2006

The Face of ACL in 2010

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Recommended Citation
Available at: [http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/tcl/vol49/iss2/8](http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/tcl/vol49/iss2/8)
As we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Association of Christian Librarians, it is exciting to dream about the next fifty years. What will the library profession look like? Where will technology take us? What kind of legacy will we leave?

But five years are a bit more realistic and most of us will still be around in five years!

It was to this end that I gave an assignment to each of the Board of Directors at the mid-year October 2005 Board Meeting. We spent a couple of hours on Saturday morning answering two questions. First, “Where do we want the Association of Christian Librarians to be in five years?” and secondly, “What will it take to get there?”

Each of the members were asked to write down his/her answer to each question and then we took turns sharing our answers. It was exhilarating to see the passion, creativity and vision that bubbled to the surface. Threads of similar goals and desires could be traced as we took our turns around the table. I would like to share some of that excitement with each of you as members of the association, so let me paint a picture of the Board of Directors’ vision for ACL in 2010.

• We will have grown in size (anywhere from 650 – 1000 members!) and yet not lost the personal feel of a caring community
• Fifty percent of the Board of Directors will be under the age of 40
• Conference attendance will have grown to 300+ attendees, possibly with an established centralized location, and published conference proceedings
• Continuing education opportunities will include specialized tracks at conferences and other training workshops in addition to the annual conference
• Our office mortgage will be paid off and we will be financially healthy
• Our staff will have increased (possibly to include a full-time paid director) and the office will be staffed during business hours five days a week
• FACL (Foundation for the Advancement of Christian Libraries) will have written at
least one grant to raise funds to support ACL initiatives

• CILA (Commission for International Library Assistance) will be recognized as a significant provider of resources and support for underserved Christian academic libraries at home and throughout the world

• CILA will have established a partnership with a library association overseas and will have planned joint initiatives to promote professional development of librarians

• There will be an increase in younger ACL members in leadership positions

• An effective program of volunteer recruitment, training, retention, evaluation and appreciation will have been established

• The Christian Librarian will have begun including peer-reviewed articles and will have gained greater national recognition as a professional journal

• The Christian Periodical Index will have developed into a full-text product and will be recognized as the premier online evangelical literature resource (with additional evangelical books, reference works, theses, and database resources)

• CPI subscriptions will have increased to over 400 per year

• Additional ACL-sponsored publications will have been produced by individual members or collectively (such as the Bible College Section)

• Bible College and Liberal Arts Sections will have sponsored workshops at other conferences

• The website will have expanded services to include a list of consultants for various library-related services, statistical surveys for bench-marking, standards and policies, and an annual “Best Evangelical Books” list

• Benefits of membership in CLC (Christian Library Consortium) will have expanded to include a host of database discounts, and other attractive discounted services benefiting both large and small libraries

Needless to say, the energy level was high as we concluded sharing our “dream” for ACL/FACL. But dreaming and reality are two different things. What will it take to realize all these dreams in the next five years?

I would like to propose five necessary steps for reaching some of these dreams:

1. We as an association need to understand what we can be “the best” at and strategically allocate resources and personnel to increase our quality of services and resources in the areas identified.

   The three areas that I see ACL/FACL being “the best” at are:

• Providing an environment for a caring community of Christian librarians to develop professionally and spiritually in service to one another and to libraries around the world

• Becoming the premier “gateway” or provider of evangelical literature and resources for the evangelical world

• Developing innovative methods of serving and supporting underserved libraries internationally

   We can’t be all things to all people, but if we can concentrate on what we can do that no other organization can duplicate, then we will have succeeded.

2. We as an association need to re-think our leadership structure and design a governance structure that promotes and empowers volunteers, staff, board members, and token-compensated individuals to be innovative within parameters set by the Board of Directors, and avoid multiple layers of decision-making.

   ACL needs a type of governance that will help empower board members, staff, teams and volunteers to actively make decisions
and lead in a more efficient and less cumbersome way in their respective areas. Board positions need to be redefined to more accurately reflect the primary areas we want to concentrate on. This will give greater meaning to the positions rather than functioning as a communication channel and liaison with a specific team.

3. We as an association must figure out a way to more effectively take advantage of the expertise of our members who are looking for ways to serve within the association/foundation.

Once we have identified the limited number of areas we want to focus on (what we can be “best” at), we need to develop mechanisms for matching “experts” in these areas to work together in effective teams to enhance the quality and scope of our resources and services. The Board needs to set the direction, but the members can be the creative wheels that set things in motion to create momentum.

4. We as an association need to concentrate on our primary product, the Christian Periodical Index, for the evangelical world at large and make it the best it can be.

We need to be actively seeking innovative partnerships that can enhance the scope, depth, and quality of our current product. We are building on a rich and faithful heritage of Christian indexers who have made this product what it is today. Let’s use current technology, creative ideas, and partnerships to make our product even more attractive and beneficial to Christians world-wide.

5. We as an association need to be willing to think outside the box.

How can we best utilize the newly created FACL (Foundation for the Advancement of Christian Libraries) to write grants to further our initiatives and to gain national and international recognition through our historical mission philosophy of service? How can we market who we are both internally to our members and externally to the library profession and the evangelical world? How can we use our website as a greater tool and resource? How can we incorporate the wealth of expertise that is available in our current and potential membership? How can we leverage our strength to encourage evangelical publishers to make the full-text of their titles available electronically?

As you can see, the five recommended steps listed above can’t be accomplished solely by the ACL Officers, Board of Directors or even Teams. It takes mobilization of many other ACL members moving toward a single goal to see our dreams come true! I would like each one of you to seriously consider how you could be involved in the future of ACL/FACL. I can guarantee that you will find it a rewarding and fulfilling experience. Come “Race with Us” into our future!

Linda Poston
President, Association of Christian Librarians