



ANGEL AND THE WELL-STOCKED LIBRARY

BY KATYE HUNT



Quality education requires well-stocked and well-balanced libraries. Seventh-day Adventist schools also need materials that support our distinctive denominational ethic. Selecting and buying library books, and then preparing them for use are specialized jobs that require professional

skills not often available in our elementary and secondary schools. The Adventist Network of General Educational Libraries (ANGEL) was developed to improve the quality of libraries in church schools in the Southern Union Conference, which encompasses most of the southeastern United States.

As librarians at Southern Adventist University (SAU) in Collegedale, Tennessee, sought to improve K-12 libraries in this geographical area, they initiated discussions with the conference education directors. The university librarians concluded that since the ideal of a professional librarian for each school was not attainable, other alternatives should be explored. One alternative was for the SAU librarians to conduct workshops for the teachers, cou-

pled with marathon cataloging sessions on Sundays in various schools. The librarians, Peg Bennett, Charles Davis, Loranne Grace, and the late Marion Linderman, discovered some unusual books during these sessions. One example was *Tropic of Cancer* by Henry Miller, which was considered one of the most pornographic books of its time. The volunteers at this school had cataloged the book as Earth Sciences of South America!

As this example illustrates, these on-site visits helped schools evaluate their holdings and needs. In most cases, school libraries used volunteer help or assigned a teacher to tend the library in addition to a full teaching load. Inadequate libraries, student unfamiliarity with the standard cataloging system, and teachers lacking the time or ability to run the library were the main problems encountered. These problems resulted from years of ne-

glect and insufficient knowledge.

Realizing that a trained librarian was needed to help the schools build a balanced collection, it was decided that the McKee Library staff would add this responsibility to their duties. ANGEL began in 1981 by serving 60 schools in the Georgia-Cumberland Conference. My involvement with ANGEL started

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in July 1982. The success of the program caught the attention of other schools and conferences in the Southern Union. Today, seven of the eight conferences participate, with 175 schools currently enrolled in the program.

The services offered by ANGEL include selection and purchase of books appropriate to student age level, ethnic diversity, and interests, and books to support the curriculum. Volume buying gets us discounts that individual schools could not obtain. The books are cataloged using the Dewey Decimal Classification system. The dictionary catalog and shelf list cards are ordered from the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC). Then a Machine Readable Cataloging (MARC) disk is generated and provided to schools with an online library catalog. Student workers affix the spine label and glue in a pocket and date-due slips. Schools thus receive books that are ready for students to check out and cards that are ready for filing in their card catalog.

In addition to processing new books, ANGEL allows schools to bring in books for cataloging that they have acquired through community gifts or local purchases. Some of these books may be weeded out if they are inappropriate, out of date, or beyond repair. Those that meet ANGEL selection criteria are mended, processed, and shipped back to the schools.

Each month, a report is sent to each conference education department showing the total number of books processed unionwide. A separate report is generated showing the number of books cataloged for each school. At the end of the school year, each of the enrolled schools receives a report listing each book, along with author, title, value, and actual cost of the books purchased for them by ANGEL. The schools also receive book request forms so they can submit specific title requests and compiled book lists.

Judith Rovinger highlights the issues involved in book acquisitions and cataloging when she says, "It takes time and skill to select books that are entertaining (if books aren't appealing, kids won't keep turning the pages), eye-catching, accurate, inspiring, and relevant. There is a lot of junk out there, a lot of mediocre and banal reading material. While these books may have a purpose and a place, a steady diet of mediocrity will not lead our children to excellence. Which of us is willing to settle for less than the best?"¹

As news of the ANGEL program spread, schools outside the Southern Union began to request assistance. The North American Division asked ANGEL to service schools outside the southern U.S. Numerous schools are now participants.

ANGEL's financial support comes from the conferences and the Southern Union. Each student is charged a set amount at registration to be used for the school library. Southern Adventist University is a strong supporter of the library program, provid-

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ANGEL sorts books for each member library and catalogs them for easy shelving.





Katy Hunt, author of this article, prepares books for ANGEL member libraries.

ing ANGEL with office space and accounting services. This allows more of the money to be used for purchasing books.

The ANGEL program provides library items requested, including books, CDs, videos, and cassettes. If insufficient requests come in to deplete each school's book fund, ANGEL will select a balanced assortment of materials for the school with the understanding that its selections are always guaranteed. If the schools receive an unsatisfactory book, it can be returned for exchange or full credit.

Communication with the schools and conference officials is critical to the program's success. Educating the constituency is

an ongoing effort, as principals and teachers transfer from one school or conference to another.

"There is empirical evidence that proves that strong library media programs help students learn more and score higher on standardized achievement tests than students in schools with impoverished libraries." As Adventist educators, we should all be concerned about providing the best reading materials for our students. "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Philippians 4:8, KJV). ANGEL can help!

If your school or conference would like to join ANGEL, or you would like more information and forms, check the ANGEL Web site: <http://library.southern.edu/angel> or contact Katy

Hunt by phone at (423) 236-2793 or by E-mail at khunt@southern.edu.



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REFERENCES

1. Judith Rovenger, "The Bottom Line," *School Library Journal* 49:12 (December 2003), p. 43.
2. Julie Cummins, "Knowledge Navigators," *School Library Journal* 47:6 (June 2001), p. 9.



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