

The most "Frequently Asked Questions" concerning a Church Bookstall are to do with how to get started. Maybe your church has a good porch crying out for a Christian literature stand? Maybe the congregation to which you belong is impoverished when it come to reading matter or devotional aids, and they have no easy opportunity of enlarging their thinking or experience? Would running a church bookstall be your "calling"? Think carefully - it is quite a commitment! It can also be a very worthwhile and fulfilling ministry. Before you throw yourself into it, there are several matters to be considered, and so the Good BookStall offers you:

Twenty Questions before you start!

Question 1. - Why does the church need a bookstall?

If the proposition that the church should set up a bookstall has arisen at the church council under "Finance", particularly if it is posited as a potential fund-raising project - beware!

Not that there is anything wrong with fund-raising - either for charity, for mission, or for the church fabric. Indeed the Dean & Chapter of a Cathedral may properly require its shop to be a profitable contributor to the enormous costs of upkeep.

And, yes, there are some church bookstalls that have made a modest profit.

However, the profitable church bookstall

- *might* have conditioned its customers merely to *patronise* it; kind people encouraging a personable enthusiast;
- *might* be relying on a fetcher & carrier who never claims expenses;
- *might* be the result of an inappropriate style of salesmanship: too pushy perhaps, or indiscriminate (in commending everything to all), and thus damaging the integrity of that church's ministry.

The profitable church bookstall is likely to have made its profit from merchandise other than books. But then, will the sale of, say greetings cards, dilute the purpose of the bookstall, or interfere with the long-established fund-raising activities of one of the church's organisations?

What percentage will your supplier allow you? Suppose it's 10%. Is it realistic to think you can make a profit? If you take goods in on firm sale, and determine say, that among your stock items you will always carry perhaps the paperback "The Screwtape Letters". You will need to *sell nine copies* of it to be able to afford to do that?

If your terms are "sale or return", that looks profitable: until your keenest browser spills coffee over half a dozen books, until the flower-arranger's spray squirt misses her display and souses yours, until the uncles in the baptismal party pick up several of your children's books for the cousins to maul during the service, until some lad leaves the youth club in a black mood and en passant swipes his hand along a whole shelf.

The manager of The Good BookStall will have a higher motivation than money-

making. Imagine offering a particularly helpful book to a person who really needs it, and then realizing that they are refusing it because they are suspicious of your commendation! Forget fund-raising: to be compromised like that is something you cannot afford.

Question 2. - Is the church bookstall mission-ary?

It still happens frequently that you come across people who have been put off the Bible by the language (and size of print) of their (grandma's) old Authorized Version: and yet they have never dreamed of seeking a specialist bookshop. Where better can some modern translations at different prices, with some sound advice about them, be dispensed than from the Church Bookstall?

But the Bible is a difficult library. There is, fortunately, no shortage of aids to its understanding. They don't seem to feature in the local bookshop though. That's if there *is* a local bookshop.

There are certain writers who often crop up in the sermons. How best can a member of the congregation follow them up? Similarly, those illustrations from the lives of famous Christians - where do we learn more about these people? Possibly the library of course (if the name is remembered from Sunday to Wednesday, if they'll take a special order without being told the author, publisher and ISBN, and if you're prepared to wait weeks). How much better if the paperback is winking from the shelf when the urge is there!

The popularity (on, and selling from, church bookstalls) of books of prayers is an indication of an acknowledged need of many church-goers.

Here's somebody asking about the Christian faith? Where's the very book this enquirer needs? Just to hand on the bookstall!

Wouldn't it be good to have some wholesome literature available for the children? Look on the bottom shelf! Or some modern adult fiction by Christian writers, say Susan Howatch or Catherine Fox? (Top shelf!)

Presents! Calf-skin, burgundy REB? Hymns & Psalms, *with tunes*? "That book that supported the Christ in Art exhibition?"

The student taking an RE exam at school, the trainee Junior Church teacher, the local preacher "on trial", the would-be lay reader taking the Bishop's Certificate, the dozen people joining the Lenten house-group, the new churchwarden/steward need to feed their minds from the church bookstall.

