

The Faith Libraries of Northern Colorado

AN ECUMENICAL NETWORK FOR RESOURCE SHARING AND COOPERATION

By Rafael Ubico, Network Coordinator, Faith Libraries of Northern Colorado, Fort Collins, Colorado

In the summer of 2009, library representatives from three churches in Fort Collins, Colorado—one Roman Catholic, one United Methodist, and one Evangelical Lutheran Church in America—met to explore the possibility of forming a network of faith libraries. Two years later the network, known as the Faith Libraries of Northern Colorado (FLNC), is firmly established with five partner libraries offering a variety of services. The following account, authored by the FLNC network coordinator, describes how the network and its ministry took shape and the lessons learned along the way.

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On a clear Saturday morning in February 2010, a newly formed network of three church libraries in Fort Collins, Colorado, launched its first event for congregational libraries in the Northern Colorado region. The event planners from the three churches—Blessed John XXIII University Parish (John XXIII), First United Methodist Church (FUMC) and Our Saviour's Lutheran Church (OSLC)—had no idea what kind of attendance to expect.

The network partners had carefully structured a full-day seminar on “Building and Managing Your Faith Library,” a theme they believed would appeal to area congregational librarians. They also felt that their seminar speakers—drawn from the three church libraries, the Colorado State University Morgan Library (CSUML), and the Poudre River Public Library (PRPL)—were eminently qualified to address the seminar's topics. But they had no barometer by which to measure the interest, if any, of area church and synagogue libraries in attending such a seminar. Early registrations pointed toward a disappointingly small turnout. The event planners talked of possibly cancelling the seminar.

Registrations surprisingly surged in the last few days immediately preceding the seminar. It began to appear that attendance might reach as many as fifty. The event organizers scrambled to ensure that sufficient seating and handout

◀ The Grand Opening of the Northern Colorado Faith Library at First United Methodist Church in Fort Collins, May 2009.

▼ Some of the fifty-seven faith library representatives in attendance at the FLNC network's first annual seminar in February 2010.



materials would be available. On the morning of the seminar, a long queue formed in the hallway outside FUMC's parlor, where the event was to be held. The three partners could barely believe the final count: fifty-seven representatives from thirty-one faith institutions encompassing eleven denominations and six unaffiliated organizations. Twenty-four had come from locations beyond Fort Collins, some travelling as far as seventy-five miles. Clearly, the seminar had struck a responsive chord within the faith community of Northern Colorado.

■ BIRTH OF NETWORK IDEA

The idea to form a network of faith libraries in Northern Colorado emerged during the FUMC library committee's annual planning retreat in March 2009. Strategic initiatives were identified within three categories at that retreat: fund raising, circulation, and partnerships. I was among the committee members who volunteered to develop specific objectives and goals in the partnership area. One of our suggestions was to contact other local churches to determine their interest in becoming partners in a network of faith libraries that would share resources and cooperate in library-related activities and services.

During the second quarter of 2009, FUMC began contacting area churches and synagogues that we thought might be interested in becoming network partners. The publicity garnered when the FUMC library was named the Outstanding Congregational Library for 2009 by the Church and Synagogue Library Association (CSLA) helped to open doors (feature articles on the library and its CSLA award

appeared in both *The Denver Post* and the Fort Collins newspaper, *The Coloradoan*). E-mail exchanges and exploratory meetings were held with several faith librarians and their committees throughout Fort Collins. Two were ready to join the network: the libraries at John XXIII and OSLC. The first organizational meeting with these libraries was held at FUMC on July 2, 2009.

■ GETTING OFF THE GROUND

Representatives from the three partner libraries originally met as a coordinating council roughly once a month for the remainder of 2009. The organizing representatives were Bill McClellan, deacon and librarian at John XXIII; Susan King and David Reid, the 2009 library committee co-chairs, and myself from FUMC; Elisa Sherman, the librarian, and Erik Thompson from OSLC; and Eddy Hopkins, the resource center director at FUMC.

I volunteered to serve as network coordinator and to moderate the council meetings. During my professional career, I twice served as a library network coordinator. In those instances, I worked with full-time professional librarians in industry, government and academia. I was soon to learn that the guidelines for a library network staffed with part-time church volunteers would have to be much more open-ended and flexible. We would need to work together in a spirit of mutual respect that allowed for our different limitations, strengths and ministries.

