

ZOTERO FOR FAITH COMMUNITIES: ENCOURAGING FAITH THINKING AND SHARING THROUGH AN
INFORMATION MANAGEMENT TOOL

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Abstract

Zotero, known in academic institutions as a research tool for students, faculty, and other scholars, has tremendous potential for use in faith communities as a place to store and share nearly any type of digital information encountered in congregational life. This presentation opens with defining the role of information in congregations' lives, followed by a basic overview of available information managers. It continues with the use of Zotero at Liberation Christian Church, covering the benefits (including a more fully-integrated intellectual presence in the congregation's faith life) and potential issues (such as copyright concerns) of using Zotero within faith communities. It concludes with the marketing and educational efforts involved in generating the interest and skills that congregational leadership and members must have in order to obtain full benefits from the use of this resource.

Introduction

While libraries and scholarly inquiry can trace some of their origins back to religious figures and organizations,¹ many congregations have not kept pace with those intellectual origins, as noted by theological educators such as Edward Farley.² Such a lag has hindered religion's ability, on the whole, to integrate faith and intellect toward the type of kind, just, and merciful action that comprises a mature faith life.³ While it is asking too much of any information management tool to accomplish the above

¹ Fun fact: the creator of the term translated as "library science" was Martin Schrettinger, a 19th century Benedictine monk and librarian who wrote a book whose translated title is *Toward a Complete Textbook of Library Science; Or a Guide to the Librarian's Complete Administration, Written in Scientific Form*. Jeffrey Garrett, "Redefining Order in the German Library, 1775-1825," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33, no. 1 (1999): 103–23, doi:10.1353/ecs.1999.0049.

² Edward Farley, "Can Church Education Be Theological Education?" *Theology Today* 42, no. 2 (July 1, 1985): 158–71.

³ While there is no universally agreed-upon description of what comprises a "mature faith," James Fowler's *Stages of Faith* provides an excellent overview of one possibility for the articulation of mature faith. James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, New edition (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1995).

task, a well-utilized information management tool within congregational life may provide people of faith with a foundational and robust means with which to thoughtfully manage information, both communally and individually. This paper covers the role that the information management tool Zotero⁴ plays in the life of one particular religious congregation, Liberation Christian Church,⁵ in St. Louis, Missouri. It begins by defining the role of information in congregations' lives, provides a basic overview of available information managers, and continues with the current and potential uses, benefits, and issues regarding the use of Zotero at Liberation Church and other faith communities. It concludes with the marketing and educational efforts involved in generating the interest and skills that congregational leadership and members must have in order to obtain full benefits from the use of this resource. While this paper mainly focuses on Liberation Christian Church's experience of using Zotero, I am hopeful that those in other religious congregations will find their experiences and discoveries useful as well.

Information in Religious Congregations

It is helpful to consider the meaning of the word "information" before one attempts to manage it. Alex Wright provides a short definition in his book, *Glut*: "Information is the juxtaposition of data to create meaning."⁶ (Data, then, may be defined as: "The plural of the Latin word *datum*, meaning "what is given," often used as a singular collective noun. Facts, figures, or instructions presented in a form that can be comprehended, interpreted, and communicated by a human being or processed by a computer. Compare with information and knowledge."⁷) Wright's definition is wonderfully succinct as well as very

⁴ <https://www.zotero.org/>

⁵ <http://liberationcc.org/>

⁶ Alex Wright, *Glut: Mastering Information through the Ages* (Washington, D.C: Joseph Henry Press, 2007), 10.

⁷ Joan M. Reitz, "Data," *ODLIS: Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science* (ABC-CLIO, 2014), http://www.abc-clio.com/ODLIS/odlis_d.aspx#data.

broad; the following paragraphs expand upon his definition through the exploration of information types within a congregational context.

One may envision three main types of recorded (i.e. written, audio, audiovisual, visual, etc.) information that characterize the main types of information encountered within religious communities: information that is about the community, for the community, and a hybrid of those two (information that is both about and for the community). These types of information may include print works, CDs, DVDs, electronic, and other online information.

In discussing information that is about the community, one may generally refer to archival information and anything that may fall under that categorization only, such as church records, meeting minutes, photographs, important correspondence, commemorative works and other documents of archival interest. Many times discussion of information management in congregations takes on the form of tracking congregational life in terms of archives or record-keeping/management (i.e. meeting minutes and other congregational correspondence and historical materials).