The church is having a campaign - say for instance to be an "eco-church": what literature is available to support the drive? Why, it's there on the bookstall!

Come to think of it, how can a church fulfil its mission *if the necessary supporting literature is not readily available*? John Wesley, who loaded his saddle-bags with books and saw to it that his travelling preachers all were book stewards, said that the work of faith would die out in a single generation if the Methodists were not a reading people.

Question 3. - Is the vicar with you?

If the person selling books from the bookstall is the only one commending Christian literature, he or she may become a little bit suspect... in the eyes of the people of the church! It is helpful therefore to have the parson, other preachers and the people who lead the fellowships, in the bookstall "team", understanding why the bookstall is there.

Preachers do not, you may find, illustrate their sermons from their reading as much as their forebears used to, but where you do have literate preachers, it would be advantageous if you could "train" them to warn you in good time before they commend particular books. When Ernest Gordon's "Miracle on the River Kwai" was first published in paper-back (and if you can remember stocking that then you have been running a bookstall so long that you do not need to read my tips on how to do it!) one minister's repeated, enthusiastic commendation sold 14 copies!

More often than not the bookstall manager plays the game "Surprised by Jim". This frantic pastime originated with a moving quotation from "Surprised by Joy" in one of the Rev Jim's sermons. It meant that whenever he did that on me (and the C S Lewis title was but the first of many) I was given just the duration of the last hymn during which to rootle through the entire stock and have the book on display by the time the congregation emerged from the service. If I succeeded, I reckoned I'd *won* that round.

Team-work could be quite extensive. Visiting speakers can give you prior warning, fellowship leaders can let you know what books they are using for those telling opening devotions, and the vicar can advise you what books it would be helpful to have always there for him or her to be able to hand to enquirers. Even if just occasionally the payment is forgotten, the bookstall is fulfilling its purpose. It's a deal more important that a book is read than that it is sold! I *think* our publishers will agree with that: after all a *reader* will return for another book.

Question 4. - Is the Church Council supportive?

It is important that the Church "owns" the church bookstall. If they are just kindly acquiescing in order to humour you, the Church Council may turn less sympathetic the moment you have a cash-flow problem.

It is therefore vital at the very establishment of the standard church bookstall to seek a substantial grant from the Church Council; and thereafter the Council needs to see the Bookstall as an aspect of its mission, and therefore to be prepared to consider its running as an expense.

Would that churches understood that their "Bookstalls 'R' Us"! The moment you hear anyone speaking of the church bookstall as "your bookstall", or "Brenda's bookstall", though they may mean it as a compliment or as an acknowledgment that you are (or Brenda is) the one who looks after it, they are suffering from a slipping strap when they have a responsibility to shoulder!

Cultivate an insensitive tongue: you may have to bite it as the church warden/steward exclaims in delighted surprise that you have on display a title for which they have asked in vain in all the bookshops in town. But keep a sparkle in the eyes for when a couple come to you because the little old lady on the back row has recommended "our church bookstall" to them.

Question 5. - Who would be your supplier?

If you live in a village and commute to the city and work in a shop next door to the religious bookshop, you will not be reading this page!

If you have several religious bookshops within reach, then it may well be worthwhile investigating their different emphases and strengths and their willingness to operate with you (and the terms they are prepared to offer). Not that you need necessarily choose just one "parent bookseller", but if you were to be "in" with several, you might not be doing enough trade with each to justify all of them opening an account for you.

However, unless your choosing of stock is done only from the bookseller's shelves and tables (and why should it be with this website available?) then the "slant" or churchmanship of the supplier may not be important. Basically, any bookseller can obtain any book. And it is a long time since William Barclay's volumes were grudgingly supplied to me by one bookseller not from the shelves, but from under the counter already wrapped in brown paper!

Essentially it comes down to personal relationships, and that is something worth cultivating.

