



Volume 49 | Issue 2

Article 9

2006

ACL and God's Call to Librarianship

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Recommended Citation

Nelson, Barbara (2006) "ACL and God's Call to Librarianship," *The Christian Librarian*: Vol. 49: Iss. 2, Article 9.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55221/2572-7478.1708>

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ACL and God's Call to Librarianship

Many people have asked me how, as a librarian in a secular institution, I became so involved in ACL. I have been at Auburn University Libraries since 1978, but before that was at a Christian liberal arts college, now defunct. ACL has been part of my life since the early 70's and, of all the professional organizations to which I have belonged, it is the one that has had the greatest effect on me personally.

My Call to Librarianship

I have liked libraries from my childhood, and worked in my tiny public library for several years (starting at \$.25 an hour). I worked one year typing catalog cards for my high school library, not something I enjoyed because the librarian was very, very picky! Actually my first library job was to organize my sixth-grade classroom library. That teacher eventually became a librarian and was my first mentor.

When I entered Central Michigan University in Mount Pleasant, Michigan, I had no intention of being a librarian, though I did intend to get a job in the college library and worked Circulation/Reserve Desk for most of my college days. From my earliest years I wanted to teach, especially history, and used to line up my dolls as if they were in a classroom. My parents were both teachers; they never pressured me to go in that direction, but that was my heart. I majored in Secondary Education, with major emphasis in History and a minor in Speech and Drama. My mother had returned to teaching when I started school in order to be able to put me through college without my having to work as hard to earn the money to attend college as she did. Her only requirement in college was that I get a second minor in Library Science just in case I couldn't get a job teaching History - hence, my foray into the world of professional library science. However, I had a call to teach, not to be a librarian.

After teaching History and English at a high school for a few years, I had to leave my job and move to Lansing in order to get a Master's Degree in History for Secondary School Teachers at Michigan State University. My only thinking about libraries at that point was using the library to do research. Having finished the degree, I was involved by then with the Navigator ministry at the University, so decided I wanted to stay in the area. The only job I could get was as a high school librarian, so I took it. Believe me; I did not consider this a calling! There was no money in the budget for library materials (I bought one reference book with fine money and spent a lot of time clipping and filing newspaper articles so students had some information for their papers!) At the end of that year, when their millage failed for the third time, they pink-slipped their first year teachers and I was out of a job.

To make a long story short, God brought Owosso College (later called John Wesley College) into my life and I took a job there as the one and only librarian. They were a newly purchased school and knew they might not get a librarian with an MLS. (Actually, at the time, I didn't know what an MLS was!) I love how God works! Because my mother insisted I get a minor in library science with my Education degree and because I had worked circulation at the University, I was able to get the high school library job. Because of that, I was considered for the college library job. I had never considered working at a college in any capacity.

Within a very short time, I knew I was called to be there at that College. Two years later they told me they wanted to keep me and if I wanted to stay, I needed to work on my MLS. At that point, I knew God was calling me to become a college librarian and I worked on

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my degree over the next few years. By the time I finished my degree, John Wesley College was very close to closing its doors, so at that time I moved to Auburn University in Alabama. My parents were moving to Florida and I wanted to be close enough to them to get there in a day, without worrying about snow and airports! The story behind getting that job is as miraculous as the one where I first began working in a Christian college environment. Neither story is short enough to include here, but it was obvious that God was broadening my “call” to a wider field.

The Role of ACL in My Life

Now, what contribution did ACL make to my development as a librarian? At the time I began at Owosso College, I had no idea ACL, then Christian Librarians’ Fellowship, existed. But I learned of it in 1973, so in 1973 I attended my first conference at Asbury College. Wow! Here were all these issues I had never thought of – and practical things to learn! And here was a group of folks I not only identified with as a librarian, but as a Christian. The fellowship was wonderful and I soaked it up.

Then I got involved (initially with *The Christian Periodical Index*) and that began an involvement as a learner, a doer and a teacher over the years. Because I learned so much in those early years, I was committed to giving back. This continued even when I left the Christian college world and moved to a secular university. God especially blessed me by bringing me to Auburn University, where my administrators never discouraged my participation in ACL, as long as I was also active in secular library organizations. This has continued through the years.

Being a Librarian in a Secular Institution

I suppose it would be appropriate here to talk about my life as a librarian in a Christian

institution and in a secular institution. The differences are pretty overwhelming in many ways, not the least of which is that I have only worked in Acquisitions at Auburn, where at John Wesley College I did a bit of everything. Some might wonder why I didn’t mention money. When I came to Auburn to interview, I was told that big libraries have money problems, too. Of course, I answered that I didn’t think this school would be in danger of closing this year and I didn’t imagine anyone had gone without a paycheck recently! But in many ways they were correct. It doesn’t matter how large or small the library, there is never enough money to buy everything that students and faculty need.

In terms of adjusting to a secular institution, it was made easier for me in that I attended secular universities as a student and was aware of some of the moral and cultural differences. While Auburn is a secular institution with a more liberal teaching and library faculty than student body, this is the rural south and in the middle of the Bible belt, which made the transition easier for me.

Conclusion

It is really hard to put in writing what ACL has meant to me over the years. Professionally they helped me get started and offered me opportunities for service both with CPI and conference workshops and on the Board. Personally I have made more friends than I can count. Spiritually, ACL has been a lifeline to me, especially with my health needs. I always know I am being prayed for and that people will respond to my prayer requests. That blanket of prayer support interacts with my prayer support here and gives me a feeling of being held in the hands of God and His church. ✝