The second type of information, information for the community, tends to include those items normally included in public, academic, or personal library collections and databases: books, AV materials, journals, newspaper and magazine articles, blog posts, conference papers, and any information that is relevant and/or of interest to a congregation but is not directly about the congregation. This category includes anything that is of more general interest, possibly to people outside of the congregation, as well.

The third type of information, a hybrid of the above two types, is both for and about the community. This category includes things such as sermon videos, podcasts or manuscripts, any congregation-created worship resources (liturgies, orders of worship or other worship plans, etc.), and congregation-created educational resources (Bible study or learning group handouts, booklets, overviews, or outlines).

All of the above types of information are congregational resources, and all in some way tell a story about the congregation in which they reside. It is still helpful, however, to place them into three discrete categories, as the ways in which they tell stories about the congregation, provide narratives for the congregation, and the ways in which interested parties maintain and/or wish to preserve them, differ by information type.

ODLIS notes the contextual nature of information: “Whether a specific message is *informative* or not depends in part on the subjective perception of the person receiving it.”⁸ People of faith (as do all people) encounter the above and other types of information contextually, which brings up several questions. How do they encounter this information, and what do they think about it? Is their curiosity engaged? Are questions encouraged in church and at home about faith? Is critical thinking a part of their faith life? How do they negotiate boundaries between communal and individual, or personal and private information and their responses to it? People's responses to certain types of information may influence the ways in which we manage that information.

Additionally, it is virtually impossible to discuss information and its management in a twenty-first century context without addressing the concept of information overload,⁹ though Wright asserts such a thing is not a new issue,¹⁰ and a recent Pew Research report notes that the percentage of Americans who feel overwhelmed by information has dropped from 27% in 2006 to 18%.¹¹ William

⁸ Joan M. Reitz, “Information,” *ODLIS: Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science*, 2014, http://www.abc-clio.com/ODLIS/odlis_l.aspx#information.

⁹ Joan M. Reitz, “Information Overload,” *ODLIS: Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science* (ABC-CLIO, 2014), http://www.abc-clio.com/ODLIS/odlis_l.aspx#infooverload.

¹⁰ Alex Wright, *Glut: Mastering Information through the Ages* (Washington, D.C: Joseph Henry Press, 2007), 9.

¹¹ Lee Rainie, “From Distant Admirers to Library Lovers—and beyond,” *Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project*, March 13, 2014, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/03/13/library-engagement-typology/>, 16.

Badke, however, contends that many people, particularly those who are younger, have opted to embrace information chaos in lieu of skillful information management. “The Net Generation has learned how to deal with the flood of data simply by picking what is easiest to access and letting the rest go. Sure, there might be better data deeper in the pile, but there seems to be no practical way to sift through it – unless you never sleep again. If the easily accessible data looks OK, then it has to be OK. Bye-bye information overload.”¹² Such a claim, while disconcerting to information professionals of all types, may also assure them that their work, seen by some as a quaint 20th century carryover, is indeed of continued 21st century relevance.¹³

There continues to be a broad perception (at least among those who seek information online) that answers to most of life's questions are simply a Google search away. Astute information professionals, however, recognize that “we have the opportunity to teach users about authority, about optimizing searches, and about the areas where Google is not the be-all and end-all.”¹⁴ Information professionals of all types who bemoan information overload and the “googlization” of society must be ready and willing to metaphorically and proactively meet people at Google, diplomatically and authoritatively assisting them with learning information literacy skills, including information management. How religious congregations, including Liberation, respond to these challenges, will surely influence the trajectory of how faith and intellect exist in congregational life.

Information Management Tools

¹² William Badke, “Information Overload? Maybe Not,” *Online* 34, no. 5 (September 2010): 52.

¹³ As a theologian, library employee, library science student, and human being, I often feel overwhelmed by information, perhaps due to my constant immersion in it and may thus have a greater awareness than populations at large as to its ubiquity. While I believe all people should be concerned and interested in information management tools to combat information overload, many with whom I have conversed on this subject appear rather blasé about it.

¹⁴ Kay Cahill, “An Opportunity, Not a Crisis: How Google Is Changing the Individual and the Information Profession,” *Journal of Library Administration* 47, no. 1/2 (February 2008): 67–75.

The speed of life in the twenty-first century now more than ever demands that people – including people of faith - manage information with finesse. Such competence will not necessarily increase or diminish one's faith, but may help one do the work of ministry more efficiently (and perhaps even more effectively). Some of the organizational issues experienced at Liberation may have been related to failures of information management. Managing information well and with proper tools means that one may struggle less with the “what” and “how” of faith questions and focus more on the “why.”

