

# Promote! Promote! Promote!

It takes more than a neat, attractive, and well arranged library with a good collection of books to entice your church members to use the library. Don't be the kind of librarian who complains, "People don't read around here! I do all this work and no one uses the library! Who wants 'religious books' anyway? I quit!" The universal plea of most church librarians is "How can we get people to read the good books in the library?" The answer, of course, is to tell potential users about those good books as often and in as many ways as possible. Your only limitation is your imagination.

Promoting your library is like advertising. And the aim of advertising is to make the consumers feel they simply cannot get along without the product or service being sold. Try to help your congregation realize how much they need you and how you in turn are there just to help them. In many ways you are competing for people's free time - your competition ranges from TV to videos to movies to sports and beyond. Your church library can provide spiritual enrichment and a deeper understanding of the Christian's commitment. Learning, studying, and thinking are life-time endeavors.

Consistent promotion is probably the single most important thing you can do for your library. Don't promote one month and then not do anything for two or three months. Church members need to be reminded how important their library is to their spiritual life on a regular basis.

The first thing we need to know is that there are four types of promotion we can use. The four types are 1) **Visual** - which includes library location signs, posters, bulletin boards, banners, and shelf displays, 2) **Verbal** - this includes personal recommendations, story hours, visiting other church organizations, and announcements from the lectern, 3) **Printed promotion** - included in this are church bulletins, book marks, newsletters and bulletin inserts, 4) **People involvement** - such as book fairs, poster contests, memorial book programs, and holiday/seasonal emphases.

Now that we've identified the types of promotion, it is necessary to plan our promotions. In doing so, no single promotion can sufficiently accomplish impact, awareness or response. Beautiful posters by themselves aren't enough. Fabulous announcements, alone aren't sufficient. Unique bulletin inserts, as the only approach aren't adequate. Instead plan on using a mix of all the types of promotion regularly.

The four things I do the most are listed: inserts, newsletter articles, book displays, and posters. The themes are decided and posters are dead-lined well enough in advance so that no one is given an assignment at the last minute.

Planning your promotions far in advance helps everyone. You may wish to create a planning calendar to hand out to committee members for this purpose. The people on your library staff will know what's coming up next. I have usually assigned posters two or three months in advance. Don't take anything for granted, stay on top of who's doing posters. As the librarian, it pays to check with your people two or three weeks before their posters are due, just as a reminder.

Let's look at some of the things you can do in your library. Not everyone will be able to use all the ideas, but they will give you something for future reference.

## **VISUAL PROMOTIONS**

- **Suggestion box** - Have an attractive suggestion box available in your library, so members can give you suggested titles and/or subjects they would like to see added to the shelves.
- **Promote your new books** - Put them on a special shelf and identify them as "New Books", then do a bulletin insert announcing the new books by title and author. With the bulletin insert members will have something that they can refer to later at home, in effect, the promotion continues even after they have left church. Or do a free standing display on a table top of your new books. People will be more liable to check out a book when they can see the front cover, rather than the spine alone.
- **Location signs** - Don't keep your location a secret. Place adequate signs around the church indicating where the library is located. It's amazing how many people may not know where your library is or sometimes that a church even has a library. Let me tell you of an example in my own church. Our library is located in a room called "the Elders Room". Everyone refers to the room as such but the library is the most prominent thing in it. I finally approached someone on the Board of Elders and proposed they consider changing the name of the room to the "Library". The elders don't use the room for meetings so why not change the name? At least people will know where it is.
- **Wish list** - Make up a list of books you would like to purchase for the library. Give your members a chance to donate them. Always include a memorial plate in the front of books that have been donated. Post your list in your library and in the narthex, updating and changing your list every few months so that it always has fresh titles.
- **Bulletin boards** - If you are lucky enough to be planning a new library and its furnishings, be sure to include a bulletin board for the exclusive use of the library. Place it outside your library but near the entry door. This will be an excellent place for you to promote your library with notices, posters, your wish list, etc. If you have a bulletin board available to you - use it. Even a half of a board is better than none. Create boards that are bright and colorful, emphasizing seasonal and religious themes. The list of themes is really endless. More creative bulletin board ideas can be found in magazines and catalogs, retail displays, greeting cards, calendars, as well as church newsletters and bulletin covers. The list goes on and on. Jot down your ideas as you see or think of them - don't wait until later and rely on your memory. You'll find you'll either forget them or just never get back to recording your ideas. If you find you are having a problem coming up with ideas, look into purchasing a book about bulletin boards, which can provide creative display ideas. NPH has a great selection from which to choose.