Membership Criteria: The coordinating council found it difficult to settle on mutually agreeable network membership criteria. After several months of discussion, the council decided that the library at any Christian church or Jewish synagogue was welcome to join the network, but that this policy would be subject to review depending on specific circumstances. All network partners were expected to open their libraries to the public for study and checkout privileges and to cooperate in undertaking services and activities agreed to by the council.

Whether or not all network partners should have a library website with an online catalog was also a matter of debate. I had hoped that we could merge the online catalogs of all partners into an online union catalog for the network. The partners all had library websites with online catalogs, but used different cataloging applications: CROSS at John XXIII, OPALS at FUMC and Tellico at OSLC. My dream of a union catalog was thus set aside for future consideration. To encourage network membership, the council concluded that an online catalog would not be required. Instead the existing partners would offer their assistance to any new partner which needed help to go online.

Mission Statement: My original vision for the network's mission statement was very limited, thinking we could revisit the subject after we had a better understanding of how the network might evolve. I thus proposed that the mission of the network would simply be to provide public access to its holdings in support of the faith communities of Larimer and Weld counties, the two principal counties comprising the Northern Colorado region. Other council members felt that our original mission statement should express what our true goals were for the network. After some debate, the council adopted the following statement to guide its work.

The mission of the Faith Libraries of Northern Colorado is to serve as a community of mutual support, encouragement, and sharing for our partner libraries and to use all our resources to bring about a deeper understanding of our respective faiths, both in the lives of our congregations and in the lives of all those whom we might reach through the gifts entrusted to us.

First Major Event: By August 2009, the FLNC network council was ready to host its first major event for faith libraries in Northern Colorado. Planning immediately began for the seminar on "Building and Managing Your Faith Library," held at FUMC on February 27, 2010.

The council faced the daunting question of how to inform the area's churches and synagogues about the seminar. The two-county region encompasses over 6,500 square miles in northeast Colorado with a 2010 census population of 552,109. However, over 60% of the population, and most of the religious institutions, are concentrated in the urban areas in and around Fort Collins, Loveland, and Greeley. The Religious Congregations and Membership Study of

2000 indicated that about 38% of the region's population claim a religious affiliation, which broke down by faith roughly as follows: 35% Roman Catholic, 35% Evangelical Protestant, 21% Mainline Protestant, and 9% Jewish and other faiths.

Promotional activities proceeded simultaneously along several avenues:

- Review of Yellow Pages from the two-county region to develop a list of faith institutions
- Phone calls and emails to these organizations to determine if they had a library, or were interested in starting one
- Visits and e-mails to extend personal invitations where library contacts had been established, including those on the CSLA Colorado membership list
- Announcements in local and regional newspapers
- Announcements in denominational communications to their member institutions
- Presentation at a monthly meeting of the Fort Collins Interfaith Council

Fortunately, *The Coloradoan* elected to run a lengthy "soapbox" article by Eddy Hopkins on the network and the upcoming seminar in its issue of February 16, 2010, eleven days before the event. In retrospect, the council felt this article was instrumental in attracting several faith library representatives from the Fort Collins area.

The seminar results, as described earlier, were very encouraging and prompted the council to continue its network initiative. Post-seminar evaluations showed the attendees found the event stimulating and appreciated its being offered in Fort Collins. Several asked that the FLNC host similar seminars every year. One Lutheran church library representative submitted the following "thumbs up" article to *The Coloradoan*:

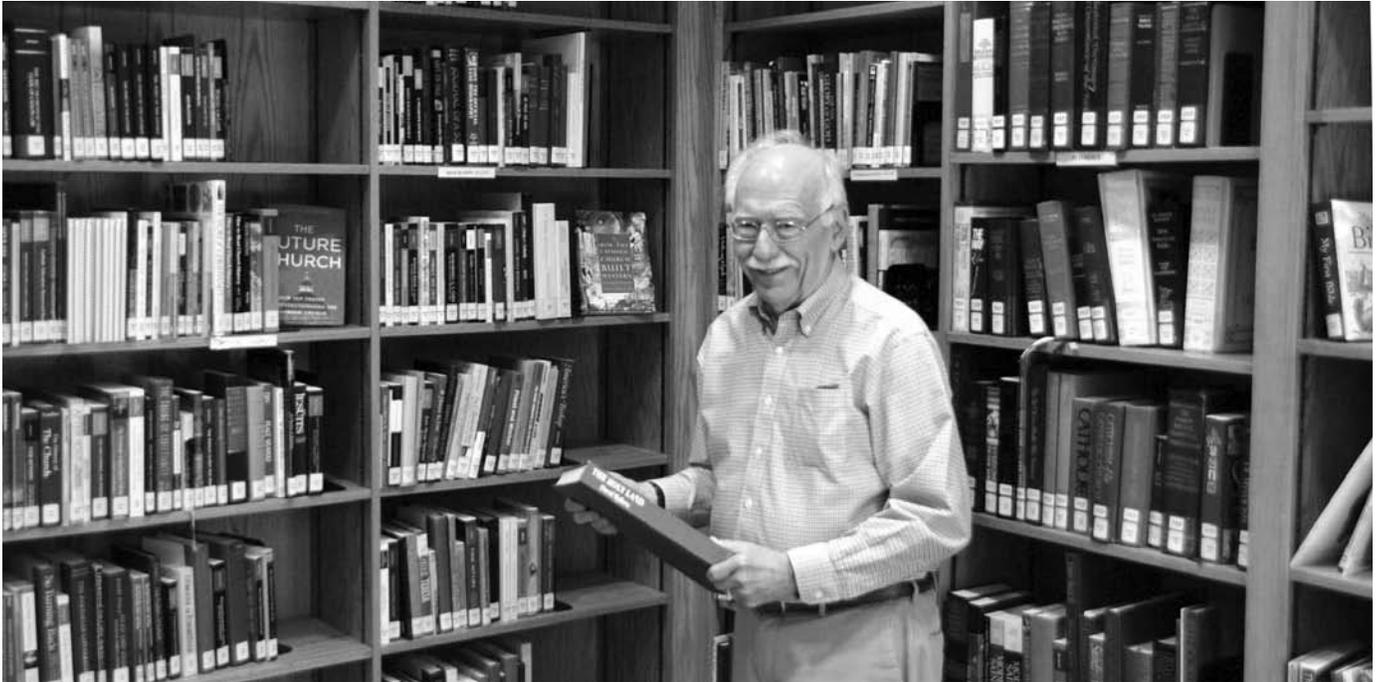
"First United Methodist hosted an exceptional Faith Library conference. Topics targeted ranged from just beginning to future network opportunities. It was refreshing to listen to informed, inspirational and infectious speakers. And what made the conference sweet—it was free. Thank you; please do this again." (*The Coloradoan*, March 6, 2010, p. A6).

In view of the positive response, the council agreed to make the seminar an annual event.

■ EXPANDING OUR PRESENCE

A fourth partner joined the network following the seminar in February 2010: Christ Center Community Church (CCCC), a non-denominational church in Fort Collins. The CCCC library is spacious, well equipped and contains around 6,500 titles. It also employs the same CROSS library system as John XXIII. However, when joining the FLNC, its catalog was not yet online and it was seeking advice on how best to proceed. A year later, the CCCC library had its own home page and online catalog on the web.

▼ Bill McClellan, church deacon and librarian, in the library at Blessed John XXIII University Parish, one of the original members of the FLNC network.



During 2010, the council representatives from the four partner church libraries focused their attention on the following network initiatives:

- Communicating with seminar attendees and other interested parties
- Promoting interlibrary circulation among the four churches
- Developing guidelines for addressing longer range considerations
- Setting the date, venue, and agenda for the 2011 seminar

External Communications: From the February seminar registrations the FLNC had compiled a contact list of forty-one e-mail addresses at twenty-eight faith libraries in Northern Colorado. More addresses were subsequently added from contacts with other area congregational libraries after the seminar. To facilitate communications with all these contacts, the council decided to implement a network website and to initiate a monthly e-newsletter.

John XXIII, FUMC, and OSLC already had established library websites and CCCC planned to develop one. We thus created a network website whose home page would provide links to the home pages of the four partner library websites. Other pages on the site describe the history and mission of the network; the special holdings of each library; upcoming events of interest to area faith libraries; pertinent resources; and the benefits of network membership. This website can be found at <http://www.flncnetwork.org>.