In recent years a number of tools, mostly available online, have been developed to help people better organize their digital worlds and other information. These may be classed into a few different groupings, with a certain amount of overlap between them. All may be described as “information managers,” because even though they encompass a variety of information management styles, and some are more popular and others more scholarly, all of them manage information in some way and have their own strengths and weaknesses. Most of them are a form of social media, or at least have some capability in that regard, even though some conjure up the image of the lone scholar sat hunched over his or her computer.

Rather than cover every tool in detail that may fall within the following categories, I will provide basic overviews of their broad categories and a sampling of resources within each one. A question one may keep in mind while evaluating these information management tools is, “What type of information manager helps people in congregations manage the previously-noted types of information both personally and communally?”

Citation/bibliographic/reference/information managers may be what information professionals initially think of when considering the topic of information management tools. These are the type of tools that scholars are most likely to use in their research lives. They are generally far more text-heavy and less image-based than many of the following categories of information management tools. They first appeared in the late 1980s and early 1990s (and during that time period tended to be, compared to

today's available software, both clunky and cost-prohibitive)¹⁵ as ways to store references for easier citation in articles, papers, and other scholarly works. They often have the most functionality when it comes to saving information considered necessary for citations. These tools have generally remained in businesses and academic institutions, although some are freely available. Most include some type of software component or internet browser plugin as well as a web-based interface. These tools include Zotero,¹⁶ Endnote,¹⁷ Mendeley,¹⁸ and RefWorks.¹⁹

Social bookmarking (and reading) sites are a hybrid between more purely social media and traditional citation managers. They are more social (i.e. their content is more easily “shareable” than with traditional citation managers) but don't have the ability to easily generate citation information and bibliographies. Delicious [and other social bookmarking sites] offer “several advantages over browser-based bookmarks, including mobility, tagging, and sharing.”²⁰ However, they only store links to web pages (rather than screenshots of the page itself or full-text PDF articles and books) and don't necessarily grab article, book, or web page metadata very well from a web site. Social bookmarking sites include Pinterest,²¹ Del.icio.us,²² LibraryThing,²³ and GoodReads.²⁴

¹⁵ Jenny Emanuel, “Users and Citation Management Tools: Use and Support,” *Reference Services Review* 41, no. 4 (November 22, 2013): 640, doi:10.1108/RSR-02-2013-0007.

¹⁶ <https://www.zotero.org/>

¹⁷ <http://endnote.com/>

¹⁸ <http://www.mendeley.com/en/2/1/>

¹⁹ <http://www.refworks.com/>

²⁰ Aysegul Kapucu, Athena Hoepfner, and Doug Dunlop, “Getting Users to Library Resources: A Delicious Alternative,” *Journal of Electronic Resources Librarianship* 20, no. 4 (2008): 228–42, doi:10.1080/19411260802554553.

²¹ <http://www.pinterest.com/>

²² <https://delicious.com/>

²³ <https://www.librarything.com/>

²⁴ <https://www.goodreads.com/>

Social media sites tend to be heavy on their “social” capabilities, allowing people to quickly disseminate information, although information shared on them is purposefully ephemeral, and thus their information retrieval capabilities are quite low. While one may certainly save links to items by sharing them, their ephemerality and obtuse user privacy policies (particularly with Facebook) make them less-than-ideal for long-term information management – they are far better at sharing/broadcasting information to others. This category of resources includes Facebook²⁵ and Twitter.²⁶

Congregation management web sites and software provide congregations with many options with which to manage all of their information, often online through cloud-based storage. Churches may take care of their “communal life business” this way. Depending on the product, this type of information manager may be a good tool for managing things such as worship planning, financial information, groups and teams, and sharing messages that are strictly meant for the entire church community. Church management software sites include Church Community Builder,²⁷ PowerChurch²⁸ and Servant PC.²⁹

All of the above tools have features and aspects that make them interesting and worthwhile (and in some cases, rather addictive), and each one has different strengths and weaknesses. However, not all of them are equally good choices for congregations seeking a reliable and intellectually fruitful way in which to use technology to help their members better integrate their faith and intellectual lives.

²⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/>

²⁶ <https://twitter.com/>

²⁷ <http://www.churchcommunitybuilder.com/>

²⁸ <http://www.powerchurch.com/>

²⁹ <http://www.servantpc.com/>

Liberation regularly uses tools from each of the above categories: Zotero, Facebook, Twitter, and Church Community Builder.

