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# Librarians as Disciples and Disciple-Makers



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## **ABSTRACT**

Librarians as Disciples and Disciple-Makers was a workshop at the 2016 Conference for the Association of Christian Librarians. This session focused on exploring the concept of being led by God, sharing round-table ideas on big-picture vision questions, and writing a personal sixty-month action plan for balanced discipleship living. This article is a summation of the workshop.

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## **Introduction**

Recently I heard someone ask a question that intrigued me: “What do we do when our dreams surpass our budget?”

Librarians are often master organizers and incredible stewards of resources. Librarians have learned to stretch dollars until they squeak; creativity and innovation have become the middle names of librarians. Librarians also share characteristics such as professional insightfulness, innovation, and creative imagination; they are change-sculptors. They daily polish values and technology into better patterns, with vision and passion for a transformed world. Think of a librarian’s impact on literacy, equal access to information, learning, intellectual freedom, and, as praying Christian librarians, the capacity to offer hope for a better world.

Does this sound daunting? It does to me. I want to point out that our impact on the community is probably greater than any other profession. As librarians, we are charged with building a collaborative learning community that meets the information of both today and the future. This is where the visionary leadership aim of a librarian needs to be.

I see the future role of any collaborative learning center as a place for idea exchanges on big-picture leadership vision. A learning center, like a librarian, should move closer and closer to being the incubator for change and positive transformation. As librarians, we are the lifeline rope that connects past, present, and future learning with changing information needs. We are the thread that God is using, tying big-picture leadership vision into the everyday world of today’s learners and preparing for a changing world.

If this task sounds impossible, I agree. We are promised, however, that we are not alone. Scripture teaches that not only will God not leave us nor forsake us, but as is written in Isaiah 58:11, “The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.” God, our Leader, will guide us forward. This gives me great hope and comfort: God is our Leader and Guide, no matter how challenging the journey forward, or how exhilarating the dream-come-true celebrations we share.

My first goal in this article is to encourage librarians to lean more on God’s counsel by daily praying and abiding in what the Scripture teaches is the best path forward. We need to follow God’s dreams for each of our colleges and community circles. We need listening ears and eyes.

Second, this article will report on the workshop’s idea exchange, which I hope will spark an articulation of potential paths forward to transform our learning environments into remarkable communities that are even better tomorrow than they are today. My desire with the round-table discussion was that everyone be able to share; unjudgmental listening to others improves creative idea flow. This exercise provided practice in creating a safe place to brainstorm ideas where creativity is welcomed and no one’s responses are squelched before they have had time to be considered. Later, records can be evaluated and prioritized; the initial goal is simply to listen to one another.

Third, this article will offer a personal sixty-month strategic plan template, which includes faith walk commitments, time frames, and measurable goals. I desired that workshop attendees take away a practical tool to frame discipleship, gifting, and desires into a plan of action with outcomes and timelines, to be able to celebrate personal progress as a disciple and disciple-maker. All of us need to learn to live with passionate intentionality; I think this applies more if we seek to please God and serve our library stakeholders with excellence.

Overall, I desire that this article encourage librarians to share leadership vision with other Christian librarians.

### **Philosophy of Librarianship, Scripture, and Prayer**

My personal philosophy of librarianship is that every library is a lighthouse of belonging, learning, and dignity. For me, belonging means knowing who we are – our identity roots – both culturally and spiritually. I think of learning as strong wings that lift us higher as minds open to knowledge and release soaring ideas. Dignity reaches horizontally, embracing others with intellectual insights that sparkle and inspire leaders with vision. Our libraries, wherever they are, are vibrantly alive

communities, growing with new learning as voices share ideas, read, and seek to apply knowledge to everyday living experiences. I believe readers are leaders who can change the world, and sometimes sculpt change through an eloquent literary voice.

The following are some of my favorite Bible verses that I believe are related to this philosophy:

Psalms 32:1 “Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.”

Isaiah 60:1 “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.”

Psalms 33:22 “May your unfailing love be with us, Lord, even as we put our hope in you.”

Proverbs 4:18 “The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.”

1 Corinthians 2:2 “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

Romans 10:17 “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.”

Revelation 3:8 “I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.”

Daniel 12:1-3 “At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people – everyone whose name is found written the book – will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake; some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.”

John 13:34-35 “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.”

