

Designing a materials-selection policy

In the last issue, we stepped through the process of establishing your library's mission statement. With mission or purpose statement in hand, the next crucial step is to determine what policies will guide your acquisition of resources and materials.

Begin by considering these basic questions:

- What materials, other than books, will you include in the collection?
- Will you include items reflecting opposing, but equally credible, viewpoints?
- Will you include high-quality items of fiction? For adults? For children?
- Will you include items from secular as well as religious publishers/producers?

Just as the needs of each church library differ, the enormous amount of material available for inclusion in the library differs greatly. Each deserves to be evaluated on its own merits. Here are hints that the Library Action Group in our congregation developed. You may want to make them part of your policy that will guide library purchases and decisions.

Does this item:

- Help fulfill the mission statement of the congregation?
- Promote, or at least not detract from, the specific theology of our denomination?
- Help us learn about other faiths or beliefs accurately?
- Fill a need in our congregation?
- Which of the many groups within our congregation will likely use it?
- Is it repetitive? Do we have something else like it?
- Is the author credible and reputable? Is the publisher?
- Has the item been reviewed in print by a credible source? (Even if the reviewer

questions the value, the resource may still have value for our library!)

- Is the item well written/produced? Of interest to the average library user?
- Well-made? Will the binding last? Will the paper hold up?
- Is the print easy-to-read? Do we need a large-print copy instead?
- If an audiovisual, is it sturdy? Colors true? Sound quality good?
- Is any violence appropriate to the material and the audience, and is it balanced by a positive resolution?
- Are the illustrations of excellent quality? (especially crucial for children's books)
- Is the cost comparable to other items of similar quality? Is it reasonable for this item—and for our needs?

Write the policy and refine it with the help of staff and library users. Follow through by having it affirmed by the staff and Church Council. And most important of all, use it as you evaluate and select items for the library. Your library truly deserves to be a selection, not simply a collection of materials. ■

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