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Expanding Our Boundaries With Information Literacy

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EXPANDING OUR BOUNDARIES WITH INFORMATION LITERACY

*Dr. Patricia Senn Breivik,
Dean of the Library for
San Jose State University
in San Jose, California,
brought this address to
the first General Session
of the 2002 Conference
of the Association of
Christian Librarians.*

*“Expanding Our
Boundaries” was the
theme of the Conference .*

Years ago I had a calling to a special ministry, but I didn't think of it that way. At the time it seemed more a desire, whereas callings had to do with going into overseas missionary work or into a full time Christian ministry.

My calling came a few years after the birth of my son when I was working with a capital campaign for the United Presbyterian Church. The \$50 million dollar campaign was coming to an end, and that meant my job would soon be over. Although I was offered a higher-level position with the Foundation – one I might add, which had only been held by men up until then, I kept thinking back to a black and white photograph and knew I had to become a librarian.

Years earlier I had worked for a year as a library assistant in a lower eastside branch of the New York Public Library. I worked mostly in the children's room, was allowed to do story hours and even go on a book buying trip. Most of all, I knew I was making a difference in the

through Ellis Island with their parents. Many of these pictures showed boys and girls literally lined up for blocks waiting for the doors of the library to open. I keep two of such pictures in my office to always remind me why I became a librarian. And the reason was that – just like those children – I saw the library as a way to a better future for them. I wanted to help open doors to new and better opportunities for them and for other generations of children. That was my calling.

The first challenge I had to confront was that I had quit college after three and a half years. Since then, Sputnik had gone up, and all the undergraduate requirements had changed. However, since the only way at that time I could envision fulfilling my mission was to become a librarian, I had to move forward in faith that I could finish a BA and get a Masters while also having some family challenges.

God, of course, is more than able to meet our needs and soon after I got my BA, one good sign that I truly had a

If you are open and ready for a leadership role beyond the walls of your library, then you'll want to pray: “O God and King, please expand my opportunities and my impact in such a way that I can touch more lives for Your glory by influencing students and learning on my campus. Let me do more for you!”

lives of those very special, very diverse young children. I also discovered a treasure of black and white photographs of much earlier days. In them I saw immigrant children who had come

calling was that I received federal fellowships that covered all my school expenses and provided a modest but adequate living stipend for both my Masters and Doctoral degrees.

I only worked for a year as a librarian before starting to work on my doctorate. The first half was at a Brooklyn elementary school library. This is where I started to work at my calling.

Being a school librarian was hard. So I moved to a temporary reference position at a Brooklyn College. I arrived shortly after the City moved to an open admissions policy at a time when the SUNY campuses were struggling to cope with the remedial needs of this new wave of students. As I encountered their struggles, indeed, their poignant mixture of hope and fear of failure, I saw again the faces of immigrant children but in a rainbow of colors. And it was to open admission students at Brooklyn College, that I returned to do my dissertation research on whether "Information Management Skills (later to become Information Literacy abilities) could help in the Academic Success of Disadvantaged Freshmen."

The focus on the experiment was on student's grades in a writing course, their grade point averages and their retention rates. But despite some fascinating – at least to me – outcomes I could not interest or entice either the library administration or the Department of Educational Opportunity to continue a longitudinal study on the students. Nobody but me was the least bit interested. Nobody but me and God.

Now you may ask how can I be so sure that then or now God had any interest in this issue at all? First, this calling is

in keeping with Biblical principles. Information Literacy is concerned with helping the "least of these", and it empowers people to seek the truth. But far more than that it has been the continuing blessings that have flowed from God on my ministry that provides that confirmation. This spring many people in my Church completed the *Experiencing the Will of God* Bible study. One of the most exciting concepts in this study is the principle that, "When God lets someone know what he wants to do through them it will be something only God can do."

Think of the

Will you leave it entirely up to God as to what those blessings will be and where and when and how you are to receive them? He may open the door for you to get a doctorate, to relocate to another campus, or to undertake a major planning role. His blessings will often be different from what you had planned and always greater than you can ask or think.

Experience at Wayne State University which also presumed to suggest that

absurdity, indeed, the presumption of a newly minted late-blooming – 10 years to get a BA degree – librarian continuing to believe that other librarians and educators should pay attention to a slightly revised version of the Library College Movement that saw libraries as the true center for learning on campus and which had been a political disaster from the very start. And, oh yes, Patricia Knapp had also written about the failure of the Monteith

librarians had a partnering if not leadership role to play in student learning.

If you add in my failure to interest anyone at Brooklyn College in continuing the research I had started, that was strike three. The idea should have been "out". But whereas there was nothing

hopeful from a human standpoint, God was ready to do the impossible.