*Lord, I ask for all of us as librarians to have the wisdom to catch hold of the desires and longings of Your heart, so that we can plan our lives and our libraries according to Your heart's desires. Teach us to please You. Teach us to trust You. Teach us to love You. Enable us by Your Holy Spirit to tell the stories, to think the thoughts, to dream the dreams, to envision the plans and purposes of God. By Your grace, help us to develop libraries into inviting places, where belonging, learning, and dignity will flourish. Reveal Your dreams and vision to us, I ask. May we carry Your dreams forward, in Jesus' name. Amen.*

## Idea Exchange

With a spiritual foundation to undergird our discussion, the workshop attendees were divided into small groups to consider the following vision questions:

- What potentially defines a remarkable community?
- In the library and church context, what is a remarkable learning community?
- How does our story as librarians fit into the redemption story of Jesus, which is the heart of the gospel? If we target one thing in our libraries that may help restore in some way, what should our libraries look like in 60 months?
- Redesign library services for 10, 20, or 30 years from now. Dream big!
- Choose one barrier to library community growth and brainstorm solutions to the problem.
- If “God-led” defines a librarian living as a disciple and disciple-maker, describe the difference between a God-led and a not God-led library development plan.

### What defines a remarkable community?

One participant in a group defined remarkable community in this way: “Life is like a tandem bike; it’s a rhythm of teamwork, mutual strength, and agreed upon direction. When one gets tired, the other pulls the load, always moving ahead with the wind in their hair.”

What else potentially describes remarkable community? There are perhaps three themes a discussion on remarkable community reflects: people, attitudes, and actions. Each person has unique gifts, experiences, and ethnicity to enrich conversations. Attitude counts, including curiosity and taking an interest in learning new things. Life-long learning and exploring new things should be a non-threatening adventure.

One of the distinctions of a remarkable community, therefore, is the fact that it is safe. People are allowed both to fail and to succeed because pursuing new ideas involves risk. A non-judgmental atmosphere nourishes participants through trust-building and respectfulness. Other great attitudes include friendliness and open-heartedness towards one another.

In other words, God-centered people seek to be sensitive to the needs of others while exhibiting genuine care. Sincere listening helps to build one another up. Ideally, even the vulnerable should thrive, instead of merely survive, in a remarkable community.

## **In the library and church context, what is a remarkable learning community?**

A second group of librarians answered this question.

The theme of Christian hospitality emerges as a key element of remarkable community. For example, a library with a friendly coffee-shop environment advances conversation, facilitates the exchange of ideas, and is a place where people have fun together. Perhaps also linked to this theme is an awareness of feeling safe, being accepted and listened to, and feeling encouraged to share personal stories. Mentoring relationships emerge as one learner connects with another.

A library is a place where intellectual freedom matters. Exploration of new ideas and research into what constitutes social conscience prospers in a remarkable learning community environment. Part of the charm and social value of the research library comes from freedom to learn, the accessibility of information, and the fact that we organize information in such a way that minority views and diverse topics are researchable.

Diverse cultures, limitless ideas, and individual versus collective intellectual exploration add yet another layer of value to the library as a socially powerful and intellectually stimulating resource. In fact, as a delightful place of discovery, where eyes open to new ways of seeing things, a collaborative learning library is unprecedented as a cultural legacy treasure. Truth discovered through reading books has the power to transform a community and act as a change catalyst.

## **What is the difference between a God-led and a not God-led library development plan?**

A third group of librarians at the 2016 ACL conference explored the difference between a God-led and a not God-led library development plan. An assumption was made that 'God-led' defines a librarian living as a disciple and disciple-maker. This group then noted the following key points.

'God-led' can be described in three ways: first, when people include God; second, a prayer-guided person; and third, a godly focus. Alternatively, we can describe non-God-led as follows: first, when people ignore God; second, when people are solely intellect-guided; and third, when people ignore godliness.

In considering this concept of being God-led, it is helpful to consider Romans 8:14-17:

“For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry ‘Abba,

Father.’The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.’

### **How does our story as librarians fit into the redemption story of Jesus, which is the heart of the gospel?**

The fourth group began by stating that the redemption story of the gospel is what matters most in Jesus’ heart. Translated into our library world, this means we must never give up on anyone. Jesus loves the disenfranchised. We are to love them, too. The hurting and discouraged need to find encouragement in our libraries. When a library is a place of belonging, safe and secure for all, this also means that each person who enters our doors should feel warmly welcomed. Each one is precious and unique. Like Barnabas, we are to be encouragers of all who enter our libraries. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can act as servants to our learning communities. We can help learners move towards greater knowledge and dignity.