Your bookseller needs to be able to trust you. (If accidentally they undercharge you, point it out - and you'll feel pennies out but actually be quids in!) Their trust is valuable, especially when you need special terms to cope with a visiting author, or need to ask if you could (this once) return a now-unsellable expensive esoteric tome which your most scholarly customer ordered with what turned out to be her dying breath.

You need also to be able to trust your bookseller. Speaking from a distant experience, I "had to" find a new one on the Saturday before the Sunday which saw the publication of the New English Bible. The 14 copies were on the counter when the manager (with whom I had been for some time) suddenly told me he "had to" cut the discount from 10% to 5%. I left them there and did not return till after he had retired. Fortunately I was able immediately to "sign up" with another shop not far away. A very long time ago? Yes, but as The Corrs sing, "Forgiven, not forgotten!"

Question 6. - On what terms would you be trading?

If it seems as though the best way to proceed in your situation would be to run a bookstall just occasionally for a special event, then it might well make sense to seek a "Sale or Return" arrangement with your local Christian bookseller. That way you do not accumulate an increasing pile of un-sellable stock!

However, a sale or return arrangement is not without its cost. Some booksellers would not be prepared to allow you a discount: though after they have learned how efficiently you've been operating on several successive occasions - returns being made still in mint condition and early the next day - you could see if they'll relent! You have travelling costs of course in relation to such books, and occasionally there'll be a spillage or a bashed-in corner which necessitates your selling (or yourself buying!) at a loss to the Bookstall.

Firm sale means that you can be more relaxed, and the discount you may expect will help cope with damage or redundant stock. At 10% a profit is probably out of

the question: you may hope to find a more generous supplier.

It's often worth investigating what remaindered books are on offer. Years ago, when a local heroine's story was turned into a television series, her biography went on sale at £2.50. When it was remaindered, it was possible to pick up at a bargain bookshop a quantity at 75p each. A hundred of those sold at £1 gave everybody a great bargain and the Bookstall made (a reputation and) £25 ("which was a lot of money in those days")!

Question 7. - How would your books get from your supplier to your church/home?

The actual carriage home of books from your supplier is not now usually the physical challenge it used to be. These days what you can conveniently carry is unlikely to exceed what you can afford!

It is unrealistic for your Church (or your potential successor) not to know what the transportation costs are. In respect to the Church Bookstall, your generosity should be that of time, not money. And it would be perhaps a bit nice-but-naughty to give less in the offertory in order to subsidise the Bookstall! Yes, "they" do call it "your" Bookstall: but, for its Bookstall, the Church has a corporate responsibility.

Do check your home insurance, your car insurance and the Church's insurance. A quantity of hymnbooks (just purchased from a bookseller and technically in transit to a Bookstall before being sold to a Church which had ordered them) was stolen while the car was momentarily parked. The loss was not recoverable from any insurer. The rain-damaged books were in fact found, after the thief had been disappointed not to discover the electrical goods and alcoholic drinks promised on the cardboard exteriors of the boxes the bookseller had used.

Question 8. - How and where will your merchandise be displayed?

You're on to a loser if the church bookstall has to be a hole-and-corner business. So the books you have on display need to be placed where they can be seen, and preferably where they will be passed by people en route to and from worship and meetings. And many folk will pass by, well-accustomed to ignoring flag-sellers, or, more seriously in this contest of course, having other things on their minds. Accept this and do not be tempted to make the display obtrusive.

If all you are allowed is a table near the entrance, cover it with your grandma's chenille table-cover, and try to build it up with (suitably camouflaged) boxes to give it some height towards the back. Full frontal display is needed to catch eyes!

But perhaps when establishing the venture, the Church Council will be prepared to give you a proper start by purchasing a professional display unit? Or maybe the church handyman can knock up a good-looking rack? And (whereas the church lounge may be burdened by people's cast-off arm chairs) the bookstall could really benefit by shops (and not necessarily bookshops) that receive more frequent refitments and need to dispose of what are still very usable display stands (and/or cupboards).

Church premises differ considerably. Perhaps the church itself is little-used during the week while its ancillary premises are positively buzzing. A secondary site for the bookstall is perhaps desirable. And the various fellowships that meet in the

different rooms each have their programmes: are there particular titles that ought to be on offer to match subjects to be tackled on particular evenings?

