

## As a church library chapter celebrates 40 years, a librarian discusses **Little libraries that could**

Alyssa Waters, *Leader-Telegram*

**EAU CLAIRE, Wisconsin** — Kathy Ralston knows there are public libraries throughout the Chippewa Valley. She knows people can get books from Amazon.com or at any bookstore in the mall.

But what Ralston wants you to know is that church libraries, although small, have fascinating books too.

The West Central Wisconsin Chapter of the National Church Library Association is celebrating 40 years this month. As a member of the association, Ralston is hoping people get reacquainted with their church's library.

"It's for the joy of reading, and it's refreshing," Ralston said. "Not only do you learn things, but I really do think that reading provides some brain stimulation that watching TV doesn't provide."

Ralston, who is one of many librarians at Peace Lutheran Church, said she knew little about church libraries until she got involved at her church.

"I had to go to our minister's wife and say, 'Can you teach me or tell me some Christian authors,'" Ralston said. "You can teach yourself a lot, but it's helpful to be around people that are doing some of the things you are."

That's why Ralston decided to become involved in the association, which has a national following with more than 20 chapters.

Ralston admits that when many people think about church libraries they think about older adults peddling books. Reality, however, is quite different.

"I think we are getting younger women involved in working with their church libraries," she said. "We strive to have a comfortable, inviting library."

Most church libraries have kept up with the times in that they not only have Christian books— both fiction and nonfiction— but they also have compact discs and DVDs.

"We put in good books that reflect Christian values," she said. "We sometimes will go and pick out books that technically aren't 'family Christian' but are important to read."

And, although Ralston would like to see more people join the West Central Wisconsin Chapter of the association, what she really wants is for people to begin reading and keep reading.

"One thing about books is that they remind us . . . that there's another world out there besides our small world," she said. "It's a wonderful thing to do with your children.

"If (church librarians) didn't believe that God can work through those books, we wouldn't do it".

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