To this end, there are some specific action steps that librarians can take:

- Encourage students to take ownership of the library more, thinking of it as their space.
- Try marketing library services to students who are not currently using the library. Add fun activities, focusing at times on relaxation needs instead of academics.
- Seek opportunities to pray with students and actively listen to them if they are willing to share.
- Encourage staff to avoid lengthy periods behind the desk. Roam the library more, engaging students in conversation and helping them overcome barriers to learning.

### **Sixty-Month Action Plan**

Following the discussion questions, I provided participants with a template for a sixty-month action plan, beginning July 2016 and ending July 2021. This template will hopefully launch an actual action plan for readers as well, triggering a way to map out measureable goals so that five years down the road there can be celebration of the pursuit of life mission with passionate intentionality.

A personal sixty-month strategic plan is a balanced life values and vision statement with measureable outcomes for where you wish to be within five years. Consider healthy lifestyle choices such as nutrition and exercise routines, your financial goals, spiritual journey needs, time management preferences, etc. Each person will have unique goals. However, the process of putting a plan in writing is what this exercise is all about.

## Sample Action Plan

My sixty-month strategic plan for January 2015 to January 2020 articulates my mission in life, my values, and a checklist of measurable actions. Mapping my pathway forward will help me stay on course to reach a targeted destination.

My mission in life is to be a disciple and disciple-maker. My values are three-fold. As a librarian, I appreciate library advocacy, strategic planning, seeking God's direction in daily activities through prayer and Scripture, and serving needs of students and college family. As a disciple, I value guidance from God, seeking to be led by the Holy Spirit, reading Scripture, praying, and deepening my faith walk, each day journaling to draw nearer to God. As a writer, I value developing writing competencies as a poet and journal scribbler in disciplined daily writing exercises focusing on prioritized, targeted writing goals.

My year one goal focuses on finances. I want to live debt-free, have a three- to six-month reserve emergency fund, and reduce my housing costs to no more than thirty percent of my income. This means living on no more than sixty percent of my income, saving twenty percent, and giving twenty percent to charities. Achieving my year one goal requires radical lifestyle changes such as downsizing from a five-bedroom house to an apartment. I also desire the expertise of a financial planner to strategize retirement investment needs, to ensure that my financial future is secure. This concrete measurable goal will produce a seamless transition to retirement living. As of December 2015, I am happy to say that I have completed these steps.

My year two goal focuses on writing. With this, I have four sub-goals. First, polish one poem per month to complete my manuscript of 48 poems by January 2019. Second, attend a writer's conference in June 2016. Third, register for a writing course over the summer of 2016. Fourth, create a writing plan of action before December 2016 and begin to research a writer's niche focus or platform. As of December 2016, I am happy to say that I have completed these steps.

My year three goal includes planning the start-up of a new business, to be implemented after retirement. My goal is to retire before December 31, 2017. This plan is ahead of schedule.

My year four goal includes launching a small business before December 31, 2018. This plan is ahead of schedule.

My year five goals include a copywriting business plan; website development; business-to-business niche articulation; identifying a client market for blog posts, letters, promotional packages, and fundraisers for non-profits; and launching [www.writinglegacy.com](http://www.writinglegacy.com). This action plan is ahead of schedule.



A sixty-month strategic plan, like an organizational strategic plan, is a living document that can be adjusted as needed. New opportunities and unforeseen circumstances arise. For example, my projected retirement date changed, which resulted in a winter 2017 launch of my new copywriting business instead of January 2019. But because I had a plan in place, I transitioned from retirement to my desired outcome in a stress-free process.

When a plan of action is drafted, there will be incentive to move more quickly toward desired destinations. As encouragement, about two weeks after the conference, I received a lovely text message from a participant who stated that they have used the 5-year plan for their work and will be using it personally as well.

## Conclusion

So, as librarians, what do we do when our dreams surpass our budget? From my library experience, our dreams will always surpass our budget! If the dream is in the right direction, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, the dream becomes a chosen destination. This invites action plan steps, outcomes, measures, benchmarks and time frames for the destination; with this, I believe the budget will come. The timeline is what gets stretched, prayed over, and extended (sometimes to almost a breaking point), but if God is leading us in the articulation of a focus, it is not the destination that changes; it is the time frame required to fulfill it.

What also may change is how we raise funds and whether minimum resources needed to fulfill the dream are in place to launch this action plan. Certainly, prayer is vital; no plan that is truly from God ever becomes a reality without meaningful prayer. Isaiah 37:21 includes the phrase “because they prayed,” followed by a whole checklist of how God moves, including His decision to save a city. Thus, God moves in direct response to our prayers. Once we digest this message, our hearts can be open to wanting to fund dreams that transform the world to make it a better place. At least, that is my hope, prayer, and desire for our future. †

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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