And once you start operating in other rooms, you start thinking about neighbouring churches in the parish or the circuit. Could they benefit from a permanent bookstall in league with ours? Or could we stand our ground there every so often?

Then, once you get acclimatized to offering particular presentations in different rooms and other places, the need for portability becomes paramount. There are those who have designed a carrying case which is a cupboard until it opens out and its doors (with perspex retaining bands) will display several titles, while its shelves also become part of the shop! Or maybe a less ambitious couple of crates and a few wire stands will do just as well? One way or another ingenuity may be required.

Or cheek. If your bookselling is subsidized by retailing greetings cards, you might find their manufacturer is willing to help you with a fitment or a revolver. On the other hand, on church premises, gaudy posters or inescapable SALE notices (which you may well be offered!) will be judged tasteless. However, if you expand your mission into the community and take a market stall, your customary sobriety might be inappropriate there!

Question 9. - Where will you store what's not on display?

Even if the amount of stock you carry could all be out always on display, that is probably not a good idea. Many church buildings are very cold and some can be damp. Alternatively, sunshine frequently slanting down on the same books can curl a paperback's cover and/or brown the top and exposed edge. And if the church is always open, the mission opportunity has to be weighed against the possibility of theft. A more likely threat, perhaps, is the bored and sticky-fingered child whose parents are lost admiring the Grinling Gibbons carving on the pulpit.

So some form of cupboarding is highly desirable, nay, essential. Some bookstall structures contain their own cupboard. Many a cloth-covered table hides its stock cupboard beneath it. Or can you scrounge a corner in the church office, or in a vestry?

It is not a good martyrdom to keep the stock in the dining-room at home. The goods would not be insured, for one thing. But, like a young cuckoo, the collection would increase in size to the detriment of the family's feeding arrangements and general life. Furthermore, you must not "commit" your eventual successor to that: in fact you would not get a successor.

Plainly, this general advice does not provide the local answer. But as with the other 19 questions in this series, you are urged to determine your arrangements before you actually set up the church bookstall!

Question 10. - Who will staff the bookstall?

It is probably unrealistic to imagine a team of well-informed, willing and reliable volunteers prepared to operate on a rota basis. But you can have an ideal!

In most churches if the person who runs the bookstall attends the main Sunday service (and the bookstall) he or she will soon get known by the local

congregation, and duty stewards will be able to point the enquiring visitor in the right direction.

A paper pad on the stall with an opportunity for orders to be noted could work if the church has a communications (pigeon-holes?) system.

It might be possible to have an acknowledged bookstall representative in the weeknight meetings who can act as an "agent" who will field enquiries, take orders and deliver supplies.

Question 11. - What will be the payment arrangements for purchasers?

For when no member of the bookstall team is present, an arrangement for taking and paying needs to be made, perhaps with stewards acting as go-betweens, or a fixed money box (frequently emptied) in the adjacent wall? Even so, those who know you will prefer to pay you when they see you, and you have to accept the occasional customer's 'forgettery'.

If a church takes a strict line against Sunday trading, that could be a complete deterrent to its establishing a bookstall, unless the place is very lively during the week.

In the days when (and a place where) the old Sunday trading law was strictly interpreted, one casuist was happy to leave a plate on the (unattended) church bookstall because whereas selling was forbidden, purchasing was not.

This writer would rather argue that equipping God's people for God's mission is not "trading" for profit, but a vital obligation of the Church.

Question 12. - What about banking?

Your local church, which itself may have to operate according to denominational regulations, may wish all finances to be under the control of the church treasurer. If that is the situation in which you find yourself, it is that person you will need to go to for advice and with whom a working arrangement needs to be established. Presenting your supplier's bills for payment by another, relieves you of time-consuming paper-work but could make your relationship with your bookseller delicate if the treasurer is a tardy clearer of debts. Hopefully your church has an efficient pigeonhole system for passing messages between key people.