Liberation often uses Facebook to communicate in ways that don't require future archiving. Church Community Builder provides the church with an organized space to manage church business, while Zotero fills a need for a more reflective online library space in which members may store citation information and full-text documents in a way that encourages successful document retrieval, as well as providing the capability to make notes on those item records, and in some cases, the documents themselves.

A Brief History of Zotero at Liberation Christian Church

The story of how Zotero came to be used at Liberation begins with my use of Zotero as a personal research manager. In January of 2012 I downloaded and created my own Zotero account. As I began using it, I was so impressed with its capabilities for my own information management needs that I began considering its possibilities outside of personal use. As a theologically trained librarian-in-training, it was important to me that Liberation have some sort of library, preferably one that wasn't located in a musty, cramped closet with nothing but 50+-year-old books. As Liberation Christian church, a 40-member, multicultural, LBGTQ-friendly, five-year-old church without a building, didn't (and still doesn't) have a building, there was no question of any type of physical library, musty or not. It was clear to me early on that an online library was called for. When I created and began using a Zotero group library for Liberation,³⁰ it was an experiment – one which continues to this day.

I thought Zotero would be an excellent tool for my personal use as our congregational librarian to occasionally share items from there with the congregation but generally leaving it for my own use. However, as I continued populating it with resources, it occurred to me that this could, for the time

³⁰ https://www.zotero.org/groups/liberation_christian_church/items

being, be just the library we needed. It let us quickly and easily add information in a highly organized fashion, allowed for full-text documents to be attached to items, and created full screen shots of web pages that we wanted to store for future reference. It easily allowed users to search for and retrieve previously saved items, allowed for tagging, notes, full-text searching, and quickly made this information available to those with whom we chose to share it – both in the Zotero Firefox browser extension and stand-alone program and via a web-based interface for those who chose not to download the program. It appeared that at that moment Zotero provided us with the most robust method of storing information as well as options for exporting our information in the event we found something more suitable for our needs.

Zotero is a free, open source program (except for the \$60.00 for 6GB per year of storage space I pay for my own library and Liberation's, which I consider a worthwhile and reasonable cost³¹). Also, data put into Zotero isn't mined for financial purposes (unlike certain previously-mentioned information managers). Instead, Zotero is one of the few computer programs that has the capability to extract web site metadata to the advantage of the user, rather than to a marketer. Its capability of reading certain fields/metadata means that users spend far less time inputting information than they might in other similar programs.³² Liberation needed an information management tool that was exceptionally inexpensive and flexible/nimble,³³ and gave the church the option to grow its library as time went on, as

³¹ <https://www.zotero.org/support/storage>

³² Daniel J. Cohen, "Creating Scholarly Tools and Resources for the Digital Ecosystem: Building Connections in the Zotero Project," *First Monday* 13, no. 8 (August 10, 2008), <http://journals.uic.edu/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2233>.

³³ The need for exceptionally economical library resources is both a necessity borne of Liberation's small budget and part of a broader trend in which congregational libraries, even more so than other types of libraries, continually struggle to be taken seriously and funded accordingly within their congregations.

well as the flexibility to export its data to another system should it need or desire another one that does similar things but better meets its needs.

Liberation previously had a LibraryThing library, but no one had really used it, because while one might look at our list of recommended books, one couldn't actually get to them. Additionally, one could only input bibliographic book information, no full-text or other files. The LibraryThing was pretty, but it wasn't meeting our needs. After exploring Zotero's group library capabilities, in October of 2013 I tentatively introduced our fledgling Zotero library to Liberation's pastor, Rev. Dr. Dietra Wise Baker. As a pastor with a scholar's heart (and a recent DMIN recipient), she has been quite supportive of my efforts to provide religious information literacy education and tools at Liberation, and has encouraged me to share this and other congregational information resources with the congregation through online, print, and in-person educational opportunities. As a new church start, however, it can be difficult to schedule such activities in ways that don't overburden our schedules. We finally scheduled a Zotero workshop for March 22 of this year as a precursor to our Faith Thinking Foundations course (until now available as the freely available Information Salvation e-course³⁴), which runs from May 29 – June 28 as Liberation's learning series for that month.