But oh what a rewarding and exciting career I have had, and oh, how much God has blessed my Information Literacy efforts and the work of so many others – some known to

me and some not.

The job still isn't done. So I invite you to pray with me the Prayer of Jabez and start "expanding your boundaries". Let's think together how that works when we look at our responsibilities as academic librarians and more particularly at our responsibilities as related to information literacy.

Step One is an act of faith – faith that God wants to bless you and your service on campus far beyond what opportunities you have had to date. Are you willing to have God make you not just a really good public, technical or systems librarian but also to make you into a leader? Are you willing to move beyond your comfort zone by asking God to bless you no matter what role and responsibilities He may see for you? Will you leave it entirely up to God as to what those blessings will be and where and when and how you are to receive them? He may open the door for you to get a doctorate, to relocate to another campus, or to undertake a major planning role. His blessings will often be different from what you had planned and always greater than you can ask or think.

It is not who you are or what your family has decided for you or even what you think you are to be. What Jabez's prayer points us to is the question: Are you ready for becoming all that God wants you to be and is ready to make happen in your life? If so, you'll want to pray: "God, oh, that you would bless me indeed!"

Step Two is another act of faith. Are you ready to ask God to enlarge your life so you can make a greater impact for Him? Do you really want more influence, more responsibility and more opportunity to make a mark for God? Are you ready for Him to enlarge your territory beyond the walls of your library to include, for example, responsibility for student learning? If so, I believe God is ready to offer that opportunity to you today.

Such new responsibilities are not a renaming of the long practiced library or bibliographic instruction. We are talking about reshaping the educational process by partnering with faculty to focus on student learning, and therefore, having students become responsible for their own learning in a way that has them exploring, evaluating and organizing resources for their own learning from the full range of existing world of print, online and in-person information that makes up today's Information Society.

If you are open and ready for a leadership role beyond the walls of your library, then you'll want to pray: "O God and King, please expand my opportunities and my impact in such a way that I can touch more lives for Your glory by influencing student and learning on my campus. Let me do more for you!"

Step Three is a turning to God in faith when we are in the process of moving into our new territories. If my experiences are any way typical of what you will face, you will have many times

when it will look and feel like you are heading for embarrassment if not outright rejection or failure. I particularly liked the thought on page 49 of the book, which states:

"If seeking God's blessings is our ultimate act of worship, and asking to do more for Him is our utmost ambition, then asking for God's hand upon us is our strategic choice to sustain and continue the great things that God has begun in our lives."

Our sufficiency, our ability, our winsomeness to forge new partnerships on campus and to become models of learning facilitators rather than teachers are not dependent on us. They are dependent upon the limitless capabilities of the loving Creator of our Universe.

Our sufficiency, our ability, our winsomeness to forge new partnerships on campus and to become models of learning facilitators rather than teachers are not dependent on us. They are dependent upon the limitless capabilities of the loving Creator of our Universe.

Our job is to every day ask for God's touch and to rejoice in our dependence on Him and the power that dependence makes available to us. Our job is to pray: "Oh God, that your hand would be with me!"

Finally, we will need to remember that when we are about God's business failure is still a very real possibility. We are attempting more and so there are, in fact, greater "opportunities" for failure or for coming in second or for settling for just a little progress. It may come in the guise of discouragement when my plans are not accepted by my director or colleagues, or when reaching out to faculty I am rebuffed, or I may get caught up in long established routines, or a key staff member may leave, or any one of a dozen or more things can be a temptation to settle for

something less than the full territory God wants me to have. It can also come from jealousies, a tendency of negativity towards one's supervisor or colleagues, or even the "Oh, we tried that before" mentality. It is even possible that hurt feelings or wounded egos can get in the way of success. To avoid this we need to daily pray: "Oh, God, that you would keep me from evil."

I like the fuller version of this prayer that appears on page 69:

"Lord, keep me from making the mistakes I'm most prone to when temptation comes. I confess that what I think is necessary, smart, or personally beneficial is so often only the beautiful wrapping on sin. So please, keep evil far from me!"

This prayer of Jabez can, of course, be prayed in regard to our growth as a Christian, as a member of a family and as a member of a community. But I do believe that God will be pleased and will honor our approaching Him with this prayer in regard to our profession as academic librarians. Would it not be a tremendous witness of God's power and testimony to His glory, if Christian librarians' success in partnering with faculty to enhance student learning became so evident that the rest of higher education had to take notice? Moreover, think of how well equipped future generations of ministers and Christian business and civic leaders will be for lifelong learning and decision-making!

How about you? Are you ready to pray the prayer of Jabez? *