If possible, open up a bank account for the bookstall, and shop around beforehand to find one that will not make charges. If it has a branch within easy reach that is a great bonus. Taking charge of the bookstall accounts yourself enables you at all times to "know where you are" and avoid accidentally slipping into the red.

Whether or not your denomination has a policy on the matter of signatories, it is good practice to have your every cheque validated by two of three approved signatures, and in order for that to be set up your banker will probably require a copy of the Church Council minute which arranges the nominations.

Keeping the bookstall cash separate after Sunday worship perhaps, or when you have emptied the payment tin, is a vital matter of discipline. You might for instance decide it will be your invariable practice to take no other money to church than your own enveloped offertory and maintain a specific "bookstall

pocket" to be emptied immediately on return. (This is less than perfect behaviour, rendering you embarrassingly unable to buy a ticket for the choir concert or contribute to the retiring collection in aid of the latest emergency!)

It is also vital of course that the amount taken is registered in your accounts book immediately.

It goes without saying that bank statements and all bills and receipts are preserved for the independent examiner to check over at the end of your financial year. And your bookstall's financial year will presumably be the same as the church's?

Question 13. - How pushy will you be as a salesperson?

Anytime you sell a book that does not live up to the expectations you encouraged in the purchaser, you have lost, not gained, a customer. You cannot read all the books you sell, but if you are going to be helpful to people you ought at least be able to give them the reason that justifies your stocking the particular book they're handling.

Frank expression of opinion about a book is advocated! Those who know you and know where you stand on things will know what they need to know about the book. The situation is not unknown for a bookstall manager's commendations to be ignored while his or her expression of reservation will clinch a sale!

There is no need to be totally passive. Use of the church magazine or website for a book review is entirely appropriate. A preacher will sometimes commend a book as the source of a telling illustration. The best stance at the bookstall though is to be on hand, ready to give informed response to every enquirer. And just sometimes it is appropriate for your tactful offer of assistance to be the first word spoken. But don't irritate by too frequent conversational allusions to the bookstall stock, or turn people away by imitative sales-gimmickry, aggressive marketing, or personal pushiness.

Question 14. - Who's going to choose the stock?

The possible problem that arises over the "editing" of the stock is if there are two partners in the bookstall's management who do not see eye to eye on the purpose of the church bookstall.

The dean and chapter (or their equivalents in relation to an historic building other than a cathedral) may see the (expensively maintained) building itself to be the provider of mission opportunities, while the tea shop and gift shop (with its few glossy books related to faith tourism) and other adjuncts are to have as their major purpose making a profit, staffed as they are largely by willing volunteers in early retirement! The reader of this article like its writer during a holiday visit may well enjoy a coffee and a flapjack in the cafeteria and take home a memento and a card or two from the "book" stall, but be disappointed that his/her major interest in reading and encouraging others to read Christian literature is not shared at this Christian "beacon".

In the operation run at one's home church it may be that the managing trustees do not see your literature-mission in any other light than a drain on the church's resources or a missed opportunity for fund-raising. They might therefore be appalled at the amount of capital you have tied up in books you think church

members and visitors ought to have readily available to them. But they would not win the argument, would they?

A more likely scenario occurs when the (lay?) bookstall manager (who has been doing the job for a decade or two?) and the (latest? professional) parson (who has come recently and may still move on first!) do not see eye to eye theologically (or ecclesiologically or missiologically). There are those who see the aim of ministry as building up a congregation who will gain strength and purpose from their shared subscription to a specific understanding of the nature of the Bible, and others who welcome and seek to grow through the sharing of diverse interpretations. There are those whose churchmanship is all-embracing, and others who believe it necessary to circumscribe membership within a pale that "necessarily" places some people beyond.

There is a contrast between those whose main aim is to put bums on seats inside the church and those who see the church as the place from which to go out into the world.

Those are oversimplifications of course. But one or other may serve as a reminder that there are those who would wish the church bookstall to reflect a particular stance and those whose catholicity would prefer to offer people the opportunity of studying alternative views. And sometimes it can get hairy if somebody secretly removes a "heretical" volume from display and perhaps replaces it with an "orthodox" alternative! Or vice versa!!