The FLNC began disseminating a monthly e-newsletter, *The Network E-Update*, in September 2010 to all contacts on its e-mail distribution list. Regular monthly editions were published through January 2011. The *E-Update* was then suspended since the almost total lack of feedback was taken as an indication of limited readership. The council decided to poll the attendees at its next seminar regarding their preferred means of communications.

Interlibrary Book Circulation: A principal purpose in forming the network was to facilitate the sharing of resources among the partner libraries. The council had anticipated that congregational members from each church would make use of all four libraries. To encourage this interchange, we announced that books checked out at any partner library could be returned to the patron's home church library. It thus became a source of some frustration that interlibrary borrowing took place only among the network representatives themselves when they visited other church libraries for council meetings.

It occurred to me that if we couldn't bring our congregations to see the books in our respective libraries, perhaps we could bring the books to our congregations. I proposed the idea of a circulating book display. The concept was readily accepted and plans were put in motion for its implementation in October 2010.

The display contained ten books from each library for a total of forty books. The criteria used to select books for the display were as follows: "newer adult books, either fiction or non-fiction, that are representative of the kind of books found in the source library, that browsers will find appealing

and be inclined to check out and read, and that are not likely to be found in the other partner libraries.” The resulting collection was a good mix of fictional, biographical, theological and devotional books.

The books were circulated to the four churches on sequential Sundays to be displayed for browsing and checkout by each congregation. Books could be returned to the library in the church at which they were checked out. The council members transported the books from church to church, replaced checked-out books with other selections from their libraries, and delivered returned books back to their home libraries. The books on display each week were listed on the web-based LibraryThing service so that patrons could browse the titles and authors beforehand. Printouts of the LibraryThing listings were then used to track circulation.

The network council found the results of the circulating book display gratifying. Thirty-one books had been checked out from the book display during its four weeks of circulation. This was an impressive number, whether viewed as a percentage of the forty books in the opening display or of the accumulative total of seventy books, including replacements. A review of the circulation data from LibraryThing showed that the types of books checked out and their source libraries were both fairly evenly divided. However, we did learn at least one important lesson: books laid face up on tables were much more likely to be picked up and checked out than books placed in book carts with only their spines showing.

Bill McClellan, the librarian at John XXIII, later reported back to the council as follows:

Blessed John XXIII University Parish hosted the display over a weekend when refreshments were served after each Mass. The display attracted much attention and several titles were checked out. No one paid any attention to which faith library was the source of the books on display, but mainly focused on the titles. The display also provided a great opportunity for our library committee members to converse with our parishioners about the various books, our library at John XXIII and the FLNC network.

In view of these results, the council agreed that the circulating book display should be repeated annually and expanded to include other faith libraries that might join the network.

■ ORGANIZING FOR THE FUTURE

In November 2010, the coordinating council held its first planning retreat, facilitated by Mark Nelson, a local retreat leader. Participants included the original organizing council members, plus two representatives from CCCC: the church librarian, Jeanne Harsin, and Laure Hittle. This retreat defined the framework by which the council could address

and resolve outstanding issues related to its goals, organizational structure, operating protocol and visions for the future. Issues defined at the retreat were taken up at regular council meetings over the next four months.

Network Goals: After reaffirming its original mission statement, the council agreed that the network’s goals were as follows:

- To share our resources, knowledge and ideas
- To promote congregational readership and education
- To develop partnerships within our congregations and with other faith libraries
- To communicate relevant information of interest to other faith libraries

Organizational and Operational Guidelines:

The council also agreed to continue operating as a network of equal partners named the Faith Libraries of Northern Colorado. FUMC volunteered to serve as a central resource for providing network support services. Operational assignments would be distributed among the partners as mutually agreed at council meetings. Typical functions to be performed are listed below.

FUMC Resource Center Services

Network mailing address
Network e-mail communications
Staff librarian
Network coordination
Network website
Network e-newsletter
Network LibraryThing website
Promotional materials

Network Partner Operational Assignments

Event leadership and coordination
Hosting meetings and events
Event participant roles
Contributions to network websites
Contributions to network e-newsletter
Principal contact within denomination

As network coordinator, I was designated moderator for the monthly council meetings. Eddy Hopkins, FUMC’s resource center director, serves as advisor on library matters. Each network partner library can be represented by more than one person, but only one is named as its designated representative for voting purposes. Ideally, that person will be the church’s librarian or library committee chair. Council decisions are reached by consensus if possible. As moderator, I only call for a vote if a consensus is not attainable. Neither Eddy nor I are eligible to vote on these occasions.

