



Volume 64 | Issue 1

Article 10

7-1-2021

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Recommended Citation

Ellero, Nadine (2021) "'An Unusual Story of Perseverance, Privilege and Prosperity during a Pandemic'," *The Christian Librarian*: Vol. 64: Iss. 1, Article 10.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55221/2572-7478.2255>

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An Unusual Story of Perseverance, Privilege and Prosperity during a Pandemic



**Nadine P. Ellero, Head of Technical Services
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Our COVID-19 pandemic work experience at Auburn University Libraries and especially in technical services was unusual. I and many of my personnel worked continuously onsite all of 2020, and we continue to do so now as I write this testimonial in March 2021. Our perseverance to work onsite was by choice, necessity, and simply, the right thing to do. We received the directive to continue providing information resources to students and faculty in all modalities, which meant that technical services never ceased ordering print or any other physical resource. Support staff in technical services are the library's staff that attend to the loading dock and receive a variety of deliveries for many departments in the library, not just technical services. Early on it was determined that the library would offer curb-side service and pick-up via shelves located in the library's entrance-way. While all library personnel were assigned a laptop to enable working from home, several technical services staff in acquisitions, physical processing, and interlibrary loan and document delivery needed to be in the library to complete their work responsibilities. We ordered electronic replacements for many books in our physical collections, but that was not always possible and staff were needed to retrieve physical materials. Fortunately, there were several non-technical services faculty librarians who chose to work onsite as well and who generously assisted with book retrieval for interlibrary loan and document delivery.

For the most part, faculty librarians at Auburn University Libraries had and continue to have the choice and privilege to work remotely, with only a few supervising full-time staff. While I am a faculty librarian with this same privilege, I chose to work onsite. Both in my role as head of technical services and commitment to being an authentic Christian servant leader, my path was clear, despite my fears of COVID-19. How could I work from home in a privileged place when my support staff and several librarians needed to come in to complete their work to provide resources that were physical? What is more, these same staff are largely from protected groups. In this present time of unveiling racial injustice, my heart and soul

could not rest in the confines of comfort or personally participate in this divide. I was called and compelled to support and protect my staff and librarians working onsite in technical services. If they were to face danger, I was going to be with them. If they needed back-up I would be there. In those early days, I made daily rounds to check-in with them regarding any aspect of work safety or comfort and I wanted them to know I am here right beside them. Additionally, as a professed Secular Franciscan following the way of St. Francis, I am urged to “spread the Gospel and use words when necessary.” In the early days and especially in May 2020 when the library opened to more user groups, I was anxious with thoughts that students and delivery persons could be covered in COVID-19 and that at any moment we might be struck with the COVID-19 contagion. I am ashamed to admit that like St. Francis of Assisi, I saw these students and delivery persons as potential COVID-19 lepers and dreaded coming too close to them. I mentally knew, this was not the way of Jesus Christ. St. John tells us that perfect love casts out all fear. If we truly love God, there is no room for fear, and I desired to carry out God’s will in whatever form that might take. At the same time, I prayed that none of my people would contract this pestilence and I upped the ante in my morning prayer to include wise counsel found in the spiritual classic, *Abandonment to Divine Providence*. Jeane-Pierre De Caussade, encourages us to “... never forget that ours is not a life governed by our feelings.” In a translation of his spiritual letters, he writes, “Everything comes from God. And on our part, everything consists of obeying the will of God. Whether we like it or not His Will will always be accomplished. Let us unite ourselves to it with all the strength of our own will, and from then on we have nothing to fear” (86). I was determined to not let fear overtake me in following out work obligations. In trusting God, my fears slowly faded, and I was able to interact with delivery persons and students as I normally would. Yes, without hesitation, I signed off on deliveries, wearing no gloves and making sure to wash my hands soon after.

Meanwhile, library administration supplied us with an arsenal of personal protective equipment and quality cloth face masks to protect us from this pestilence and enable us to fulfill our part of the university’s mission. We lost little momentum on providing information resources in all formats to our patrons. Interlibrary loan and document delivery personnel had access to print in our main and offsite storage buildings. We shared our good fortune as we provided resources to others in need both nationally and globally. The fruits of our labor were seen in the expressions of gratitude and monetary credit towards our OCLC subscription. Then to our surprise we were notified in December 2020 of selection for OCLC’s new Express Digital Delivery program for our ability to deliver articles and other digital resources within an 18 hour or less timeframe.

My hope is that our story shows how true privilege works in God's kingdom. Neither I nor any of my personnel contracted COVID-19 in the library. Our library and workplace never became a den of contagion and our geographic location in rural southeast Alabama was instrumental in shielding us. We were motivated and privileged to help others who were not so fortunate as us. Exercising servant leadership during a pandemic as a Christian and Secular Franciscan provided me a most precious privilege to stand strong in Faith, do what is right, and experience God's glory through his protection and prosperity. ✝

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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