Liberation's Zotero library holds many different types of items – made up of all of the different types of information as discussed previously. We have links to streaming video (mostly sermons from our YouTube channel), bibliographic records/information: books, articles, theses, and full-text journal and magazine articles – PDF, HTML (web page) (most are from open-access journals), blog posts, reports, books – PDF, ePub (freely-available), encyclopedia articles, web pages (Zotero captures and saves screen shots of full web pages, which is one of the areas in which it truly shines as both an online library and archival tool), conference papers, newspaper articles, and book chapters. Some of these

³⁴ http://biblioministry.org/info_salv/

items are available full-text in the library, while others are bibliographic records with space in which to write notes about and descriptively tag the item.

Information Management at Liberation Christian Church With Zotero

The previously-mentioned three types of information and above categories of information management comprise the ways in which Liberation conceptualizes information. Liberation's members (known as "Liberators"), strive to be "faith thinkers," which at its most basic understanding means they are interested in integrating their faith and intellectual lives, both individually and communally. Another important aspect of Liberation's context as a new church start is that "we've always done it this way" is never an adequate excuse; the structure (or more precisely, lack of structure) of a new church start provides members with opportunities to build everything from the ground up. (Such pervasive and expansive opportunity, while often delightfully heady, may occasionally lead members to feel slightly unmoored.)

Liberation's bold proclamation that its members are faith thinkers, coupled with Rev. Dr. Wise Baker's womanist rally cry that "I would rather die with my questions than live with your answers"³⁵ has taken the church to spiritual and intellectual places that many congregations simply do not reach. Inasmuch as Liberation is serious about its faith thinking, it needs to have access to solid theological materials, tools, and training to fully utilize them. Liberation's thirst for knowledge is great but its budget is small; thus the church must astutely assess anything on which it disburses funds. With all of the above things in mind, as congregational librarian I creatively considered the role that tools that have

³⁵ Dietra Wise Baker, "Chapter 1: Not Just for Black Women" in "Can Anything Good Come From Nazareth?: A Womanist Hermeneutic of Preaching (Not Just for Black Women)" (Aquinas Institute of Theology, 2014), 6.

traditionally been the purview of those within institutions of higher education could play within Liberation, including the ATLASerials database and information/citations managers.

Heading into its fifth year of being church, Liberation's members are few but committed. Between Rev. Dr. Wise Baker's commitment to a thinking faith, Liberation's members' openness to meeting and loving people where they are and exploring faith questions, and my training in both the content and research processes of theology and library science, Liberation continues to slowly implement the building blocks of faith thinking (closely related to what I and a few others have termed "religious information literacy"³⁶).

Why would a church, including Liberation, need a research tool/information manager? There are several reasons. To be quite blunt, religious people need to be smarter. Many indicators point to this need. The Pew Research Center's 2010 U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey uncovered troubling information regarding how little factual information Americans generally know about religion. It notes from previous surveys that America is "among the most religious of the world's developed nations," but the 2010 survey shows "that large numbers of Americans are uninformed about the tenets, practices, history and leading figures of major faith traditions – including their own."³⁷ Nearly 30 years prior to that survey, Edward Farley railed against the regrettable inconsistency in the church of theologically-educated clergy and non-theologically-educated laypeople, asking, "Is there something about the very

³⁶ I define religious information literacy, a term which has very occasionally been used within religious and theological librarianship, as the integration of the content of religious literacy and the processes of information literacy. Such a definition will doubtless be improved upon with time.

³⁷ Luis Lugo et al., *U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey* (Washington, D.C.: The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, September 28, 2010), <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2010/09/religious-knowledge-full-report.pdf>, 7-8.

nature of faith as an existence in the world before God which founds in the community of faith an inclination and seriousness about ordered learning?"³⁸

He then named a number of changes which he believed must happen before church education becomes theological education, including "Cumulative, rigorous educational process and post-Enlightenment tools of analysis and interpretation (historical, literary, social, psychological, philosophical) will have to be introduced into church education," boldly proclaiming that "Directors of Religious Education will have to be more than administrators of educational programs. The educator on the church staff will have to be a theologian-teacher."³⁹ People of faith who desire to claim their authority as people of God have greater agency to do so through a solidly integrated faith and intellectual foundation. Rather than blaming laypeople for failing to take an active interest in their religious education and faith formation, he instead noted that church structures at their deepest levels encourage laypeople toward something that may be considered church education but is certainly not theological education.

