

Weeding a Church Library

*** Warning ***

Weeding a library is not for the faint of heart!

As librarians, we are trained to cherish and maintain a collection of books and other materials. Therefore, it is normal for some of us to feel uncomfortable about getting rid of books.

However – weeding is every bit as important as selecting a book to put in the library. In fact, as we weed, we continue to select what remains on the shelf and in circulation. You might want to think of weeding as de-selection.

Weeding is essential!

Every church library comes upon a time when the shelves become too full. Often times the fullness can be attributed to books that should have been removed from the shelves years ago. Weeding is difficult. Sentimentality often prevents us from being objective about a particular item. Nevertheless, proper weeding of any library is one sure way to increase its usefulness and attractiveness to your congregation.

Benefits of Weeding:

- Space is saved! If a book is not being used, why is it taking up valuable shelf space?
- Time is saved! Crowded shelves that hold ragged books with illegible markings waste time for both the person searching for a book and the person shelving.
- Immediate appeal! Circulation will increase simply because the shelves look nicer. More of the books appear to be new because they are no longer overshadowed by older books. The adage “less is more” holds true.
- Upgraded! The average age of your books will be newer.

MUSTY is an acronym offered by Joseph Segal, in his book, *Evaluating and Weeding the Collection*. This is a helpful aid, as it suggests five negative factors which along with your most objective attitude could mark a book for weeding.

M – Misleading. The book is factually inaccurate. Examples would be information about the world and geography, statistics, scientific facts.

U – Ugly. The book is worn and beyond mending or rebinding. It looks tired.

S – Superseded. There is a new edition available or a better book on the subject.

T – Trivial. The book is of no discernible merit.

Y – Your collection has not real need for this book. Do you need five biographies on Helen Keller? Is this a book or subject area that would be well covered in your local public library?

The **MUSTY** acronym *along with the last date of use* can usually define if the book should stay or go. Some church libraries may want to discard a book if it has not been used in 5 years, others may prefer to wait 8-10 years since the last checkout.

Keepers.

Of course there are books in your library that you may never choose to retire. These would include classics in the traditional sense, as well as those who have lasting value in the Mennonite realm. Books on Mennonite history, theology, biblical studies, culture, as well as local and regional authors will most likely find a permanent niche in your collection.

Book Sale.

Many church libraries hold a used book sale to “re-distribute” culled books. I recommend that you limit it to 2-3 weeks and ask for donations (25 cent minimum) that will go towards purchase of new materials. What is left after the book sale can go to a used bookstore, thrift store or the trash. (You don’t have to state that last part if it is too scary!)

Opposition...Typically, the library committee will find some opposition to the idea of weeding. A frequent comment might be, “ But that is such a good book, how can you get rid of it?” An appropriate response might be, “If it is such a good book, why hasn’t it been checked out in seven years?” Be prepared to offer a statement of why you are weeding and what your long term goals are for the library. “We are weeding so that we can have more space for new books and offer better service to our congregation. We are offering these worn treasures to the congregation at a book sale. Come and take home a favorite and leave a donation for new books.”

Gift/Memorial books...Another difficult situation may arise when a gift or memorial book is considered for weeding. Be sure your library has a policy that clearly states any intentions you have for the eventual discarding of such materials when they are no longer popular or useful. An effort might be made to contact any relatives or close friends of the person in whose name the gift or memorial book was initially given. Offer it to them before placing it on the sale table.

Courage, dear friends! Remember, if you want a church library that is useful and appealing to your congregation, you do know what you must do. Be courageous, be objective, weed!

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