

How to Begin or Renew a Church Library

By Sue Berthelot

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light and there was light.’” (Genesis 1:1-3. HCSB). This passage could also be describing the beginning of a church library ministry. In the Living Bible verse 2: “the earth was at first a shapeless, chaotic mass . . .” When this new ministry is first contemplated by a church, it has no shape and its intended space is dark. If the church is trying to revive the ministry, it may seem like a chaotic mass.

Beginning a library ministry or reviving a dormant library is an exciting time in the life of a church. Planning with the pastor and other church leaders how this vital new ministry will enhance the life of the church family can be an invigorating experience. In the beginning stages of planning a library many questions must be answered.

1. **What is the mission statement and vision for your church family?** Everything done by a church library team needs to carry out the mission and vision of your church family.
2. **Who? What? When? Where? How?** Explore the answers to these questions as you apply the mission and vision of the church to the ministry of the church library.
3. **How will our library team be organized?** Consider the types of spiritual gifts needed by individuals on the church library ministry team. Identify the types of positions for team members. A team leader is one position. The other positions need to relate to responsibilities assigned to team members. For example, your team may have a technical specialist and a promotion specialist.
4. **How will we train our team?** You will find several avenues are available for training your church library team.
 - A. [Equipping Church Librarians for Ministry](#) has seven certificate plans for you to use as a planning and training guide through the Church Librarians Network. These courses can be done individually, as a team, or in a conference.
 - B. Your denomination, association and/or state convention may sponsor library networks as well as training conferences throughout the year.
 - C. In addition, you will find a few [articles on Lifeway.com](#) to be excellent training tools to use with your team. Articles are also available on the [Church Librarians Network](#).
5. **What criteria will we use for selecting media?** The church library ministry has the responsibility to serve as steward of media resources that strengthen and support the total church ministry. A selection and gift policy is suggested to help guide the library team with selection decisions. This policy is also very important to help when unsuitable material is donated. The selection policy needs to be voted on by the church in a business meeting, thus reflecting the desires of the church rather than the opinion of one individual. A sample policy is in the resource [Church Library Ministry Information Service](#).
6. **How do we plan a budget?** Budget planning is an important task that impacts everything else through the year. Budgeting information and forms are available in the resource [Church Library Ministry Information Service](#).

7. **What About Space and Furnishings?** Look for a location with high traffic flow, where people gather, and that is easily accessible. A separate room is best but a table or a mobile shelving unit works well. For more information about space and furnishings, see the resource *Church Library Ministry Information Service* and the free download [*Church Library Space, Furnishings, and Interior Design*](#).
8. **How Do We Circulate Media?** Develop policies regarding the hours the library will be open, length of time media can be borrowed, the use of fines for past-due media returns, and other circulation concerns. For guidance, use the resource [*Church Library Ministry Information Service*](#).
9. **How Do We Prepare Media for Circulation?** The technical tasks of accessioning, cataloging, labeling, storing, and shelving are important parts of the preparation of media. Tools for helping you do these actions include [*A Classification System for Church Libraries, Revised Edition*](#) and [*Church Library Ministry Information Service*](#).
10. **How Do We Encourage People to Use the Library?** Promoting the use of the library involves planning for the visual, verbal, printed and activity-oriented ideas. Begin circulation as soon as media processing has begun rather than waiting until everything completed. Help people feel they are part of the new library ministry. This approach will generate excitement and become a great promotional tool. The resource [*Church Library Ministry Information Service*](#) will provide you with ideas for a great start in promoting your library. In addition, the online book [*Creating Promotion That Communicates*](#) by Charles Businaro will guide you in designing promotion materials.
11. **What Services Should We Provide?** The basic service of the library is to provide easy access to appropriate media. As personnel and resources are available, add services such as story time for children, media clubs, book reviews, and special support activities for age-group ministries. For guidance, use the resource [*Church Library Ministry Information Service*](#).

As your church launches this promising ministry, take each step with prayer. Each phase is very important and organization will be the key to getting a quality ministry up and going. The most important key is prayer. Remember, every church library had a beginning . . .

In the Beginning . . .

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