

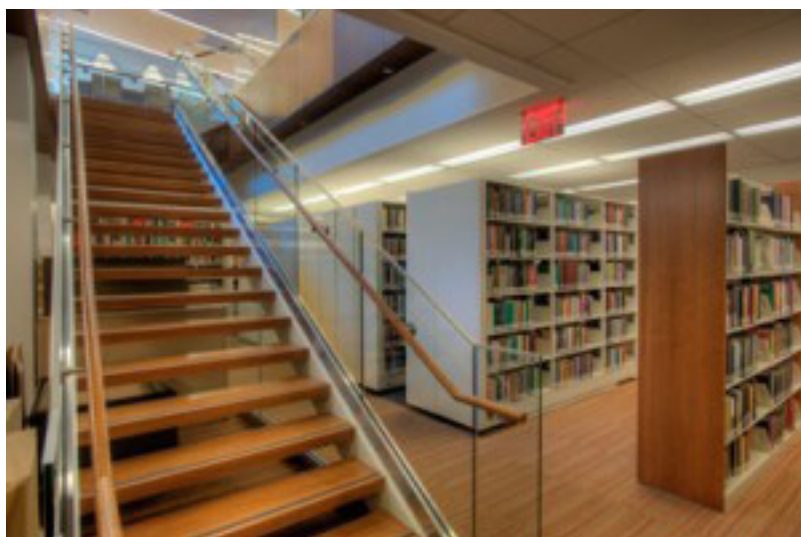
## A Forum on Library Construction

### *Christoph Keller, Jr. Library, General Theological Seminary, New York*

*by Reverend Andrew G. Kadel*

#### PROJECT OVERVIEW

**O**n Friday, October 14, 2011, the Christoph Keller, Jr. Library at the General Theological Seminary in New York was dedicated, the culmination of at least twelve years' worth of planning and preparation. Those who attended the dedication entered first into the main floor Reading Room which is surrounded by floor-to-ceiling windows, providing a panoramic view of the Close, as GTS' campus is called. Directly ahead is the Chapel of The Good Shepherd; in the evening the stained glass windows glow invitingly, making a subtle contrast with the simple, modern, but rich wood fixtures in the library, reminding students, faculty, and visitors that this is a library housing rare theological works as well as modern resources to prepare leaders for today's Church.



*Interior staircase*

entrance lobby is a lounge and two group study rooms, which are equipped with Promethean boards for projection of computer images and distance education applications. The entire library is wireless-enabled.

The lower level is dedicated to collections with Montel compact shelving occupying most of the available space. Almost one-quarter of the floor is enclosed in a Special Collections room with separate climate controls. Seven study carrels with locking shelves assigned to students with advanced projects and a catalog kiosk makes this a pleasant area for serious study.

The Keller Library is in a building that occupies the same footprint as the previous building that contained the library, Sherrill Hall, which was built in the late 1950s. By the late 1990s, both the design and the physical condition of Sherrill made it difficult and expensive to maintain. At the same time, the seminary administration was seeking partnerships to help improve the seminary's financial situation and address serious deferred maintenance problems. Because most of the other buildings on the Close are landmarked, Sherrill became the natural focus of any planned redevelopment. The process of finding a partner and getting a building approved in New York City is always very complex, so, while the initial steps began in the late 1990s, it took until 2006 until plans for the new building, a cooperative apartment building that would house the library, were approved. The decision was made to begin, and demolition and construction started in January 2008. Preliminary meetings with architects began

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*Reading Room*

in 2004, but after the original proposed building was reduced because of New York City preservation issues, plans had to be reconsidered much closer to the move-out date. An RFP was developed for specialty library movers, as quality moving and storage was key to keeping the plan on such a tight schedule. At the same time, the staff had to plan for an interim library collection and the space that would house it. After a thorough multi-modal process that involved staff, faculty, and students, we had a very respectable 18,000-volume collection, although students and faculty consistently said they missed their “real library.”

Of course, in making plans for an interim library, one of the virtues of being in New York City is the wealth of other resources available, such as the New York Public Library and the Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary. Still, the Burke Library, which had recently been acquired by the Columbia University libraries, is private, and careful attention had to be paid to negotiating and maintaining good access for users.

One of the keys to our successful move at the beginning of 2008—which, because of the vagaries of the approval process in New York, was done with very short notice and time to complete—was the selection of a skilled and experienced library mover. In addition, the planning assistance from the movers was key to helping the staff envision the move and the way the interim space would be best used.

As we worked in our interim space, we continued to plan for the new library. The new building was finished in the spring of 2009, and residents began to move in, but the seminary’s financial concerns delayed the beginning of construction on the library itself. However, through relationships cultivated by a senior faculty member, a board member of the Friends of the St. Mark’s Library, and the library director, as well as the seminary’s administration, a \$5 million gift from the family of the late Bishop Christoph Keller, Jr. was promised. That not only allowed construction to go forward, but also provided money to complete a retrospective conversion project for the seminary’s remaining card catalog.