To provide a funding base for the network, FUMC agreed to set aside a specified amount in its annual library budget for the support of network activities and events. If budgeted funds are insufficient to support a planned network activity or event, the FUMC network representative can then request financial contributions as needed from the other partners at a network coordination meeting.

Certain guidelines were adopted regarding monthly council meetings. The host churches for these meetings are rotated among the network partners. Each meeting opens with the same three agenda items: (1) the introduction and orientation of any guest from a faith library interested in becoming a network partner; (2) an opening meditation and prayer offered by the host library representative; and (3) a sharing of library successes, ideas and concerns.

Visions for the Future: Council members have mutually embraced a shared vision for the FLNC network's future, encompassing:

- A growing number of network partners
- Hosting regular annual events for area faith libraries
- Sponsorship of book- and author-related educational events
- A unified catalog of library holdings
- A robust interlibrary loan program
- Close ties with congregational library associations
- Unified fund raising events
- Consortium purchasing
- E-book lending services

The coordinating council plans to address the first five of these visions in 2011, as discussed below. Plans for the other four will be developed later in the year or in 2012.

■ PLANNED 2011 EVENTS AND SERVICES

Events planned for 2011 by the FLNC council include a second annual seminar and a more hands-on workshop designed specifically for faith librarians. A "Faith Literature Speakers Series" will also be initiated during the year. In addition, the network's circulating book display and e-communication services from 2010 will be enhanced and offered again.

Faith Literature Seminar: The FLNC hosted its second annual seminar, "The 2011 Faith Literature Seminar," on Saturday, March 5. The seminar offered faith librarians informed perspectives on faith literature: its history, current trends, book review sources, and available online and e-book resources. Opportunities were provided to share and discuss library concerns and issues. Knowledgeable speakers were again drawn from the network libraries, the CSUML, and the PRPL. In addition, a featured guest speaker from outside the area—Amy Frykholm, *Christian Century* correspondent and author—gave an insightful presentation on "Religious Themes in Contemporary Novels."

While at the seminar, attendees were asked to identify workshop topics that would be most helpful in addressing their libraries' needs and concerns. The FLNC council used their responses to develop the 2011 Summer Workshop for Faith Librarians (see below). Congregational libraries represented at the seminar were also invited to join the network.

▼ Library at Christ Center Community Church, a welcome fourth addition to the FLNC network in 2010.



The Faith Literature Seminar was attended by twenty-seven representatives from fourteen faith libraries. This was a little less than half that of the 2010 seminar, but still respectable. The council attributed the decline in attendance to two factors: (1) the seminar had received less promotion than in 2010; and (2) its focus on literature was probably less interesting to faith librarians than the 2010 theme on how to build and manage a congregational library. For its 2012 seminar, the council discussed the desirability of appealing to a wider faith community than librarians, while continuing to offer separate workshops specifically for faith libraries.

Most attendees rated the seminar as either very helpful or helpful. All speakers were also viewed favorably; the guest speaker, Amy Frykholm, was particularly well received and several attendees encouraged the FLNC to invite her back to Fort Collins.

Summer Workshop: The summer workshop for area faith librarians will be held at CCCC on Saturday morning, July 30, 2011. Ellen Bosman, a librarian at New Mexico State University who maintains a website for congregational libraries, will serve as workshop leader. The various sessions will cover topics suggested by attendees of the Faith Literature Seminar. These include requests for guidance on such practical matters as how to start a library, get a catalog online, encourage readership, promote one's library, raise funds, manage security, and effectively weed a collection.

Faith Literature Speakers Series: The FLNC will launch a new “Faith Literature Speakers Series” in 2011. For this series, each partner library will arrange for an author or other scholar to speak at its church on a book or other faith literature topic. The first of these events will be held at FUMC on August 10 when Amy Frykholm returns to Fort Collins to discuss her most recent book *Julian of Norwich: A Contemplative Biography*. Other speakers are being engaged to discuss the works of Flannery O’Connor and C. S. Lewis at OSLC and CCCC, respectively.

