

## Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of the Library Committee

The Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of the Library Committee was charged with “helping the Meeting discern the best way forward in structuring the [Library] Committee so as to protect and develop the resources of the library and to maximize its usefulness to the community.” The members of the Committee were Barbara James, Rick Morgan, Dean Pruitt (Clerk), and Leslie Sussan.

Our first step was to recommend to the Clerks that Barbara James serve as Acting Librarian to replace the Meeting’s Librarian who had resigned. Barbara has taken courses in library management and she served as the Meeting’s Librarian for a number of years. This recommendation was accepted, and Barbara has reorganized and relabeled the shelves for easier access, added shelves for newcomers and the writings of Meeting members, updated the inventory of the library’s holdings, and updated the spreadsheets for the children’s, young reader’s, adult, and audio-visual collections. She is now updating our on-line database (*Library Thing*) and working on our online collection.

We met eight times between June 12 and September 25 and performed the following activities: reviewed the Library Committee’s annual report and minutes of recent meetings; received input from the outgoing Librarian and the Committee’s clerk; reached out to the Quaker Librarians’ Collective and to local meetings for information about library practices elsewhere; consulted with members of the Meeting about the library’s history, the library website, and possible alternatives to the current database; and developed recommendations for staffing a new Library Committee and for a clearer mission statement, set of tasks, and policies going forward.

We hope that these recommendations will be helpful to future Library Committees and Librarians, but we want to make clear that they are intended as goals to work toward in a multi-year process. Our recommendations do not all require immediate attention, and indeed it would be impossible for volunteers to undertake so much at one time. Instead, we hope that our ideas will help Library Committees and Librarians to set priorities, divide responsibilities, and plan for the future.

### Basic Recommendations

1. The primary message to share with the Meeting is that our library is alive and well. The collection is a wonderful resource to be treasured and maintained. It is also capable of growing and evolving along with the meeting community.
2. We recommend that the Library Committee develop and regularly update a handbook to set guidelines, articulate policies, and preserve practices. Such a handbook will facilitate transitions between librarians and committee memberships, avoiding confusion and re-invention. We have not created that handbook, believing it best done by the Library Committee itself, but we have sought to point to key items that would be appropriate to cover. These are presented here in the form of a draft updated mission statement, a tentative list of core tasks, and a set of proposed areas for policy development along with some suggestions for content to be addressed.

3. We do not recommend structural changes in the Library Committee. However, it is important that the committee consist of at least **four** active members in addition to the ex officio membership of the Librarian.
4. We think it desirable for future members of the Library Committee to bring some or all of the following skills and characteristics: **Leadership skills** (people persons as well as book persons, able to get folks excited about possibilities and to bring out contributions from different people); **Digital savvy** (able to discern future-oriented and technological opportunities); **Public relations skills** (to promote the library within the Meeting, for example, to develop blogs or articles and initiate special events such as book signings by Meeting members); **Love of books** (to find and evaluate books, to look for gaps in the collection); **Detail-oriented** (to maintain an inventory, keep the room neat, bookkeeping); **Librarianship** (aware of techniques for keeping a collection in order); **Diverse perspectives** (e.g., on youth, race, gender, activism, spirituality).
5. The Library Committee should be encouraged and enabled to draw on other meeting members for particular skills, insights, or projects as appropriate. For example, content specialists (e.g., specialists in Quaker literature, peace building, spiritual development, economic and social justice, and the environment) might be asked to examine our holdings and suggest acquisitions in their areas of specialization.
6. The Library Committee should be a working committee with a division of labor among its members. For example, different members or subcommittees could be in charge of soliciting and reshelving returns, recommending new acquisitions, planning communication with the Meeting, updating the Library website, etc. This would avoid two common problems with Meeting committees: all the work falling on the shoulders of the clerk and all the work handled by the entire committee at its meetings.
7. The Committee should review with the Librarian how best to handle books that may be of special historical and/or financial value, including our Special Collection.