Another step toward the alleviation of the serious and pressing paradox between religious faith and religious ignorance may be the use of a quality information manager. While the Pew survey says that "educational attainment – how much schooling an individual has completed – is the single best predictor of religious knowledge,"⁴⁰ one may adopt a more nuanced perspective of this statement by considering that the same tools and activities that lead to academic success may also encourage lifelong learning success outside of the classroom as well. It may be possible to distill certain elements of

³⁸ Edward Farley, "Can Church Education Be Theological Education?," *Theology Today* 42, no. 2 (July 1, 1985): 159.

³⁹ *Ibid.*: 171.

⁴⁰ Luis Lugo et al., U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey (Washington, D.C.: The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, September 28, 2010), <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2010/09/religious-knowledge-full-report.pdf>, 7-8.

academic success and place them, with discernment, into a congregational educational context. While a robust information manager by itself will not magically create religious literacy where there was none previously, it provides a solid framework in which to encourage religious information literacy within congregations.

Many information management tools are available to congregations, as previously noted, but it may be a perplexing task for those charged with seeking out a good one to do so. Congregations should carefully consider their research and information management needs when selecting such a tool. When Liberation did so, it discerned that it needed an online library that would allow the storage and sharing of documents about the church and books/book citations, articles, and reports – both foundational and supplementary resources to provide additional context and thus enhance learning from Sunday's sermons. It was also moderately important to use a tool that would allow the church the capability to have some form of online archive, should they come across any materials to place in it. Elena Razlogova, a historian who uses Zotero to store digital image files and their metadata, declares, "Zotero excels as a Swiss Army knife, do-it-almost-all research tool."⁴¹

Using Zotero for these purposes within a congregation provides Liberation with a more social way of being scholarly, allowing Liberation to pursue theological discussion both as a church community and within a broader intellectual context. "True scholarship does not sit by itself, and is worthless as a disconnected piece of writing; being part of a network of thought and publication is what makes all scholarship active and relevant."⁴² Zotero provides its users with such a network in which to make that

⁴¹ Elena Razlogova, "DIY Image Management with Zotero," *Perspectives on History* 50, no. 7 (October 2012): 55.

⁴² Daniel J. Cohen, "Creating Scholarly Tools and Resources for the Digital Ecosystem: Building Connections in the Zotero Project," *First Monday* 13, no. 8 (August 10, 2008), <http://journals.uic.edu/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2233>.

happen, particularly through the capability of making and saving notes both on an item's record as well as within the item itself (depending on the item; PDFs tend to be better places in which to save notes).

Marketing and Educational Efforts

Functionally speaking, I have used Liberation's Zotero library more than anyone in the church. As the church librarian, and as I originated this project, that makes sense. However, it is meant as a library for the whole church, and the current number of members means it isn't necessarily being used as such. As Liberation claims it is a church of faith thinkers, and faith thinkers need to regularly engage with solid religious and theological scholarship in order to continually refine their faith thinking, as Liberation's librarian I am charged with letting people know that our library exists and providing them with adequate education about it.

While some librarians may have previously believed that libraries and their resources “sold themselves,” such an attitude (in light of strained budgets, particularly) has largely been replaced with an understanding that the importance of information resources are neither self-evident nor self-explanatory. Wisniewski remarks, “As user attention is a rare commodity, we need to market our products and services—and do so aggressively and effectively.”⁴³ One of a librarian's most important tasks these days is to let their library users know about resources and teach them how to use them.

Information resource marketing can take on many forms, from print or online fliers to very relational conversations with church members about their information needs. While as an introvert it is not always my first inclination to strike up conversations with people, as a librarian I am obligated to do so for the sake of the profession. A week prior to the Zotero workshop, I asked a church member her opinion of the upcoming Zotero workshop. She said that she had never heard of Zotero (most people

⁴³ Jeff Wisniewski and Darlene Fichter, “Electronic Resources Won’t Sell Themselves: Marketing Tips,” *Online* 31, no. 1 (January 2007): 54.

haven't – and librarians of all types have a responsibility to introduce people to information managers such as Zotero). She mentioned that she really didn't need help organizing her information. I was confused. (Doesn't everyone need help organizing their information?) But I persevered, mentioning that Zotero is a very robust tool, and that we have an online library for Liberation on it. “Oh, an online library! That sounds interesting! You should talk about it from that perspective.” Our conversation reiterated two important points: one, that I live in my head too much – and that no library or librarian is an island. Librarians always need to connect with people in the congregation about matching members' information needs with library resources, which are only valuable inasmuch as they are used by those in the congregation.

