

A theological OPAL

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A few weeks ago I was reading the weekend newspaper and noticed an article in the careers section on librarianship. Naturally I immediately began to read : "In the ideal workplace, all your workmates are kind, friendly people. There's no hard sell, no dirty or hard, physical work and the job involves helping people. Libraries do not quite reach this nirvana of labour but they come close. Surveys have put librarians right at the bottom of the list of how stressful jobs are." Well obviously the writer was not talking to an OPAL nor did the librarian being interviewed recently acquire the Gillespie library which must be very high on the list for filth. Actually it was suggested that we wear gloves when handling the Gillespie books but I don't think I could have kept up with the laundry! No dirt, no hard physical work, no stress!! My heart specialist said to me recently, "Oh you just carry a few boxes occasionally - perhaps you had better look at some regular walking." I thought 'Does running count? Weight-lighting? Stair-sprints?'

I would like today to talk about my personal experiences in a one-person library many of which will be most familiar to other one-person librarians. When I first went to the Presbyterian Theological Centre I was very fortunate. The Presbyterian Church had had to re-establish its education of prospective ministers after church union. The library therefore was only started in the early 1980s but had as its foundation an excellent collection of biblical studies from the library of the late Rev. Stuart Petrie who had been a scholar of some note. It had not been set up by a librarian but the Principal had sought expert help and then carried out the task himself Thus that which had been done was basically correct in the areas of acquisition, classification and cataloguing but all these tasks had been done in a simplified fashion. Consequently when I was appointed in early 1989 as the first librarian my objective was to build on what was there. Obviously there were problems in that there needed to be more specific classification and more comprehensive cataloguing; some works had to be married; and books which did not follow normal author entry rules such as Bibles and Conferences needed to be re-done. Nevertheless I did not have years and years of horrible blunders to repair.

One of the most amazing things I encountered was that quite a few times in the early days the Principal would say "If you run out of things to do you could always help in the office"!! Fortunately he now sees a whole range of library services which he did not know existed and is always trying to find funding so that I can work more hours. This I think can be a major problem in smaller and even in some medium size institutions (although not at P.T.C.) Some Principals and faculty are short-sighted when it comes to libraries. Even though they may have studied for their qualifications at university libraries they do not realise how good a small library can be or how vital it is to make the small library effective. How many times do we come across people without library experience being given the small college library to run? I feel for these people - the task of operating a one person library is so complicated and demanding without having to be floundering in the dark as well. In this regard I think we, as an organisation, owe it to both them and our profession to institute some strategies to improve the situation. Obviously the quarterly

Chapter meetings and the Annual Conferences go a long way to help but we could consider the possibility of two-day seminars on particular issues perhaps a couple of times a year. Reading lists could be circulated or at least be available. Our Pettee group in New South Wales is hoping to meet more frequently for example. Another option is a mentor system when an experienced librarian would be available for each person. The problem of professional isolation is a very real one with the lack of daily contact with other librarians - something which is taken for granted in larger libraries. A mentor system could overcome frustrations with classification; provide new avenues of supply; expose a greater availability of works in your field; build a support system for encouragement. I maintained my own unofficial mentor system in that, in the early years, I harangued Hans or Kim on reference or Ann Prichard on classification. Last year for three months I had the opportunity to work at the Camden Library and not only was I exposed to a far different collection from mine but I saw a greater variety of publishers' catalogues and learnt of some interesting smaller collections that are held there. At the same time I "grew" a relationship with my colleagues there. An official mentoring system would benefit so many one person librarians.

One person librarians need to be constantly open to learning as much can be gleaned from larger libraries with larger resources in staffing and finances. Although budgets are generally restrictive some practices can be adapted on a smaller scale. Automation and on-line facilities are obviously one option to be followed through but even a study of another's Reference Collection can provide much fruit and often great excitement. Another way of building and improving your collection can be in the improvement of your subject knowledge. I know it has been said in the past at these very Conferences that a librarian should be able to research any field of knowledge successfully by using his or her professional skills. This is true in a general reference sense but I don't believe that in-depth research can be directed or carried out without a really good subject knowledge. This is a long-term project but essential when there is no-one in the library to turn to for help. (Although I notice the Theology Librarian at the Library of Congress classified a book called *The Laments of Jeremiah* at Lamentations instead of Jeremiah - who did she ask for help? She certainly didn't check the Bible or she would have found she had too many chapters for Lamentations!) I myself find tremendous benefit in the fact that I am doing an Advanced Diploma of Theology - albeit at a very slow pace. Even attending lectures occasionally can give you a greater insight as to the direction the course is taking and can often highlight gaps in the library collection particularly if you are trying to do an assignment.