You may have to work out your answer to this one with fear and trembling. You will gather that the choice of titles suggested on this website is broad. Even so, an editor is still required. And that goes for your own good bookstall too: there will be some titles you'll keep under the counter or obtain only by special order!

Question 15. - Will you enhance the stall's appearance and profitability with cards?

However determined you are that the purpose of your church bookstall is to encourage people to enlarge their knowledge and experience or deepen their spiritual life by purchasing and reading good Christian literature, or for instance to be active book-giving godparents, it is likely that you will experience pressure to extend the range of items that you sell.

Your religious bookselling does not clash with anyone else's business. If there is a local bookshop, its religious section is likely to be paltry and multi-faith, and upstairs and round the corner - on "The Road Less Travelled" indeed!

But if you're asked to purvey the denominational newspaper – would you not be treading on the toes of the local newsagent? Or 'Christmassy' stuff? – Ah, hang on, the Brownies are touting round the congregation with a catalogue to raise funds for their outfit. But greetings cards, and especially greetings cards with a text...? And all the get well, well-wishing and sympathy that fellow-Christians wish to express?

The pressure may come from customers needing, enquiring, suggesting; or from your parent bookseller offering to supply you (with Advent calendars to start with!) from the shop's stock on the same terms as the books. Or a manufacturer might approach you with an offer of trade terms, and you could see this as a way of subsidising the economically-difficult book trading.

Can you "afford" the display space? Is it right to tie up capital in stock so marginal to the bookstall's purpose? It is impossible to give general advice on this question. No it isn't. If you go for cards, don't touch anything not wrapped in cellophane.

Question 16. - Have you a team of potential book reviewers?

Even if you were able to read every book you stocked on the church bookstall, it would not be a good idea to be the only person prepared to commend the works displayed. You would find your church folk quickly developing the Mandy Rice-Davies syndrome, assuming with every commendation, 'Well, you would say that, wouldn't you?'

In any case a book review is unlikely to be framed in the way some of us were taught in school to produce an account of an experiment in chemistry lessons, using total scientific detachment, all in the passive mood. When you read the blurbs on the back cover of a novel, do you not take as much notice of who said it as what it was they said? And it's just the same with a newspaper review surely? I remember being (happily) surprised after slating a particular book in the church magazine still to sell the thing immediately - to a lady who knew she would like it because she never agrees with me about anything! So it is important that any blurb is 'owned' by its producer not inflicted anonymously on your people.

Perhaps some of your customers are women or men or children to whom you can suggest, as they purchase, that a short review in the church newsletter would be acceptable? But don't overdo it: you mustn't make anyone feel there's an obligation. And they'll know that professional reviewers receive free copies: and you're not going to be able to reward in that way!

Probably a page in the parish magazine or church newsletter is the best place. Alternative (or additional) possibilities would be: a screen display on the church's website, an occasional spot in a service, a mutual sharing in a weeknight meeting (when the speaker has failed to turn up, or, better, as a regular educational exercise e.g. at the preachers' meeting) or, exceptionally, a specially duplicated handout.

Question 17. - Are you OK with accounting procedures?

You do not have to be an accountant to be a church bookstaller. But there is of course a need to be accountable.

If you keep legible records of purchases and sales and do an annual stock-taking, some kind person in the church will be found who can turn your records into presentable accounts. There are places, though, where the whole of this side of things is turned over to the church treasurer anyway. However, it is important that you know what your financial position is, so that you do not attempt to spend what you have not got!

A likely double sheet of accounts would have a number of columns.

- The first would bear the date for each transaction.
- The second might be used for some reminding note, say a brief version of the title sold, or the purchaser's initials.
- (If you regularly have other 'pitches', say the rest of circuit, or cluster, or other churches in the united benefice, or Saturday market stall, you might

think it interesting and informative to maintain separate columns for these different areas of income.)

- The penultimate column on your left-hand page would contain a repetition of what cash you have already entered.
- And the last one would repeat the figures for any cheques noted earlier in that same horizontal line.

