



# The Theology Library in the 21st Century

by Vicki Tkacz

## Introduction

**H**ow does a small library cope with the demands of the 21st century? In my opinion, the main issue can be succinctly stated in three words.

Service                      Success                      Survival

One has to constantly remember that just because you think you have got the service delivery right and operating successfully, this doesn't mean that the survival of the library is guaranteed. We have seen this on many occasions. The answer for me can be summed up in four strategies:

Plan                      Perform                      Promote                      People

In other words, get it right, do it very well *but most importantly* don't do it quietly and *never* forget the importance of the library team.

Before discussing the specific strategies we are implementing in our Library to take us into the 21st century, it is necessary to outline the Library's background and the organizational context in which we operate.

## Our background

### History

The Catholic Library had its beginnings as a teachers' resource centre based in Nedlands in 1973. It was later incorporated into the Catholic Institute in 1976 taking the name of the Catholic Institute Resource Centre. In 1987 it was given new terms of reference by the WA Conference of Bishops and was reorganised and renamed as the Catholic Library of WA. It was also relocated to the Catholic Education Centre in Leederville. In 1999, the WA Bishops decreed that the management of the Catholic Library would pass to the Catholic Education Commission and consequently it now operates as a library service within the Catholic Education Office (CEO) whilst also maintaining its original purpose and role.

### Organizational Context

In 2001, the Bishops of Western Australia issued a Mandate letter which shared their vision for the Catholic education system in the new millennium. Subsequently, in 2002, the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia developed a statement *Living the Vision* to embrace the Bishops' vision, the focus of which is:

"We in Catholic education seek to create environments that enhance learning, nurture young people and empower them to live the Catholic faith in the spirit of Jesus" (*Mandate 2002*).

The Catholic Education Office bases its Strategic Action Plan on the *Living the Vision* statement and all staff are "encouraged to embrace the messages embedded within the



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statement and personalise them to reflect the work they are currently doing and expect to do in the future". (*Strategic Action Plan 2003-2007*)

#### **Purpose and Role**

To support the religious education, theological and pastoral needs of the Catholic community of Western Australia, and through it, to the wider community.

#### **Core Collection and Services**

The main collection focuses on Theology, Religious Education and Liturgy, with emphasis also on areas such as Spirituality, Social Justice, Personal Development and Life issues, Family and Parenting, Pastoral Studies, and also Education, Teaching, Leadership and Management.

As such, our role is varied because we are well known as an academic theology library and provide resources and services to researchers as well as tertiary students involved in religious and theological studies.

The Library also acts as a school AV resource centre with over 6000 audiovisual resources such as videos, DVDs, CDs, music bags, picture card sets, etc which are loaned to schools throughout the year to support their Religious Education programmes. These resources may be advanced booked at any time and are distributed through a statewide courier system to all Catholic schools in WA.

In addition, we provide a range of tailored services for parishes, parish priests and catechists. Members of the public are also welcome to make use of and/or join the Library.

We also provide library and information services to our own organization which has its main office in Perth with nineteen teams, as well as three Regional offices in Broome, Geraldton and Bunbury.

And, in addition, we undertake other corporate services such as the provision, maintenance, troubleshooting and staff training of the data and AV equipment in the CEO seminar and training rooms, as well as maintaining a centralised Serials Subscription Service and a Staff Resources Collection for all the individual teams in the CEO.

### **Library review**

One major impact on the Library has been the Library Review which was completed in 2001. The recommendations were well founded and as a result of their implementation, the Library saw quite a few changes.

Over three years, we:

- Renovated
- Refurbished (being heritage listed - all types of issues)
- Reorganised (e.g. Staff positions/Strategic plans/Work practices)
- Reviewed (the Library collection has been weeded, reclassified if necessary, and reorganised)
- Repackaged (developed & tailored services for certain client groups)



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- Re-Automated (new library system - eLibrary installed)
- Re-Branded (e.g. new look library with new brochures and booklets, and a new style of PR programme).