### **Draft of a Possible Library Committee Mission Statement**

The mission of the Library at Bethesda Friends Meeting is to provide informational resources that support the Meeting's spiritual development and activities, build community in areas of shared concerns and interests, and reflect Quaker principles and practices. To that end, the Library Committee will:

- Maintain, grow and prune the collection to keep it dynamic and accessible
- Promote the active use of the library to meet the evolving needs of the Meeting
- Support educational efforts within the Meeting and interact with other Meeting committees
- Be alert to new technology and digital resources to best accomplish its mission

## Recommended Core Ongoing Tasks for the Library Committee

1. Maintain the existing collection
  - a. Regularly re-shelve returned books
  - b. Check shelves periodically to maintain good order
  - c. Keep library area clean – remove items left around
  - d. Keep inventory and catalog up to date
  - e. Repair damaged volumes when possible or remove if not
  - f. Eliminate lost books from the Meeting's on-line data base (Library Thing)
  
2. Identify and meet community needs for a dynamic collection
  - a. Work to determine Meeting community needs/wants from the collection (e.g. what balance of reference works, historical/archival material, and circulating books; what balance of current events, Quaker testimony subjects, social justice topics, spirituality/contemplation, and Quaker authors/history/ philosophy; and what balance of adult, children, and youth books?). Surveys and focus groups might be used.
  - b. Identify gaps in the collection or areas of overrepresentation, possibly surveying the Meeting to refine vision for the collection
  - c. Develop policies on topics and types of books and other resources to meet those needs (and be willing to revisit those policies from time to time as needs may change)
  - d. Prune existing books based on the above and on book condition
  - e. Evaluate any proffered donations based on a preset policy and identified gaps, and re-gift or return unneeded donations
  - f. Implement an annual purchasing plan based on the above
  
3. Promote active two-way communication with the Meeting community
  - a. Find ways to make members more aware of what is available through the library, e.g., reviews and articles in the *Newsletter*, announcements in Meeting, actively rotating shelves (new books, Meeting authors, book group titles), "how to use your library" instructions, blog/Facebook posts, pages on the Meeting website, section of the *Newsletter*, suggestion box, newcomer tours, and an updated Quaker reading list
  - b. Track circulation – analyze what does and does not circulate and use as one basis for monitoring needs
  - c. Liaise with other committees, for example:
    - (1) RE about books for children and youth, both to get input on books kids are reading/enjoying and to offer information about what we have. This might involve a yearly visit to each grade to show them age-appropriate books, allow them to talk about what they like to read, and encourage borrowing.
    - (2) ARE and F&H about plans for book-related events
    - (3) M&W, RE, ARE, P&SJ and PC about the library's resources. Perhaps a targeted area for adult and children's books on sensitive subjects – e.g., personal or family crises such as divorce, Alzheimers, death, autism, and disability. Perhaps one on social justice issues such as peace, racism, and environment.
    - (4) Book Table about what has sold well and what might fill gaps in the library's collection

- d. Identify constituencies with special needs or interests to ensure that the collection is welcoming to all – e.g. LGBTQ, African American, immigrant/refugee, teenager/youth
  - e. Look for ways to showcase the library – e.g., highlight special sections, host library tours, organize special events such as readings by BFM authors
4. Plan for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century library
- a. Consider alternative non-print book resources and develop policies for acquisition and use – CDs, DVDs, e-books (which belong to the library and can be borrowed by Meeting people), i-books, online downloads or streaming, web-based resources. Consider uploading spiritual journey CDs with password protection.
  - b. On a library webpage, list web-based resources and guides that people can obtain through their own computers. Grow and promote a catalog of such material.
  - c. Develop a social media strategy -- e.g., improvements to a webpage, possible BFM booklovers/bibliophiles discussion blog, Facebook page, tweeting new acquisitions
  - d. Possibly at one point install a terminal in the library for Meeting people to look up the items they want
  - e. Retain membership in the Quaker Library Collective.
5. Plan for moving the library
- a. Coordinate with future planning groups about physical requirements and future wishes
  - b. Plan and identify resources needed to move the existing collection -- e.g., collect online guides to moving a library, identify materials and assistance needed, recruit volunteers or paid movers to pack and unpack
6. Hospitality – contribute one month (currently February) of hospitality service in partnership with the Book Table Committee

### **Suggested Areas for the Development of Policy Guidelines**

1. Upkeep and maintenance policy and practices. These policies might spell out:
  - a. How the books are organized, such as how we have implemented Dewey decimal, what special shelving is needed (e.g., books by members, new arrivals)
  - b. Who is assigned to receive donated or purchased books, how they are classified and added to the inventory, how the online database is updated
  - c. How books are removed from the collection, i.e., the mechanics of removal from the inventory list and database, what records are kept of de-accessioned books, how we dispose of books (e.g., offering to donors or members, sale as used books, donation to charities, transfers to special collections such as Sidwell's or Swarthmore's)
  - d. How checkouts and returns are handled (e.g. who is to re-shelve and how often, do we use software to keep circulation records, check for repair needs, and review for books checked out for a long time)
  - e. How good order is to be maintained on the shelves and in the room
  - f. Whether we should have due dates and renewal procedures
  - g. How overdue books are reclaimed—about 300 are now missing from the collection