Of course there are many problems like the importance of subject knowledge which are peculiar to one person libraries. I was asked if I would include in my talk something on the topic of empowerment. The day this request came about was most appropriate. For three years we have had a visiting lecturer from the Presbyterian Church in America and on his departure for home I was asked if I would help clean his house! Being an old house it was not an easy job and all the time I was taking apart the toilet to scour its hidden parts I was thinking - what has this to do with librarianship? But it does have to do with working together in the College and building relationships with faculty for they were there too and, after all, what did house cleaning have to do with lecturing? This is where

theological libraries can differ somewhat from other specialised libraries. For I see librarianship in theology as a ministry rather than a job or a career. (In fact there is little point using the one-person library as a career move as there is basically nowhere to go!) In addition there are huge benefits in coming to the one-person library at the end of one's career than at the beginning for experience in a number of library situations can prove invaluable. My service to the library and to the college community is tied in with the service exercised by the faculty and the office assistant and anyone else who is committed to the Mission Statement of the P.T.C.

The Presbyterian Theological Centre exists to glorify God and advance his gospel mission by equipping candidates for the ordained ministry of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, deaconess candidates and other Christian men and women to walk with God; to understand, apply and communicate the Scriptures; and to lead God's people in diverse forms of Christian service.

Please don't misunderstand me - I don't want to appear smug; we are not a higher breed of librarians by any means and I'm sure you would find the same strong commitment amongst medical librarians, for example. However we might be able to cope with the frustrations and set-backs more easily when we are committed to a fine purpose. Morris West stated in a recent interview that "the exercise of power involves service". But note he said service not 'servile'. Yes, we can draw the line at helping in the office and answering the telephone when everybody is unavailable but going the extra mile in a lot of cases brings untold benefits to the library. If, for example, I have a backlog of books to be processed I might invite faculty to see if there is anything they need for a course that I can pull out and process immediately. If someone is looking for an older book and it is not in the catalogue I will check the donations and if it is there will process the work for loan availability. My objective is to have the Gillespie collection available for use in some acceptable way instead of waiting until it is processed.

In return I encourage faculty to tell me of anything useful they might turn up in their research outside the college. I pick their brains for new authors in theology or new trends I might have missed. Our American lecturer browsed widely and put me onto at least two theologians I had not discovered in my reading. Being a small college I have been able to organise birthday morning teas for staff. Even though the librarian is neither faculty nor student and thus not privy to faculty meetings these morning teas provide great sources of information for future benefit. Every cake baked is worthwhile! - and the fellowship is great too. If you are asked to join or lead a fellowship group or if everyone, staff and students are all at Chapel Service except you do you refuse to partake? No - if you really worry about the time lost come in an hour earlier or leave an hour later. This time might be a real source of refreshment. You may be the middle child of the college family but you are an integral member of that family and can sometimes be the lynch pin between staff and students. These are matters peculiar to theological libraries but by spending time building one to one relationships I often find that others set boundaries for me - for example, sometimes the Principal will ask the students not to bother me with trivial requests that they can, with more effort on their part solve themselves, because I am

particularly snowed under at the time. The Student Representative Council will point out to students the fact that they might be "using me" without any prompting on my part.

This serves to illustrate what I believe about working relationships. At the risk of being controversial, and I know it is because it is a subject which spilled over into the library from an recent Ethics lecture, may I say that if we look to our responsibilities others by the same method will be taking caring of our rights. That, of course, is not an attitude strongly nurtured in today's world and human nature being the way it is it doesn't always work! But it does seem to function most of the time in my situation.

