

EDITORIAL

By

JOAN C. DURRANCE¹

It has been estimated that there are libraries in 10% of the nation's churches. Based on the total number of churches in the United States in 1966 — 332,344 — there may be over 32,000 church libraries in this country, and at least two denominations report libraries in over one-fourth of their churches. One can readily see that a large number of church libraries have been established. More librarians are finding themselves in the sometimes uncomfortable position of being asked to set up a church library. The librarian faced with this task does not always meet it warmly because the very basic question — How should one organize and maintain a church library? — may seem unanswerable.

The material which defines the church library and its purposes, organization, and maintenance is available through almost every major denomination in the country. These materials are prepared by the denominations for the inexperienced volunteer who assumes the office of church librarian. This service is usually provided through the church library department which is closely linked with the Christian Education Department or the Sunday School Board and with the denominational book stores.

Although the philosophies and recommendations of the denominations differ, the services of the church library departments are similar. The department usually gives a small discount on all books purchased, provides church librarians with book selection lists, and furnishes them with book catalogs, promotional helps, and manuals for organization and maintenance of the library.

The materials are similar, but their content reflects the denomination's philosophy of church libraries. For example, the book selection policies of the denominations differ widely. Some denominations advocate building of general collections with strong religious sections while others mold church libraries to supplement the Sunday School curriculum. Still other denominations recommend a religious and denominational collection with a few secular titles, usually about social issues and/or recreation.

To be of maximum assistance to the church, the professional librarian should know about these materials and guide the layman in organizing a library which conforms to the denominational philosophy. The writer has found that sometimes church members are not aware of their own denomination's program for church libraries.

The professional librarian who is confronted with the request to set up a church library need not hesitate to be of assistance. The librarian should suggest that there may be a denominational church library department which issues materials for the beginning church library. The addresses of these departments may be obtained through the *Yearbook of American Churches*. The inquirer may safely write the Sunday School Board or the Christian Education Department of the denomination, whose address is given, requesting information about the church library department. The professional librarian must see the church library as a special library with a purpose reflecting the philosophy of the denomination. Viewing the library from this perspective will enable the librarian when called upon to be of most assistance.

1. Mrs. Durrance holds the M.S.L.S. from UNC and has held positions on the professional staff of the Miami (Fla.) Public Library and the Wilson Library, UNC in Chapel Hill. The mother of two preschool children. She is presently a resident of Seattle, Washington.