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## A Public Christian Library: A Unique Model For Evangelism

Jim Barnes

*Prague Christian Library*

Laurie Barnes

*Prague Christian Library*

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# A PUBLIC CHRISTIAN LIBRARY: A UNIQUE MODEL FOR EVANGELISM

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*Jim & Laurie Barnes  
Missionaries & Associates  
Institute for  
Christian Resources,  
Prague Christian Library  
Prague, Czech Republic*

*The following profile article is designed to share an example of a unique model of ministry based on the concept and vision of a public Christian library located in a "marketplace" environment, open and available to the general public. Prague Christian Library, located in the capital city of the Czech Republic, was originally established and received government approval as a non-profit foundation in the Spring of 1999.*

**T**he foundational premise of the work of Prague Christian Library is to provide a place where anyone (believers, seekers and observers) can come and access information related to Christianity and the Bible and is designed to acquaint users with a Christian world-view.

The library serves both the Czech and English speaking international and users and patrons include about half international and half Czechs — more than half of the Czechs speak English and want to specifically access English language materials.

Currently the library, which is fully automated, contains 2,500 plus resources (approximately three fourths English and one fourth Czech), including books, videos and audio tapes but we are looking to also add CDs, magazines, position papers and other Christian materials with a goal of 5,000+ in the current location. There are books in both English and Czech, as well as smaller collections in other regional languages including German, Hungarian, Polish, Russian, Serbo-Croatian and Slovak.

The library selection process is very specific and the collection is focused in several key areas including Biblical studies, theology, marriage and family, relationships, applied Christian living, and other specific modern issues addressed from a Christian perspective. The library also includes a rather extensive children's collection as well as Christian fiction and biographies which are quite popular

In a society where reading and education, as well as dialogue and discussion are so highly valued — Prague is the home of Charles University, one of the oldest universities in all of Europe — the vision is one which is not only culturally relevant, but meets a real and practical need for Christian materials. It seems that in a culture where trust remains a real issue, and the view of the church is quite tainted, the situation is such that many people will come to a library who may not feel as comfortable in visiting a church.

In order to offer the sort of environment which is truly conducive to providing complete freedom and opportunity for personal choice regarding the Christian faith, as well as convenient access to Christian materials, it also becomes essential that the library be established as a legal entity separate and independent of any church, religious or educational institution. Legally the library was founded and operates as a society for public welfare (non-profit organization) with oversight by a Czech board of directors.

While keeping the operational and legal boundaries clear, the library is a

part of an informal English library consortium, and as such works in cooperation with other libraries to help support the various educational and leadership development needs which exist. The collection very much complements what is available (in many cases there are limited resources) in the various seminary libraries, and is quite often used by students from the Protestant Faculty of Charles University, Anglo-American College, as well as those from both the International Baptist Theological Seminary which serves the needs of the entire European Baptist Union, as well as the Evangelical Theological Seminary, the largest evangelical seminary in the Czech Republic, sponsored by the Cirkev Bratska (Czech Brethren Church).

Working directly with Christian publishers both in the United States and U.K., the library is able to receive normal library discounts for purchase of new books. We also have developed sources for good quality used and out of print books and have also received donations from several private collections, but many of our books are purchased using funds received through individual and church gifts. Many congregations have become involved in special "Buy a Book for the Library" projects and in this case, a list of desired books is provided, as well as specific details and suggestions of how

to actually purchase and ship books.

In addition to the gifts of books, the basic operating expenses of the library are currently provided for by regular grants including gifts from various individuals, churches and organizations given through the Institute for Christian Resources, which serves to sponsor this particular library development project.

Sources of income include user fees, fines, special book orders and room rental. Current operating expenses amount to approximately \$1000 USD/month. Eventually the goal is that the library will become self-sustaining and gain financial support through the local Czech and international churches.

As a means to introduce people to, and actually support the use of, the library resources throughout the year the Prague Christian Library also hosts different lecture series on various issues of applied Christian living, and dealing with practical relationship and marriage and family needs. The library has also been the venue for several Biblical studies series, as well as sessions which examine the beliefs, issues, and practical aspects of comparative religions.

In addition, there are also a variety of other library activities including an English language story hour for kids on Saturday mornings. Average attendance is around 12 to 15 children each Saturday, with books on different

themes followed by a time of crafts, games and singing.

We are also in the process of continuing to develop and offer a variety of programs for Czech kids, and the opportunities for ministry abound at the local pre-school and nearby elementary school which actually specializes in languages. Unfortunately with limited resources, we have yet to be able to take advantage of all the opportunities which exist.

With the launch of the library website, more individuals from outside of Prague are discovering and inquiring about borrowing privileges. As such, we have thought about, and want to find ways to be of better service to, those in more remote locations — including the possibility of developing and operating a bookmobile system

Future plans also call for a vision of replication which will provide for establishment of similar public libraries located in other major cities in Central and Eastern Europe, with specific possibilities currently being discussed for Budapest (Hungary), Berlin (Germany) and Zagreb (Croatia). \*

*For more information about the vision, purpose and operation of Krestanska knihovna Praha (Prague Christian Library), please check out the library website: [www.christianlibrary.cz](http://www.christianlibrary.cz) or e-mail: [JLEBarnes@compuserve.com](mailto:JLEBarnes@compuserve.com).*

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*(Continued from page 85.)*

of celebration leading up to the 50th Anniversary of ACL in 2006. Valley Forge Christian College near Philadelphia will be our 2005 conference host site. Ideas and information are appreciated by the 50th Anniversary Celebration Task Force (Dale Solberg, Coordinator.)

#### **STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2002-2004**

In the first business meeting session on June 10, I gave an overview of matters on which our Board of Directors, and Director of Operations have been working. Work is continuing toward a marketing plan to internalize in our members the ACL mission and vision, to encour-

age pride and confidence in the Association, and to convey to the larger library world our mission, vision, benefits, services, and products. The ACL Web site has been re-designed. The Financial Advisory Team, including our Business Manager and Treasurer, are improving our financial reporting capabilities and studying the Association's use of honoraria to express appreciation for service to the Association. ACL's management structure continues to be studied and discussed. The Board of Directors changed the terms of office for Treasurer, Secretary, and Directors-at-Large from two years to three years. Changes were also made in the Director of Operations posi-

tion to support new marketing initiatives. The Board of Directors will meet October 30-November 1 in Cedarville, Ohio.

It is a challenging and exciting time to be serving in the Association. Please regularly ask God to guide the many serving in the work. And let us hear from you!

In His service,

**Steve**

Steven L. Preston, ACL President  
Director of Library Services  
Milligan College, Tennessee  
[sjpreston@milligan.edu](mailto:sjpreston@milligan.edu)