Indeed, we entered the 21st century in quite spectacular fashion although it wasn't an experience for the faint-hearted. I therefore saw it as extremely positive that no staff member rebelled, resigned or retired and that the clients came back! In reality, the team members were very supportive and flexible to the changes, taking on new training, responsibilities, work practices and new ways of looking at service delivery. It must be pointed out, that in researching the issues of service delivery and future development, we did spend quite a considerable time organising client liaison meetings and surveys which produced very useful and positive input into the changes we implemented and therefore the positive feedback from our clients was very gratifying.

### The future

So where to from here?


We have just recently completed a second strategic plan for the library which hopefully will take us through the next five years and is in line with the time period of the CEO's new strategic plan. However, it is always important to keep the big picture in mind even when operating within a certain strategic plan so we always keep a one page list of the main goals to look at over the next two strategic planning periods (ten years) even though we know they will evolve as we go along.

Evolve they have, the second strategic planning period has begun earlier to take into account succession planning factors with several people planning to retire in the next year. This has allowed planning for a restructure of staffing and library services to commence this year instead of 2011, although still in line with the ten-year plan.

The new structure will focus on future developments and requirements of the library service and centre around Client Services, Promotions and Technical Services. It will include a new service delivery model that concentrates on frontline services and circulation staff as library ambassadors. Client Services will focus on replacing existing services and incorporating new services utilising new technologies to add value to our services to various client groups e.g. client profiles for CEO staff will allow us to set up search alerts on our databases which will then send emails at predetermined times with all the latest documents on their subject area attached for them to read directly.

Indeed, our aim is to take our services directly to our clients, being aware that they often no longer have the time nor access to physically use the Library.

Correspondingly, it will be essential to develop an appropriate and high impact promotional programme in order to effectively market these expanded services to client groups. Likewise, it will be



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imperative that the positions in the new library structure will have the capacity built in to them to deliver these services which in turn are supported by efficiently organised, and sufficiently resourced, technical services.

In addition, we are very committed, in particular, to one extremely important principle. Our organization, the decision makers, the purse-string holders, should never, ever, be at the stage where they are deliberating whether or not to fund and/or to continue with the library service because they are so unaware of the role and more importantly, the value of the library to the organization. Correspondingly, they should also fully understand what would be the cost to the organization if there were no library service.

In this regard, there have been some very useful studies and reports over the past few years:

- firstly, a resource manual from Canada entitled *The library's contribution to your community: a resource manual for libraries to document their social and economic contribution to the local community*, published in 1998 and reprinted by Auslib Press in 2000; also
- an article in the *Australian Library Journal* in February 2004 entitled *Valuing libraries* by Ian McCallum and Sherry Quinn, which was a selective review of the then recent publications focused on the value of public and special libraries.

These publications discuss the relevance and worth of libraries and how to translate them meaningfully into terminology that is easily understood and valued by your decision makers. However, some of the studies would have libraries undertaking major documentation to substantiate all of this but if you look beyond that to the principles behind it even the smallest library can take these on board and incorporate them to varying degrees within their own planning process.

## Plan

So, returning to the four strategies I mentioned earlier, the first being *Plan*, we have certainly endeavoured to implement these principles in our new strategic plan. After re-examining our purpose, we then explored, and compiled, eight key points detailing our relevance to the organization, e.g.:

- gatekeeper and provider of information in line with Catholic Education and Church teachings;
- provider of technical support, trouble-shooting, training and maintenance of data and AV equipment to the CEO; and
- manager of copyright compliancy and awareness for Catholic Education in WA.

And from there, we defined our value, which we considered to be both moral and economic to our parent organization and the community. This then allowed us to translate our relevance into actual value. Taking the above examples this would translate into:



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#### Moral Value

- e.g. CEO staff, schools, parishes, students and researchers can use the Library’s resources confidently knowing they are relevant and appropriate to the Catholic faith.