Your right hand page does not need to repeat the date and descriptions columns (which you would still use, the first for date of action, and the second say for the number of the cheque used, or mileage travelled) but would otherwise look similar.

- You would have a column for payments out.
- (And again, you might choose to have several of these if you use different suppliers, say two booksellers, or run special sidelines in greetings cards, Traidcraft wares, or dabble with remaindered books you get through mail order.)
- A column indicating running costs is particularly informative.
- Then a cash column, most usually repeating the figure in the costs column.
- And finally a column for outgoing cheques, repeating what you've spent with your suppliers.

When cash accumulates (as it might by every Monday morning), bank it. That requires the amount to be entered into the last column of the income (left) page and entered in the penultimate (cash) column of the outgoings page.

At the bottom of each double sheet you would keep running totals in the income column(s) and expenditure columns. The two totals from the furthest right columns (cash and cheque) get deducted from the two cash and cheque totals on the right hand side of the left-hand page. And then all that bottom line is carried forward to the top of the next sheet.

All of which is easier seen than described! (A worked example can be found at the end of this document.)

Question 18. - How many church jobs are you already doing?

Although this question, like the others, is intended to deal with practicalities, it is realized that we are moving into the realms of idealism.

The standard advice to church bookstall managers has, for half a century, been: as church jobs go, this should be your one responsibility. To be fully efficient and effective make this your one commitment in Christian mission in (and to, and from) your local church.

This recommendation is passed on to the reader in full seriousness, but with the admiring acknowledgement that, God bless you, you'll ignore it, like all the others I have written.

Question 19. - Right! So what about the Bookstall's grand opening?

It is very rare that a church bookstall makes news. It is just there, making its modest provision for a minority of the worshippers week by week. Somebody occasionally might get steamed up about Sunday trading, or object to a particularly narrow (or, more likely, broad) publication you have on offer. But the local press won't sniff one grumbling churchperson out as creator of an argument of consuming interest to the freebie-reading general public.

You need an occasion, for which there will be publicity (with a photograph) in advance, and a report (with a photograph) afterwards. A church bookstall gets an occasion once in its lifetime - when it is established. Regional television might be interested, and local radio stations surely will.

Though it is not a hole-in-corner business, you've have to make sure that no-one else sees it that way. Pull all the stops out. Go for it in a big way.

So you will arrange for a denominational dignitary to be present with a significant part to play. Some musician or group will be able to do his or her or their bit as an incidental attraction. The nearest well-known Christian writer will be the guest star who will come and open stall (which on that day for sure will have some of that writer's books on sale) (with a handy pen for autographing). Thinking about pens, you could have a couple of hundred bookstall pens on sale specially inscribed with your logo and advertising slogan. (Here's ours for free: 'always at your service'.)

Get it well advertised among local churches both of your own denomination and the others. Don't make the event itself into a prosy service. Brief welcome, prayer by the local parson, song, five minutes of sweetness and light from the famous author, two minutes from the top brass and a commissioning of the manager (and team?). Another song - and off to coffee and biscuits and chat. And in that other room there'll be a special display perhaps from the parent bookseller just for that day.

Well, something like that!

Remember the local press won't send a reporter to you on a Saturday afternoon, or perhaps any time at the weekend, so you might have to send off your own report and photograph. And don't forget your denominational newspaper too.

Question 20. - The question that's bugging you!

This website replaced, and has considerably developed the potential of, The Christian Bookstall Managers' Association. This body consisted of the 300 or more of the keenest book agents across the country, who used to meet sometimes regionally and certainly annually, giving each other encouragement and sharing practical ideas. It produced a particularly helpful Handbook for Christian Bookstall Managers which has been long out of print. And we can admit that some of its ideas have been recycled amongst the 19 previous answers!

The mutual contacts were the most valuable aspect of the CBMA. And there is no reason why friendly and illuminating conversations of the sort some of us remember cannot take place through this medium. Each bookstaller in her or his church porch (or wherever) can feel at times an isolated oddity. You can still associate! And if something is bugging you, why not contact the editor at expert@thegoodbookstall.org.uk and challenge her to put you in touch with someone who understands just how you feel and possibly has the answer to the twentieth question.

