

Book Selection

Ask: How do you select materials for your library? Raise hands...How many of you...browse bookstore? Use recommended book lists? Buy only green books? Purchase only books by Christian publishers? Buy every Amish romance that is published?

What are the three things you need to make a decision about new resources for your church library? Knowledge and Tools and Skill

Knowledge:

- ❖ Know your collection! There is no substitute for being familiar with what you have, and yes, it takes time! You are not wasting time when you are simply standing there and looking at the titles! Because...when you are familiar with the materials on your shelves, you will be aware of its strengths and its weaknesses. You may find out that you really do have 12 Amish romance books! You may also discover that you have no materials on hospitality!
- ❖ Know that the strengths and weakness of your collection change over time – because of current trends, issues in broader society and in your congregation,
- ❖ Know quality when you see it! Construction, durability, can withstand multiple uses. (I love pop up books, but I refuse to buy them) Develop a critical eye when it comes to illustrations.

Tools:

Check It Out A monthly list of fine resources is compiled by Marlene Bogard for the Conference Resource Library. Available on www.mennowdc.org / library

Professional Library Reviews in Book list, Horn Book, Library Journal, School Library Journal. These journals are all professional and therefore pricey, but talk to your public or school librarians and see if you can borrow their copies. Become aware of publishers theology/philosophy. Just because it is labeled as “Christian fiction,” doesn’t mean it is a great read.

Reviews in Religious Periodicals. Annual editions of *Christian Century*, *Christianity Today*, *Sojourner*, and a host of other religious periodicals often have a “best of the year” edition. Their editors and writers compile a list of what they deem are most important, quality books for the year.

Reviews in Mennonite Publications. *The Mennonite*, *Mennonite Weekly Review*, *Timbrel*, etc. include reviews and blurbs about new books and videos.

Bookstores. Browse, read, dream, buy, and make lists!

Preview everything when possible. If you order unseen, be sure you can return items if they are not suitable.

Network with church, public and school librarians.

Skill:

When selecting, you may have to shelve your bias. Set aside any personal agenda you may have and seek that which is best for the congregation. Remember, a church library is a ministry that you are participating in on behalf of your congregation, so the resources you select may or may not be your personal choice. One librarian was very excited because as

soon as she put out new fiction, lots of women came in to check them out. She received a wake up call when a man came into the church library to tell her that the new books did not really appeal to him and ask if she would please consider some “all purpose” fiction, or at least some that was not popular serials. She had put her preference for reading “gentle reads” over that of the needs of the entire congregation and had slighted the male readers.

Which leads me to the important matter of **balance**. There is a balance that needs to be maintained between developing the collection based on demand or on over all quality. If the former is used solely, then you will have more materials heavily influenced by popular culture. For example, if you buy every Amish romance book that is available, yes, you will be a popular place with the women readers, but do you risk losing another segment of readers? What are some other temptations you may face with buying only on demand?

Selection Policies are foundational to book selection.

Selection Policies

A good, sturdy selection policy will

1. Support your mission/purpose statement of your church library
2. Define who you are and are not: we will purchase resources to support the Christian Education programs of the congregation, we are not an archive, we do not provide storage space for leftover church bulletins or unused SS material, we do
3. Detail a Gift/Donation Policy Ask: do you need to keep every book that is donated? How will you determine what to keep and what to graciously refuse? What happens when a gift book is no longer used? Do you have a procedure that determines what to do with those? (**HANDOUT: When a policy paper isn't enough!**)
4. Explain how to de-select a.k.a. **Weed!** This policy will help to determine how to evaluate what is useful, how long to keep something in circulation, and provide reasons why an item should be removed. (**See my handout on Weeding**)

General Criteria for Materials Selection (books, videos, other formats) Each item selected for the collection should meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Support the on-going ministries of the congregation
- Contemporary or permanent value
- Quality of writing, design, illustrations
- Reputation of publisher or producer; significance of author
- Relevance to interests and needs of congregation.
- Potential or known demand for the material
- Cost
- Balance – will it fill a gap in the collection? Compliment existing resources?
- Availability of materials elsewhere
- Suitability of subject, style and level for intended audience
- Evaluation of critics and reviewers, both professional and lay people
- Consider recommendations of pastoral staff and church leadership
- Space limitations

Further Criteria for works of imagination such as fiction, poetry and drama:

- Representation of a significant trend, genre or culture

- Vitality and originality
- Artistic merit and literary value
- Authenticity of historical or social setting
- Effective characterization

Sample Gift Policy

The Busy Bee Church Library accepts gifts of materials, but reserves the right to evaluate and dispose of them in accordance with the criteria applied to purchased materials. (see above). Gift materials which are not in accordance with the library's objectives and policies will be sold and the monies used for purchase of desired library resources. No gift materials will be accepted with "strings attached." We welcome cash donations for the purchase of materials in memory or honor of a person. A "wish list" of desired books is available.

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