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Around The World In Eight Days

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AROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHT DAYS

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ABSTRACT

Theological schools in the two-thirds world struggle with untrained staff and inadequate resources. On-site evaluations, training workshops, automation projects and blitz cataloging are four ways Christian librarians can assist through short visits overseas. Good communication and preparation are essential for a successful visit. Follow-up communication can turn a short visit into a long-term partnership.

I don't have a year to give. I don't even have a month. What can I do to help a library overseas in one week?

Bible colleges and seminaries around the world are doing a vital work of training national pastors, church workers and denominational leaders. Upper level schools are preparing faculty and theologians to deal with the vital issues of those cultures. They are aware of the importance of the library for effective training, but they struggle with untrained staff and limited resources.

Here are four possible ways librarians could lend a hand during spring break or for one or two weeks in the summer.

ON-SITE EVALUATION

Your visit can be an encouragement to a local librarian feeling overwhelmed by the task. At the very least you can help them to identify the tools they already have on hand and teach them to use those tools more effectively.

Your visit may take the form of a pre-accreditation evaluation. By pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of a library you can help them to be better prepared before that all-important accreditation team visit.

Rightly handled, such an evaluation need not

be a threat to the librarian. You are working together toward the same goal of effective library service. Your word as an outsider may be just what he or she needs to convince the administration to move ahead on something the librarian has been concerned about for years. ACL member Bill Abernathy visited Israel Bible College in 1994 and again in 1998. In the time between visits the school had achieved accreditation. They attributed much of the improvement in the library to his evaluation.

TRAINING WORKSHOPS

The Commission for International Library Assistance (CILA), a division of ACL, sponsors basic library training

CILA
**Commission for International
Library Assistance**

workshops overseas every year using *The Librarian's Manual* (ACL, 1994). Other workshops may be sponsored by local accrediting agencies, individual schools or consortia. Such workshops may involve several schools or training the staff of one institution. They may be for basic beginners, more advanced or on a specialized subject such as library automation. Linda Stark taught library administration and basic cataloging in Myanmar (Burma) as part of a larger leadership training seminar put on by her college. Mariel Voth has conducted workshops on original cataloging in the Southern Cone of South America, where they do not use English or have ready access to cataloging services.

AUTOMATION PROJECTS

Many schools are jumping at new technology to vault their libraries into the Twenty-First century. They welcome help in choosing a system and setting it up. Because of problems

with electricity, continuing the card catalog may be essential. Your job could be as simple as teaching someone who has never used a computer before to enter data and print cards. (Finding local sources of card stock will be your biggest challenge.)

You may be asked to set up an OPAC and train local technicians. Ferne Weimer and Dorothy Bowen recently installed Concourse at Moffat College in Kijabe, Kenya. They had it up and running and local staff entering data in a day and a half (despite the missionary who plugged one computer into the wrong current and blew out the power source!) Ferne and Dorothy were in and out over the next few days to be sure things were running smoothly.

BLITZ CATALOGING

Whether you use a database or do original cataloging, you will find most third world schools very appreciative of your help in making a dent in the new or used books they have received. Whether the staff is undertrained or simply would like a second opinion, you may find a box of problem titles awaiting your advice. Helping them to weed out donations can be a challenge in a country where they are aiming for the magic number of volumes required for accreditation.

BEFORE YOU GO

An effective one-week visit requires months of planning. You will want to investigate visa and inoculation requirements early. Cheaper airfares are available if you plan ahead. If you carry excess baggage of donations to the school, you may be able to arrange special rates for non-profit use. (British Airways is especially good about this.) For a short visit, plan to stay in your own hemisphere. You don't want to waste days adjusting to a major shift in time zones.

Good communication ahead of time is essential. You need someone at the other end setting things up to run smoothly. Realistic goals should be defined so both of you know what is expected. Sample shelflist cards will help you to know the state of the catalog before you plunge into an automation project. Be sure you are communicating with the librarian and not merely a school administrator. Misunderstanding has hampered more than one visit because the local librarian was left out of the planning.

Be as familiar as you can with the culture before you arrive. Find out *before* you bring the computer, how regular their electricity supply is. If showing the sole of your shoe is considered insulting, or setting your handbag on the floor is a sign you are looking for a pick-up, you want that information ahead of time.

Read, read, read! (Do we need to tell librarians that?) Talk to someone who has been there—a returned missionary or an international student. *Culturegrams* put out by Brigham Young University is a good source of practical

information. The perspective of an alternate worldview will be much more difficult to understand than the idiosyncrasies of food and housing.

AFTER YOU COME HOME

You can be an on-going encouragement to the librarian you visited. You understand their situation like no one else. You have been there, and as a fellow-librarian, you know the issues. Make yourself available to answer questions by e-mail. You can even do some cataloging from a distance. In a few cases it may be possible for the librarian to make a return visit to you in the States. Simply showing hospitality builds trust. An internship of anywhere from a month to a year may be possible. The visiting librarian could gain supervised practical experience in various areas of your library.

You can act as a purchasing agent for the overseas library, buying and shipping titles they are specifically looking for. Send freebies from your own overstock when they are relevant to the partner school's need. Consider creating your own CIP data when none is provided.

FINDING A LIBRARY THAT NEEDS YOU

The Commission for International Library Assistance (CILA), a division of ACL, publishes a list of libraries which have approached ACL for help. Ask missionaries of your denomination or international graduates of your school for contacts. This could be a natural link for an on-going relationship between schools.

Remember that we are on the same team. We do not go as Great White Fathers (or Mothers) walking all over people with our "right" answers. We go humbly, as fellow laborers with those God has already raised up to do the work of training leaders for His Church. Make sure you are working with people on their priorities and not merely doing something for them.

In Thailand Linda Stark met a missionary helping in the library. She had been trained 10 years ago by Dorothy Spidell in an ACL workshop. The results of that training are still being felt. It's worth a week out of your vacation.

This article is based on a workshop by the same title held at the 2000 ACL conference in San Diego, CA. Contributors included Bill Abernathy (organizer), Phyllis Masso, Ferne Weimer, Dorothy Bowen, Mariel Voth, Linda Stark, and LeAnne Hardy. Collectively we have library experience in two dozen countries. †

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