The biggest challenge, as is often the case, was space needs. The new library is about 17,000 square feet, while the old library was nearly 40,000 square feet. The cost of building and maintaining space in Manhattan was a major

motivation for the smaller space. The disparity is not as much as it appears because of greatly increased efficiency in the new library—nearly an entire floor in the old library was not useable for collections or people, and the stacks and special collections of the new library are entirely compact shelving, while the entire old library was stationary shelving. Nonetheless, the space was not large enough to accommodate the entire collection.

Several alternatives for offsite storage were explored. The one that was most feasible was a partnership with the Candler School of Theology of Emory University. Approximately 90,000 volumes (out of GTS' original 270,000) were transferred to the Pitts Theology Library, an agreement for interlibrary loan and cooperation in maintaining the titles in the collection was reached, the faculty and staff of General Theological Seminary were given full access to the resources of Emory's libraries as affiliates of Candler, and other cooperative agreements between the schools were signed. Ultimately this allowed the Library to focus much more clearly on the areas in which the Seminary has specialized for a number of years: Anglican Studies and Liturgics, which will allow it to grow appropriately in those areas that are of the most use to church members and scholars. While materials placed at the Pitts Library are valuable, they are not as necessary for the current programs of the school.

In the preparation for the new library, the planners all agreed that the library should be a place for people to be, not simply a place to access information, check out books, or have books stored. The Christoph Keller, Jr. Library is remarkably successful in that regard. The Main Reading Room has twenty-four chairs at study tables, six at computer workstations, and ten soft-seating chairs. The Group Study rooms have six chairs, and there are five soft chairs in the lounge and lobby area. When one adds the seven carrels in the lower level and five readers' chairs in the Rare Book Reading Room, there are 69 seats for patrons in an institution with 100 to 150 students.

What the library, with its restored collections, its gracious and useable spaces, and its access to new technologies and online resources has become for the seminary and for the wider church is a welcoming place for students, faculty, scholars, and visitors to study the Word; a chapel for knowledge and learning in the same way as the Chapel of the Good Shepherd is for worship.

## DISCUSSION

### 1. What was hardest and what was most rewarding about this project?

The hardest part of the project was waiting. Waiting for decisions and authorizations to go ahead, and authorizations to plan or negotiate. While some tentative plans might be done without authorizations, changes in the institution's plans and finances meant that there were long stretches when the future was unknown. The most rewarding part of the project was working with real professionals and seeing the project come together at the end.

### 2. How was the rest of your work affected by this challenge?

There were times when the rest of the work was affected very little, except that we were in tiny interim quarters without our collections available. At other times, such things as collection development and ordinary cataloging went by the wayside entirely while the project of finishing the library and moving proceeded.

### 3. Is there one single thing you wish you had done differently?

I am satisfied with how things came out. With choices forced together at the end there was a certain improvised character to some of the choices. The limits were set by factors beyond our control, and within those limits I have no regrets.

#### **4. What was the single most valuable piece of advice you received for this project?**

Libraries are PLACES for learning, and more and more students are gravitating to well-designed library spaces for a major part of their work.

#### **5. What have people responded most favorably to so far?**

People are very happy about the attractive appearance of the library with a beautiful view and light on the main floor, as well as being a comfortable place to work. People are also very happy to have the research collections available again.

#### **6. How do you see your library's services being enhanced by this project so far?**

This is a very pleasant place to work and study and many people do that. While our actual technology is only slightly improved, it looks a lot better and people like to use it. The group study rooms are heavily used, both for structured projects and unstructured projects. Actually more successful in that respect than I had expected.

#### **7. Other observations of interest.**

Because the changes in the collection space occurred after the collections were in storage, the books for the Pitts Library had to be chosen from broad classification areas: Dewey 300-999, and 000-224. Oversized and rare volumes were all retained in the Keller Library. Weeding was not done in advance because there were more pressing demands in the development and administration of the library before the move (and the announced library would hold all the collections at that time). Weeding was not possible during storage. However, substantial elimination of duplicates is being done from the Dewey sections that are being retained in the Keller Library—more books were brought to the new library than could fit. This resulted in the library retaining the biography section, a large portion of the Dewey New Testament section, and selections from 000-210 and 655, which would have otherwise not have returned to New York.

Since 1982, all books have been classified in the Library of Congress Classification, and all books in this classification have been retained. Before that, most books were in a Dewey-based classification, with liturgy books and biographies in their own local classification. The Liturgy section has been kept in its entirety and the biographies have been weeded of less relevant material.