Enhanced Interlibrary Circulation: The circulating book display that met with such success in 2010 will be repeated again in 2011. This year the display will travel to the five partner churches on sequential Sundays in October.

The FLNC council is also experimenting with the best use of LibraryThing to facilitate interchurch book lending. We are currently attempting to load all five catalogs into a single searchable file. As of this writing, the bibliographic records from three of the partner libraries—John XXIII, FUMC and OSLC—have been merged on LibraryThing. This alone has proved to be a formidable task and we have yet to find an easy way to enter updates. (Our progress can be tracked at www.librarything.com/catalog/flncnetwork).

The council plans to investigate alternative ways to create an online union catalog should the LibraryThing approach not prove feasible. A union catalog of current FLNC holdings will make close to eighteen thousand titles accessible to our users. Bill McClellan at John XXIII feels that this “merging of the network’s holdings will be a useful search tool for all the FLNC libraries and will encourage and stimulate more use of each of our faith libraries.”

Improved Communications: The FLNC contact list now contains fifty-one e-mail addresses and six postal mailing addresses for library representatives from thirty-four area churches, synagogues, and other faith organizations. For communicating with these contacts, attendees at the Faith Literature Seminar indicated a slight preference for e-notifications of new developments and upcoming events rather than a regular monthly e-newsletter. In response to this guidance, the FLNC has dropped its former monthly *E-Update* and will replace it with a newly formatted e-notification, *The Network Connector*, to be distributed as events dictate. The network website, www.flncnetwork.org, will continue to be maintained and updated.

■ POTENTIAL LIBRARY MINISTRY

A fifth faith library joined the FLNC network in response to the invitation extended at the Faith Literature Seminar: The American Baptist Church of Fort Collins (ABC), represented by its librarian, John DeHaes. At the same time, Amy Holzworth joined the FLNC coordinating council as the OSLC librarian for 2011, replacing Elisa Sherman.

A search for church and faith library networks on the web disclosed one network similar to the FLNC: the Hibbing Church Library Network in Hibbing, Minnesota. The Hibbing network, with six member faith libraries, was formed in 1990-91 at the initiation of the Hibbing Public Library (HPL). Recognizing the wealth of material relating to religion in the six church libraries, the HPL catalogs the materials from these libraries for inclusion in the HPL catalog. In return, the six libraries agree to share their materials with the HPL and other area faith libraries.

The FLNC council expects that other faith libraries in Northern Colorado will choose to join the network. We would especially welcome partner libraries from outside Fort Collins. As a cooperative network, the FLNC has the potential to serve as an effective regional resource for other area faith libraries, as well as the general public. But, unlike the network in Hibbing, the FLNC must rely on its own resources to provide convenient access to its catalogs and holdings.

The almost eighteen thousand titles held in the five FLNC partner libraries represent a unique offering of special collections and holdings in various concentrations. The collection size at each partner library breaks down roughly as follows: 1,550 at ABC, 6,500 at CCCC, 5,500 at FUMC, 2,100 at John XXIII, and 2,300 at OSLC. Many items at each library cannot be found elsewhere in the area. Our challenge is to make these resources as accessible as possible to the broader Northern Colorado faith community for reading, study and meditation. Access to the FLNC libraries should be especially useful to faith institutions that have very small or no libraries of their own. We expect a searchable union catalog will prove a useful tool in facilitating this outreach.

■ A COMMUNITY-SERVING COMMUNITY

The five partner churches that now constitute the FLNC—Catholic, Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, and non-denominational—view themselves as an ecumenical faith community that has come together to serve both our congregations and the larger faith community of Northern Colorado. Working together in this common ministry, we have learned to respect our different viewpoints and traditions. As we move forward, we will seek to extend this spirit of mutual respect, along with our combined library resources and expertise, for the benefit of our greater community. Bill McClellan puts it this way: “The network offers splendid opportunities not only for the sharing of resources, but for fostering diverse opinions and enlightening minds.”

We would love to hear from other church libraries that have formed cooperative networks or are thinking about doing so. Please e-mail us at library@flncnetwork.org. If your church happens to be located in Northern Colorado and you would like to learn more about the FLNC, we invite you to contact us at the same address. ■