

January 5, 2017

TO: Board of Spiritual Formation
Rev. Alexis Kassim
Rev. Timothy Tutt

FROM: Jane Williams

RE: Westmoreland Church's Nordbeck Library

This is my report, with recommendations, from the fact-finding study I did regarding the library and possible futures. As a member of the Board of Spiritual Formation, I offered to do this study because the current library space will be re-purposed in the Westmoreland 2020 scenario to additional space for babies or toddlers. See <http://www.westmorelanducc.org/buildinginterior2> Because of the pending changes, it also seemed the church should have cleared the present library space of books and other materials by summer 2017 (though a new location for library materials was not identified in 2020 documents).

To help accomplish this study, I interviewed Adam Barth, James Estes (library director at Wesley Theological Seminary), Alexis Kassim, Judy Newman and Timothy Tutt. I also conferred with David Bennett about implications for the present library space based on the Westmoreland 2020 initiative and asked Janet Moyer about her work-related use of library materials. I checked in with other members of the congregation on library-related matters as well.

Context

It is axiomatic that a library's space, collections, staffing, services and programs be designed and operated to meet the needs of the community that that library exists to serve and that the scope meet the needs. However, there seem to be no straight lines to be drawn from Westmoreland's current library to the needs of its community in any of the above aspects. As a result, I tried to infer or draw out from interviews some of the undefined needs, questions or assumptions.

I explored the library from two main angles: its function as an active unit of the church and its collection. The former would entail a (volunteer) library manager who is purchasing new materials, cataloging and publicizing them, mounting other marketing/awareness efforts, and being available as a resource. It might also entail dedicated space, or at least space conducive to browsing, study or similar in-library pursuits. If not dedicated space, then there might be regular hours during a week when the library would be open and intended just for library use, plus possibly the library manager would be available during that time. A functioning unit would be a dynamic space or environment and one that church staff and members would think of as a source of information or inspiration to answer questions and seek insight and spiritual growth.

It seems the Westmoreland library collection has been developed to support or provide

- serious/scholarly Bible study and related activities such as sermon preparation, leadership of Bible study classes, etc.;
- standard spiritual, philosophical, religious or theological monographs;
- titles exploring the lives and works of major religious, spiritual figures;
- source documents and accompanying material representing other faiths;
- titles that help the reader comprehend the geography, history and current setting of various faith traditions;
- works about the UCC;
- books that help lay leaders in spiritual and organizational leadership;
- titles reflecting current authors, concerns and trends in living spiritual, faithful lives;
- “self-help” titles helping readers to understand/cope with various issues or challenges;
- various other items, some purchased because of mentions in sermons;
- children’s books.

Findings

1. The library has not been an active church unit in about three years and to date I have found little cause to try to reactivate it. It does not appear to be a priority of the church.
2. Use of library materials is sparse and seems to be mainly ad hoc or serendipitous. (Obviously, the staff and members have many other information-gathering and reading options available to them. Moreover, the approach to information retrieval and research in general has changed dramatically, to an electronic environment that makes print collections less useful.)
3. The library collection has useful reference titles and other works that lend themselves to spot consultation or reading for information, ideas or insight.
4. The catalog of the library’s holdings exists partly on cards and partly on a spreadsheet and was complete/current as of three years ago.
5. The library space is used primarily for meetings.

These observations do not reflect on the careful stewardships of the library’s past volunteer managers such as Judy Newman, Charlotte Moore and Elizabeth Nordbeck.

Recommendations

1. Keep some categories of items in the collection:
 - a. current, authoritative reference works such as commentaries, dictionaries, Bible translations, study Bibles and the like;
 - b. standard works of philosophy, spirituality, religion or theology;
 - c. items known to be used, on UCC, life issues, currently relevant topics;
 - d. source documents and accompanying material representing other faiths;
 - e. items by Westmorelanders;

- f. children's books;
 - g. Charlotte Moore's hymnal collection [Note: collection could be moved to music room or music library, depending on music librarian, music director and Moore family input.]
2. Weed the collection so it retains what is or could be useful, with priority to the categories in the first recommendation above or others as identified to be useful by church staff or members (and as specifically as possible).
 3. Engage a group of church staff and members with special interest and expertise to accomplish the weeding.
 4. Rearrange remaining materials on present library shelves, using only higher shelves in each section of shelving (so lower shelves are free for children's toys or supplies or children's books, but the adult books in any case are out of reach) OR, if found more desirable, build doors to fit some of the present shelves so the remaining adult books are out of sight and reach.

Actions

1. Seek congregational input on recommendations, in the context of how members use in the library and how often, with comments sent to me, following up as need be, by mid-/late Feb. Summarize comments and report out, early March;
2. Revise the plan of action as Board of Spiritual Formation, Governance Council and/or others in authority determine.
 - a. If the above recommendations are substantially intact following congregational input, proceed as follows:
 - i. Send a courtesy letter to Beth Nordbeck, daughter of Elizabeth Nordbeck, for whom the library is named [Note: Library materials to be retained could be named "Nordbeck Collection."]
 - ii. Proceed in March/April with weeding and disposal of de-selected materials through a reputable resale or donation vendor such as Better World Books.
 - iii. Maintain remaining materials by and large as a static collection, in which scenario there is no library manager, no new purchases other than what is needed for Christian Education, no current catalog. The smaller collection is a core for reference, research and occasional reading. Any added or new materials might be replacements for older reference works, when new editions become available.
 - b. If congregational input is substantially different from above recommendations and leads to different conclusions regarding the library, rethink direction (Board of Spiritual Formation).

This is a proposed plan and invitation for congregational input based on the above recommendations. We want your feedback, based on your actual use of the library. Please send your comments to Jane Williams at janewilliams11113@yahoo.com by March 19, 2017.

Feedback will be reported to the Board of Spiritual Formation, plans modified as needed and then submitted to ministerial staff and Governance Council.