Now everything in the garden is not always rosy. You are not only isolated from other librarians but you are also isolated in no-man's land - or should I say no-woman's land? It is probably well known that in the Presbyterian Church a decision has been made not to ordain women. May I add that this is never a viewpoint pushed at the Centre but there are some there who believe it is a correct biblical decision and sometimes you may feel your status is unconsciously neglected because of your gender. Of course this has benefits in that, if for example, there is a family problem which needs attention there is never any question as to where the priority is and great understanding is given. May I stress however that this matter is really not worth worrying about!! Sometimes I feel it might be more my imagination than anything else. The only time when it may have been an issue was when we embarked on a large building extension project in which the size of the library was approximately doubled. I approached the person in charge of the project on a number of occasions with the objective of establishing exactly the details of the new library set-up. A vague wave of the hand and the architect's drawings shown to me were meant to suffice. Numerous requests for a meeting with the architect and builder were politely shelved. I was not to be thwarted! Here was an opportunity to develop the library to its best potential. I prepared a four page brief on the matters which needed to be considered - sound proofing, electrical wiring, telephone points, lighting, security, air-conditioners, workrooms, furnishings, access during building and the procedures for physically moving the collection back and forth. I then gatecrashed one of the faculty's leisurely lunches (very politely of course) and handed each a copy of the brief. The silence was deafening and the results gratifying. My meeting with the architect was organised. To ensure every detail was followed through I worked through whilst everybody conveniently avoided the disruption by going on vacation. This proved to be invaluable as many on the spot decisions needed to be made - size of a doorway, positioning of switches, retention of sinks, etc, etc. I should add here that the person in charge of the building project had a particularly heavy work-load at the time. With the Principal on sabbatical leave he was Acting in this role in addition to his normal duties so obviously attention to detail was something which was almost an impossible priority but nevertheless it was essential to me!

This brief was an example of the benefits of reporting. I have never been asked to present an Annual Report but have always done so. Any major project such as the building extensions or the Gillespie Library procedures has been reported. Every so many years I carry out a survey on book buying covering subject categories and average prices of books in each subject area. I always draw faculty's attention to the ANZTLA statistics so that

they can compare our progress with other libraries. Over the years this reporting seems to have enhanced the value of the library. I am also very fortunate in that all the faculty have always been most supportive of the library and keen to build on its strengths. In fact the building extensions were undertaken primarily to increase library space.

Incidentally my method of procuring a library meeting is often the only way to go in a small college where every member of faculty is so overloaded with extra tasks that programming a library meeting as such seems to them to be another extra they don't need. I could probably take this as a compliment that they feel everything is running well but there is always more to be achieved. However I know I can always go straight to the Principal with a problem as it arises and it can be discussed and solved instantaneously. But regular library meetings are naturally beneficial and I aim sometime in the future to establish them. Possibly the best way to achieve a good response is to just suggest every couple of months that I join the faculty for lunch to discuss some library matters. It would be a good opportunity for me to take a lunch break!! Lunch to me, if it occurs, is a quick bite at my desk perusing book reviews or the latest journal articles. In a one-person library the housekeeping must be done systematically and the in-basket empty at the end of the day or panic sets in. Busyness often also means that you are not on the "need to know" list as often as possible but I keep in touch through the Office Assistant or through checking the Minutes of Committee meetings.

There are of course great benefits in doing all the jobs! By the time you have picked up a book in a publisher's catalogue; read a review; checked it against holdings and present orders; ordered it; taken delivery of it; given it its acquisition number; classified it; catalogued it; covered it; displayed it; shelved it; it tends to stay in your brain to the point where you can even find a book which is only vaguely described by subject content but specifically described by the colour and design of its cover. Even with the assistance of 'compulsory' student volunteers you need to be most careful as to what you give each to do. You must be aware of their gifts - are they systematic or not, for example - before you allot them duties. Shelving to me is only doled out to those with a proven record. Let volunteers return books and file on the trolley but shelving must be a carefully assigned duty. With the time constraints of a one-person library I don't need to be searching endlessly for a book which I know should be there. It is much more economical in time for me sometimes to shelve books than waste time searching everywhere the following week. Because of the essential tasks which must be done day by day larger projects have to be slotted in over long periods and sometimes you think they are never going to end. I am finding even after nearly ten years that there is still one major job to be undertaken before I face the huge task of processing the Gillespie collection. I have to be realistic and acknowledge that I may never process all the donations. However they are shelved by author/editor so that they are an accessible collection and I occasionally take a trolley load back to my workroom. But work is an exciting challenge even when I sit up in bed at one in the morning surrounded by catalogues. A one-person librarian once said to me "What do you find to take home to do?" I still can't understand that question.

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