2. Book acquisition and removal policy – to articulate how we decide which books are appropriate

The policy might identify the categories the Library Committee views as within its mission. e.g.:

- a. Reference materials: Bibles, Bible concordances and commentaries, rare books, and historical materials
- b. Quaker history, theology, philosophy, and practice, including Pendle Hill pamphlets
- c. Christian classics and comparative sources from other traditions, including resources on meditation, contemplative works, spiritual journeys
- d. Biographies of Quaker figures and others who have embodied Quaker values (SPICES)
- e. Resources for living in a community, including materials on communication, family and parenting challenges, pastoral care, and diversity
- f. Resources for living our faith and values in the world, including materials on social justice, poverty, the environment, conflict and peace-making, gender and race issues, current events of concern to our Meeting, and the role of science and religion in modern life
- g. Audio and video files, including individual spiritual journeys and any other materials produced by the meeting community, as well as other media materials on the topics already listed
- h. Resource books for Meeting management such as non-profit leadership and accounting
- i. Publications by Meeting members and attenders.

The policy might also include criteria for determining the priority to give among selections that fall within the scope of the mission (since space and expenses are limited) such as:

- a. Is it up-to-date? If outdated, is it an important classic or milestone work?
- b. Does it have lasting value and interest, or is it mostly relevant to a passing “hot topic”?
- c. Does it cover a subject not represented in the collection or bring a new and different perspective to one already represented? Is it duplicative of other material we have?
- d. Is there a connection to our community, for example, was it used in an ARE session, read in a book or other study group, read by a spiritual or activist group such as the Experiment with Light, authored by a meeting member, or recommended by one or more members?
- e. Does it contain material that might be problematic or controversial for some members of the community? If so, do reflection and consultation show that the value of the item outweighs any concerns? Should there be any special handling?
- f. Is the cost reasonable in relation to our budget? If relatively expensive, might it serve as a valuable reference that individuals would have difficulty acquiring otherwise?

The policy might also spell out who is to make decisions on individual books to be purchased, accepted by donation, or removed from the collection and how the decision is made, communicated, and recorded -- for example, will the whole committee review individual purchases/donations, will an individual or subgroup be designated to perform these tasks within guidelines and keep other members informed, will potential acquisitions be discussed by e-mail between meetings?

### 3. Donations policy

At times, the Library Committee has received large quantities of books resulting from people's downsizing or moving and has found it difficult to accommodate or dispose of all of them. Also, the Library Committee seeks to be proactive in shaping a collection best suited to the needs of the Meeting community as a whole within the space constraints. This suggests that the Committee should develop and promulgate guidelines that provide more clarity to donors. For example, potential donors might be asked to fill out an electronic or paper form listing the author, title, date and condition of each proffered book. Then the Committee could evaluate the offers within the framework of the acquisition policy. The Committee might also solicit donations (and suggestions) in areas where it has identified gaps or needs in the collection.

### 4. Policies Concerning the Roles of Committee members, Clerks, Librarians, and Auxiliaries

- a. How is the Librarian selected? We recommend that this selection be made by the Business Meeting on recommendation by the Nominating Committee. The Nominating Committee should seek input from the Library Committee.
- b. How are the tasks divided between the Librarian and the Library Committee? We suggest that the Committee and the Librarian meet each year to divide the responsibilities equitably.
- c. How are the Library Committee's tasks sorted out among its members?
- d. How are auxiliaries from the broader Meeting community are chosen and recruited? Auxiliaries might include teenagers doing their community service.

### 5. Policies concerning interaction with and support of other committees and groups within Meeting

- a. How should the Library Committee coordinate with ARE about planned readings? With the Meeting's Book Group?
- b. How discover what RE, First Day school teachers, and parents want to see in the children's and young readers' collections?
- c. How solicit the Book Table's suggestions about what to purchase?
- d. How determine the proper social justice issues and the best resources on these issues? How coordinate with P&SJ on these matters?
- e. How ensure that the collection both reflects and welcomes diversity

### 6. A policy concerning Library Committee meetings. Should the Library Committee meet in the library? Doing so might facilitate discussions of the library.