#### Economic Value

- Example 1. Centralised services provided by the Library such as Serials subscriptions, AV equipment provision and technical support, creates efficiency and economies of scale for the CEO rather than each section and team having to manage such functions individually (and if necessary, a dollar value could be assigned to this)
- Example 2. Collaboration with national copyright groups to implement Smart Copying strategies will help reduce copyright costs and also the provision of timely and current advice on copyright helps to avoid any costs in relation to compliancy issues.

Within the strategic planning process we also examined the various factors which influence and affect the library service. In other words, a snapshot was taken of the broader environment with key known and emerging influences that may well impact on the library service, including:

- political;
- economic;
- social and population;
- technological;
- internal organization; and
- competitors/collaborators.

We also looked at the future from three viewpoints:

- what assumptions we could rely on (role and function, new technologies, staffing and funding levels etc.);
- what relationships we would be involved in (including primary and secondary beneficiaries, suppliers and partners); as well as
- what challenges and opportunities we would face (these centred around the effective use of technology, client service provision, partnerships and the larger organization in which we operate).


As a result, we developed four main strategic focus themes to guide and direct the Library in undertaking its purpose and role: Clients and Client Efficacy, Products and Promotion, Partnerships and Capability.

#### Clients and Client Efficacy

Focuses on the range of different client groups that use the Library, encouraging new membership and not only developing the competence but also the confidence of all clients to make effective use of the library’s services.

#### Products and Promotion

Focuses on the development, management and promotion of resources and services. The term products was used deliberately to



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encompass both services and resources together with the processes involved in their provision and, very importantly, to ensure that we don't get too attached to them so that we do not see the need for change. It implies that such “products” will be constantly evaluated and reviewed and then retained, revised, repackaged or removed in response to the changing environment in which the library operates, thereby ensuring service delivery is kept to an optimum level.

#### **Partnerships**

Focuses on the range of partnerships, internal, external, collaborative and commercial which can enhance the quality and cost-effective delivery of library services.

#### **Capability**

Focuses on the range of factors which contribute to the Library's capacity and capability to effectively and efficiently deliver its services such as staffing, technology, facilities and equipment.

Each theme was examined and strategies developed in order to achieve our goals over the next five years.

For example, within the Products and Promotion theme we examined a variety of collection development issues and, in particular, the question of collecting electronic vs. print resources.

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It is an interesting concept for us because we see the Library not just as a collection of resources but being a place for the gathering of wisdom and enabling Catholic tradition to be a foundation for the future of the Catholic community. Our clients not only come looking for current data, or wanting to gain knowledge of a particular subject, but also to seek and develop faith and wisdom. And in the case of the latter, it may be contended that an e-resource would not make the reading experience as gratifying.

Also, we would not like to see the day where a major crisis precipitated the loss of such collective wisdom because of technology failure. However, currency and ease of access afforded by e-resources cannot be overlooked so we will undertake a programme of purchasing e-resources but, for our library, it will be a complementary resource not necessarily a replacement.

#### **Perform**

The second strategy of *Perform* is obvious. We not only have to maintain a high level of service delivery but also be able to measure, track and rate our performance in real and pragmatic terms so that we can understand and make sense of them and so, too, can our organization.

But being a small library, we try to keep the process as simple as possible and some of the studies listed in McCallum and Quinn's

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article, as well as a couple of papers that came out of the ANZTLA 2005 conference, have been very useful in this regard. As a result, we tend to use a mix of what we call success measures which include some performance indicators and, to a small extent, benefit measures and client satisfaction indicators. This can be qualitative as well as quantitative and in a small library can be as simple as including client feedback, appropriately documented, as one of your measures.

#### **Promote**

That brings me to the third strategy and that is *Promote*. According to our client feedback, many of them see us as a wonderful treasure trove of theological, liturgical and spiritual resources.

This is all well and good, but if no one else knows about us, what we have, or what we can offer, we will remain only a hidden treasure and as so many hidden treasures do ... they get lost and forgotten.

Hopefully, not this library!

We promote, promote and promote ... both passionately and politically.

