions, track use and circulation, make note of books on loan to the library, and list future purchases.

Ross of Moncton Wesleyan said, “Our church leadership has also entrusted the library with custody of the many multimedia study series materials it has purchased, because our software solution does such a

great job of tracking and controlling circulation.”

Finally, communication is essential. The library ministry is built through connections and communication. Ideally, this will happen on two levels: between the library team and the minister(s), and between the library team and the congregation.

Metropolitan United suggests inviting the pastoral team for coffee in the library for an opportunity to become more familiar with it and to see what it has to offer. This will make it easier for the pastoral team to use and to promote the library, as well as make suggestions about books and resources that may be valuable to add to the collection.

Communication methods with the congregation about the library ministry can be varied. Sharing information with bulletin notices highlighting new acquisitions, relevant resources being pointed out by ministers or study group leaders, and testimonies about how a resource challenged or helped someone to grow in their spiritual life have all been helpful strategies.

The most valuable communication with the congregation is through the personal connections and contacts made by the library ministry team. The better they know their users, the more relational the library team is, and the more significant the library can be as a ministry.

Your church library is a tremendous ministry opportunity. It can reach all age groups, and it can support the outreach into the community. It has the potential to strengthen, counsel, and encourage, all while being a financially sound investment. **RPN**

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