When discussing Zotero, or any other information tool with those in the congregation, it is important to consider the tone and vocabulary one uses, and to consider one's audience's self-interest: consider from their perspective what value they would find in that tool. As a librarian, it is important to not only be enthusiastic about helping people learn about this tool, but also present it to them in a way that makes sense to them. Liberation continues to learn as a church what faith thinking means to it. The introduction of tools and concepts that have typically been within the realm of academic institutions into the realm of the congregation is new ground; Liberation is still “finding their feet” and a common language to discuss these things. It is important to find phrasing and vocabulary that resonates with members' spiritual needs.

I promoted the March 22 Zotero workshop at Liberation through all of our usual channels, and had a preliminary attendance total of 6 people (which is quite good for a Liberation event), but only two attended the actual event. Some people might see that as poor attendance or failure, but it was heartening to work with two interested and motivated people who wanted to learn more about this information tool. From my perspective, the workshop was a success, and though neither of them installed Zotero on their computer that day, they did sign up for Zotero accounts and join the library. I

anticipate seeing even more interest as we continue with the Faith Thinking Foundations course, particularly because it will be even more useful to discuss and use Liberation's Zotero library within the context of the course.

There are certain challenges in regard to educating Liberation's members about Zotero. Some people in church have an aversion to thinking too much about their religious beliefs when pressed to do so. The church is not an academic institution, and unlike academic institutions where there are formal educational assessment processes, churches may evaluate successes and failures via other means. Additionally, while there may be a paid Minister or Director of Christian Education, many of the people who are teaching Sunday School and/or other classes at church are volunteers with very little formal training in religious education or pedagogical methods. Even when trained, most are more concerned with the content of religious education than the processes that go into encouraging mature faith formation.⁴⁴

Along with the information overload that some people may experience comes tool/account fatigue. "Do I really need this?" some have begun to ask about online tools. I, of course, assert that people do need this particular tool, and that having this tool may replace myriads of other information management tools, or may provide a solid foundation that will make other tools less necessary. While adopting "yet another tool" may seem to promote information fatigue, in the end this particular tool may actually help manage that condition.

Zotero is definitely an online tool, which occasionally taps into some people's fear of the internet. While electronic document storage is certainly one wave of the future, not everyone in the congregation is comfortable with letting go of paper/print items. Some people are scared of technology or would simply like to use less technology in their lives, and so even though on the whole using

⁴⁴ As a librarian I am always concerned with the processes and methods by which people arrive at theological or other intellectual conclusions.

electronic or online tools is the most beneficial for our church at this time, we still have quite a learning curve in some regards.

Liberation's use of Zotero also engages some church library issues. As discussed previously, overall, congregations lack religious information literacy. People who appreciate church libraries may view them as an important, but not core, piece of one's church life - which become even less important when compared to other church activities, most of which require funding. As Jim Wallis and other wise people have said, "a budget is a moral document,"⁴⁵ – and while the funding or lack thereof of a church library is not necessarily a "moral" issue, per se, the funding it does or doesn't receive, particularly as compared with the rest of the budget, tells us about the church's values. One place in which Zotero really shines for Liberation is in its cost, which is nothing save that which is paid for storage.

Additionally, the profession (or lack thereof) of church librarian leads to some issues. Were church librarians truly educated and mobilized in the way academic, special, and public librarians are, they could more effectively dialogue on the above-named and other important issues related to information within the church. But as long as church librarians generally remain clerical volunteers, they will stay on the sidelines of decision-making processes, rather than be included as full educational partners in congregational life.

Information Ethics

Ethics surrounding information use are terribly important for those involved in any library endeavor, though the subject often goes unaddressed due to a lack of education on this subject. The

⁴⁵ Jim Wallis, "Budgets Are Moral Documents," *SojoMail*, February 5, 2003, <http://sojo.net/sojomail/2003/02/05>.

World Council of Churches published a free e-book, *Love to Share*,⁴⁶ that provides a more theological treatment of some of these issues than one might otherwise encounter regarding information ethics. Though it does not specifically address academic resources and the particular issues surrounding them, it provides an excellent and nuanced theological treatment of that mushy middle ground between copyright law and God's realm. In reading the book, one considers that American copyright law perhaps ought not be the final word on this subject, especially regarding resource use within the church. (That said, no one wants to be the next test case for copyright law, so it is highly desirable to be knowledgeable about copyright law and fair use guidelines.)

