

A good donation policy—a church librarian's best defense

Anyone who has ever volunteered to help in a church library has likely arrived one day to find a mysterious bag, box or pile of books. Sometimes there is a note indicating they are donations for the library from a specific someone, but more often they just appear. While these might be wonderful treasures and perfect additions to the collection, often they might better have been passed along somewhere else.

Now the problem is the library's! Without a written policy, it is difficult, delicate, and often arbitrary to deal with donations.

Your best bet is to develop a donation policy with the help of your library committee. Then have it approved by the pastor(s) and church council. Tell the congregation about the policy through a newsletter article or postings in the library. Be sure the office staff knows about the policy, too—sometimes donations are left with them!

Three tips to protect your library

Tell people how the donated items will be evaluated. Our policy says that any items donated will be evaluated using the same criteria as items the library purchases. It also says that gift and donation items will be evaluated by at least three members of the Library committee and a decision made about acceptance.

Explain how the item will be processed and added to the collection. You might simply say that it will be processed and added in the same

manner as a new purchase. If you use an accession book, note the donor there. Some libraries place a bookplate in donated books or indicate a gift in some other way, while other congregations have made a decision that gifts and donations of any kind are not publicized. Be sure you know what is the policy of your congregation in that regard.

Explain what will happen to items that are not appropriate for the library collection. You may want to specify that the items will be returned to the donor but remember this only works if you know who that donor was! Our policy simply says "If the item is not accepted, the Library Action Group will see that it is disposed of in an appropriate manner." That gives our Action Group the possibilities of sharing with another church or public library, donating the books to some other group, or simply recycling the unusable ones without any hurt feelings.

A small amount of planning can save many headaches! A simple policy with only these three points can make the life of church library volunteers infinitely easier. ■

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