There are many inexpensive materials that you can use to make your bulletin boards. You can use fabric as a background, or newspaper, construction paper, gift wrap, or old wall paper. Your lettering can be as simple as using markers or you can purchase a set of letter stencils, templates, or dry transfer sheets and make your own, using the same type of materials as I had suggested for background covers. One suggested caption you could use is "New Arrivals for Spring" using stems and leaves of flowers, but make books instead of flowers using some of your new titles. You can add to the display as space permits. Some other caption ideas for posters or boards "Change your mind - read a book," "Your church library - a harvest of blessing," "Libraries are Windows to the World."

## VERBAL PROMOTIONS

- **Story hours** - You might consider arranging story hours in Sunday School classes, vacation Bible school classes, or in elementary classes if your church has a school.
- **Other church organizations** - Approach other organizations in the church and offer to talk to their group about the library, or about specific books available in the library. Check with your pastor about upcoming Bible class studies; you might have an opportunity to promote books that are targeted toward or related to his Bible studies.
- **New members** - When your church accepts new members, make a point of being a part of their welcome. Our church holds a small reception after the service when they are accepted. Our committee is presently working on a welcome letter to the new members that will contain our policies and rules and will encourage them to make use of our resource center. This also gives you the opportunity to meet all the new members and possibly get them interested in helping you with the library.
- **Announcements** - Talk with your pastor. If he will consent to making book announcements from the lectern, prepare brief descriptions of some new books.

## PRINTED PROMOTIONS

- **Bookmarks** - When making bookmarks put titles and authors for seasons or special interest, such as Easter reading. These bookmarks can be included in Sunday bulletins and be made available to everyone checking out a book. Make a display of the books you promote easily accessible for a month after you give out the bookmarks.
- **Church newsletter** - Use your newsletter for a multitude of promotions. Review books, promote your next display, publicize missing books, mention new gift books and acknowledge their donors. At least once a year, review all your services and policies. Report on library committee meetings.
- **Bulletin inserts** - Make inserts monthly. Use these inserts to promote new books and your monthly displays. Make the inserts eye catching and readable.

A suggestion for the librarian here. Invest in a book of clip art. Clip art and pictures in such books can be copied with no copyright problems. These pictures will help you make numerous promotional items more attractive and eye catching. If you have a computer available to you, it is possible to install clip art discs in your computer.

## PEOPLE PROMOTION

- **Poster contest** - Sponsor a poster contest for the children in your school or the Buckaroos and Pioneers. Break down the children in age groups and award a prize (a book or a bookmark) for the winner in each group. Use the posters to help promote your library.
- **Book fairs** - Sponsor a book fair in your church. Promote Christian reading in your congregation. NPH will be happy to work with you to customize your selections to

suit your church and members.

- **Open house** - Plan an open house once a year. Serve light refreshments. Let the congregation know you have resources available for them.
- **Home delivery** - Become a personalized book service to homebound members. If there are shut-ins that like to read and can't get to church, arrange for a group of volunteers to deliver material to their homes.
- **Book discussion groups** - Hold meetings in the library in which you will all read the same book and then discuss it. Supply book lists of related items to supplement the regular reading. This is also a good way to promote the library and recruit helpers and supporters for the library.
- **Special promotions** - Take advantage of special times of the year. Promote during National Library Week, National Bible Week, and Children's Book Week. Don't forget the children. By promoting books for children, you will get their parents in the library. While the parents wait for their kids to select a book, maybe they'll find something they'd like to read.

I've tried to give you some ideas to use in promoting your library in this presentation. You can expand on all these ideas and come up with many others of your own. Remember, every place you look there are ideas you can adapt for use to promote your library. If you feel you still need some ideas place your name on the mailing list of some of the companies that deal in library promotional material and bulletin board helps. I have already mentioned looking at NPH for clip art books and bulletin board idea books, but there are other companies such as Upstart, Children's Book Council, Murphy School and Library Specialties, Ann Marie's Workshop, Inc., and Demco Library Supplies. Another place to look for ideas and materials are teacher supply stores. Remember you don't necessarily have to purchase their products, but you will get ideas and that's what we're all looking for.

However, your best promotion is always the person whom you have helped in your library. Word of mouth travels fast. The only limitation in promoting your library is your imagination.

*Written by Joanne Weber; edited 12/09/09. Used with permission.*