We promote in a variety of ways:

- we organise displays in the main building and send circulating displays around the regional offices;
- Library staff get involved in all organizational events at the CEO;
- we send regular email broadcasts of new resources or upgrades to the service and also include similar information in both a print and electronic newsletter;
- we constantly visit the different floors and sections of the building, involving staff in the selection and perusal of new resources, training in new AV equipment, system upgrades, and copyright awareness;
- we organize promotional events such as:
  - Australian Library & Information Week;
  - Reconciliation Week;
  - special liturgical seasons and celebrations; and
  - memorial events.

NB. Sometimes it can be a serious promotion introducing a new service or showcasing library resources and, at other times, it may just involve some fun like all the staff dressed as Women in Black, touring the building giving out chocolates!

- We also feel it is essential to undertake ongoing Library orientation and user education programmes for each of our client groups.

However, every time you promote you need to evaluate what you are promoting, why you are promoting it, who are you promoting it to and how?

And most importantly, how do you portray it as value for money to your decision makers? You need to use every opportunity to demonstrate this over and over again but in terms with which they can identify and appreciate.



*“Every team member should understand what you are trying to do, why you are doing it, and how you are going to achieve it. They should be, and feel comfortable in being, ambassadors as well as advocates for the library.”*

For instance, you can put a particular spin on the library’s promotional exercise or make use of a specific event or an organizational issue such as displays which can be promoted to clients in relation to a current issue, liturgical celebration, memorial event, etc. To the decision makers, though, this would be relegated to just another nice library display unless you translate it into an activity which is seen as proactively supporting a strategic focus of the organization.

For example, this year we organized several circulating displays on Reconciliation, both the Sacrament and the Week. (The latter celebrating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1967 Referendum). As such, they were promoted to our clients as a journey of the Australian community from a social justice and historical point of view. However to the CEO we presented it as a team initiative in supporting this year’s theme of the CEO’s *Living the Vision* statement by circulating displays to our regional offices to showcase library resources and reinforce *Living the Vision* within our regional areas.

Like other libraries, we constantly try to tie in our projects with the goals and/or initiatives of our organization.

For example, we knew the CEO had a range of team resources across the building although most people did not know who had what and often duplication occurred. A central staff database was the answer but costs and staffing prohibited us from embarking on the project until a timely CEO discussion on the stewardship of resources within the organization. We used that discussion to springboard our project and subsequently received additional funding to complete it as well as being commended for our initiative in supporting the CEO’s focus on effective and responsible stewardship.

And that’s the other side of planning; some projects are just not feasible at the time but can be prepared ready for a later budget and/or timely intervention of a larger organizational issue and, in so doing, make you look very proactive and supportive of your organization.

### **People**

Last, but not least, and that is the *People*, the Library team. All the best planning and promotion in the world will go by the wayside if you do not have the support, body, mind and soul of your team. Collaborative teamwork is essential as are regular intakes of chocolate and cake!

Together, you need to “think the future” and then develop sustainable strategies to create it.

Every team member should understand what you are trying to do, why you are doing it, and how you are going to achieve it. They should be, and feel comfortable in being, ambassadors as well as advocates for the library.

All staff should also know the library’s history, its mission and goals, its policies and processes, and understand how they fit into the overall picture. In other words, they should be able to promote the library at all levels, to all people, at any time.





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Ensuring the effectiveness and vitality of a team requires constant attention and should take into account issues such as appropriate training, the working environment, effective meetings and communication, succession planning and, most importantly, being able to laugh and have some fun.

Like any other organization, the library service will succeed or fail on the strength of its people, and that is definitely the case in our library. The team constantly demonstrates hard work, flexibility, enthusiasm, a wonderful sense of humour and, most definitely, a long standing patience when, once again, their Library Manager says “Guess what I’ve been thinking?”

To conclude, to ensure the success and survival of our library in the 21st century of our service, we feel it is imperative to continually seek new ways to reinforce our relevance and visibility to those we serve, both the clients and our parent organization. And, for us, this means well-researched, timely and sustainable planning, maintaining optimum performance in service delivery, passionately and politically promoting the service and, most importantly, working together with both a sense of purpose and fun.