A continual barrier to more solid and robust theological education within congregations is that much thoughtful religious and theological scholarship is highly inaccessible to many people who would benefit from it since it is only accessible via print or online subscription or via expensive databases, and thus is simply off the radar to people who wish to use them. While lately many public libraries have begun providing their users with access to a great many high-quality databases, most do not appear to provide access to ATLASerials, a valuable full-text religion database. ATLA offers a reasonable \$150/yr subscription to ATLASerials for clergy and congregational administrative staff,⁴⁷ which is wonderful, but the steep difference between the cost for clergy access and the cost for an entire congregation (even a 40-member congregation) to access this database serves to perpetuate any existing clergy/lay educational divide. One may remain hopeful that ATLA will consider the economic opportunities they miss by not providing a more nuanced pricing structure for financially-strapped congregations, and may

⁴⁶ World Association for Christian Communication, World Council of Churches, and Spirituality and Worship, *Love to Share: Intellectual Property Rights, Copyright, and Christian Churches* (Toronto, Ontario; Geneva, Switzerland: World Association for Christian Communication ; World Council of Churches, 2008), <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/programmes/unity-mission-evangelism-and-spirituality/spirituality-and-worship/love-to-share.html>.

⁴⁷ <https://www.atla.com/products/support/Product-Support-FAQs/Pages/access.clergy.congregational-staff.aspx>

continue to rejoice that more and more journals of interest to Liberation and other congregations are open access.

There are additional issues with providing congregations with quality e-resources. The maxim “just because you can do something doesn't necessarily mean you should do something” is important to remember when considering technological versus legal boundaries in sharing information. One of the differences between using Zotero as a personal vs. group library is that for personal use – particularly in an education manner – there is often a great deal more leeway in terms of what may put in that library versus what may be ethically shared in a large group library. There is also a difference between what is shared between a small group of research collaborators and what is shared with an entire church, small thought that church may be, and what is technically possible versus ethically right.

How, then, does one populate a Zotero group library ethically? Very carefully! While full-text documents in our Zotero library are available only to members (and membership is available only by request, vetted by me), as a theological librarian, it is of prime importance that the documents in the library are there ethically. If one cannot do that, one fails to set a good example of ethical information use for congregational members at Liberation and other congregations.

Assessment and Evaluation

Liberation's work with Zotero as a church has largely been limited to my work with it. Thus far I have not had many goals or expectations for this endeavor besides “I sure hope that people like this!” (In new church starts we are often open to all kinds of new ideas without the expectation that they will be successful.) Wisniewski notes, however, that “librarians are increasingly being called upon to justify

their libraries' existence with metrics, showing acceptable and increasing levels of use and user satisfaction."⁴⁸

Much of my assessment has been qualitative and gleaned through fairly informal conversations with Liberation members about the Zotero library. However, I asked the two workshop attendees to complete a short survey at the end of the workshop, which produced some important feedback regarding attendees' perceptions of Zotero. Both attendees were far more impressed by the web-based interface of Zotero than the Firefox browser extension. They wanted to attend the workshop to learn of its use "for ministry" and "preparing sermons."⁴⁹ Their feedback will help me to better refine future Zotero educational endeavors for Liberation.

Conclusion

Liberation Christian Church's Zotero library has thus far been a fascinating exploration of what happens when a library 2.0 tool meets church 2.0. As with any library, it is always a work in progress (or as Shirley Guthrie might say, "always being reformed"⁵⁰), which is equal parts frustrating and heartening. Significant challenges have arisen during library implementation: the library is small (consisting of a mere 583 items, total), with limited book capability (due in part to restrictive publisher options for shared e-books and articles). It is highly underutilized, in my opinion, by clergy and congregation alike. There are potential ethical land mines in it that are far more a symptom of the growing edges of online content and copyright law's inadequacies than the root of the problem itself. In

⁴⁸ Jeff Wisniewski and Darlene Fichter, "Electronic Resources Won't Sell Themselves: Marketing Tips," *Online* 31, no. 1 (January 2007): 54.

⁴⁹ Zotero Workshop Wrap-Up Surveys (March 2014).

⁵⁰ Shirley C. Guthrie, *Always Being Reformed: Faith for a Fragmented World* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

short, this early attempt at building an online library for this church – and by extension, encouraging other churches to do so – is rough and full of potential issues.

However, Liberation's experiences with implementing a Zotero library, both positive and negative, have and will continue to provide valuable learning opportunities for Liberation, as well as other congregations who seek ways to successfully bring information tools into their midst. Zotero's use in any environment, but particularly within religious congregations, has the potential to revolutionize the way clergy, congregational members, and librarians envision faith, intellect, and the integration thereof within religious congregations.

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