Last updated May 2006

| Date | Itemisation | S Ample's | Circuit | Synod etc | CASH | BANK | Supplier | Bookshop 1 | Bookshop 2 | Mail&Intnt. | Et cetera | Costs | CASH | CHQS. |
|------|----------------------|-----------|---------|-----------|--------|---------|----------|------------|------------|-------------|-----------|--------|--------|--------|
| 1 Fe | brought forward | 485.02 | 173.50 | 1257.46 | 51.19 | 815.80 | 295.63 | 146.41 | 219.32 | 61.55 | 120.44 | 66.74 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 7 | Spring Fair expenses | | | | | | | | | | | 15.00 | 15.00 | |
| 14 | Bank postage | | | | | | | | | | | 0.30 | 0.30 | |
| 15 | RT | 5.00 | | | 5.00 | | | | | | | | | |
| | Card Supplier ch156 | | | | | | | | | | 358.08 | | | 358.08 |
| 16 | BANKED | | | | | 55.00 | | | | | | | 55.00 | |
| 20 | card | 1.10 | | | 1.10 | | | | | | | | | |
| 21 | bkstl tin | 8.10 | | | 8.10 | | | | | | | | | |
| 24 | RD | 77.87 | | | | 77.87 | | | | | | | | |
| 25 | bkstl tin | 3.95 | | | 3.95 | | | | | | | | | |
| 27 | bkstl tin | 0.80 | | | 0.80 | | | | | | | | | |
| 28 | Bank | | | | | | | | | | | 0.24 | 0.24 | |
| | CMD | | 15.99 | | | 15.99 | | | | | | | | |
| 1 Ma | cds | 3.00 | | | 3.00 | | | | | | | | | |
| | PB | 3.50 | | | 3.50 | | | | | | | | | |
| | BB | 15.00 | | | | 15.00 | | | | | | | | |
| | bkstl tin | 7.85 | | | 7.85 | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | bkstl tin | 7.50 | | | 7.50 | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | John St. cradle roll | | 4.75 | | 4.75 | | | | | | | 0.24 | 0.24 | |
| | Remainders pers cc | | | | | | | | | 94.62 | | 0.30 | 94.92 | |
| 4 | cheque 157 | | | | | | 110.00 | | | | | 0.25 | 0.25 | 110.00 |
| | promo pens pers cc | | | | | | | | | 98.41 | | | 98.41 | |
| 5 | bkstl tin | 12.20 | | | 12.20 | | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | Ntwk & cshbk donatn | | | 161.85 | 161.85 | | | | | | | 16.00 | 16.00 | |
| 8 | books & travel | | | 12.94 | | 12.94 | | | 256.18 | | | 2.00 | 2.00 | 256.18 |
| 9 | Ch Tog mtg | 7.00 | | | 7.00 | | | | | | | | | |
| 10 | bkstl tin | 5.10 | | | 5.10 | | | | | | | | | |
| | Ntwk | | | 18.50 | | 18.50 | | | | | | | | |
| 15 | ex bkstl tin | 1.50 | | | 1.50 | | | | | | | | | |
| 18 | Card supplier ch 159 | | | | | | | | | | 41.60 | | 0.24 | 41.84 |
| | bkstl tin | 2.20 | | | 2.20 | | | | | | | | | |
| 19 | bkstl tin | 1.50 | | | 1.50 | | | | | | | | | |
| | | 648.19 | 194.24 | 1450.75 | 288.09 | 1011.10 | 405.63 | 146.41 | 475.50 | 254.58 | 520.12 | 101.07 | 282.60 | 766.10 |
| | less | | | | 282.60 | 766.10 | | | | | | | | |
| 20 | carried forward | 648.19 | 194.24 | 1450.75 | 5.49 | 245.00 | 405.63 | 146.41 | 475.50 | 254.58 | 520.12 | 101.07 | 0.00 | 0.00 |