

By RACHEL COLEMAN • Leader & Times You can take a librarian out of the library, but you can't take the love of books out of the librarian. At least, not if the former librarian is Carol Rittscher of Kismet, who recently resigned her nine-year position as children's librarian at Liberal Memorial Library. Rittscher is still shelving titles; the only difference is that now she does so on a volunteer basis, at her church. Just a few blocks from the public library, Central Christian Church occupies the corner of Fourth St. and Grant Ave. Tucked inside its circular structure is a library — a small one, but a library nonetheless.

"Our church has really focused on outreach to the community, and that includes our library," Rittscher said. "It's open to everyone in the community. You don't have to be a member of this church to check things out." With an array of titles for all ages, the library offers fiction, like the children's "Magic Bicycle" series, marriage and personal development titles, Bible studies and more. The library shelves also hold audio- and video-recordings, magazines and journals. An old-fashioned card catalogue, housed in small wooden drawers, keeps track of the materials.

"I'm working on automating our materials, so people can go on our website to see what's available," Rittscher said. "It would make the library more accessible."

Rittscher's plans for the church collection are just part of her "life after the library" list of projects. She's enrolled in a class titled "Perspectives of the Worldwide Christian Movement," offered through the Meade Mennonite church.

"It's interesting stuff, with amazing speakers," she said, "and the textbook is huge. I'm really having to put my thinking cap on to get through the material."

The course connects to another item on Rittscher's list: helping raise support for her son Matt and his wife, who plan to embark on a Christian missionary-work trajectory.

"They'll be attending Moody Bible Institute in Chicago next fall, to complete a one-year certificate course on cross-cultural missions," Rittscher said. "After that, they hope to work with a group called Avant, somewhere in southeast Asia — Vietnam or Thailand."

In more library-related matters, Rittscher continues to serve on the Kismet Library Board, and anticipates helping the group move toward the construction of a new library building.

"I have a feeling I'm going to be immersed in that," she said, noting that the present facilities, half of the small town's city hall, have been nearly filled to bursting.

Amid so many volunteer and educational projects, Rittscher said she's still contemplating what her next mode of employment might be.

"You know, change in life comes in so many different forms, and I had felt for a long time that it might be time to move on from work at the library," she said. "I loved the job, loved the children. But I had been praying for direction, and felt it was time to move on."

Even so, she departs with fond memories and admiration for her coworkers.

"When I took that job, nine years ago, it almost felt to me like I got it on the basis of my volunteer experience," she said. "Every day, I was in awe of what I saw going on around me. It was a neat opportunity in so many ways." Rittscher especially liked her exposure to collaborative efforts in the community, like her regular trips to the Head Start classrooms to read aloud and boost children's familiarity with the library.

"The Children's Healthy Fun Fair was another great project. We got to work with the health department, parks and recreation, Latchkey, different United Way agencies ... it was neat to see what all those agencies were doing," she said. "That's really valuable, and I'm looking forward to applying that teamwork method to things here at the church and elsewhere."

Because Central Christian Church is focused on outreach to the community, Rittscher said, "the experiences I had at the library have worked out beautifully to enhance what we want to do in the church."

Already, Central Christian has partnered with the Liberal Area Rape Crisis/Domestic Violence Service, Rittscher said. Family films on Sunday afternoons have also been a big hit with the community.

Now, with a newly-expanded space in the building for the church library, "I'd love to see more children and families coming in to use the resources," she said. "I enjoy children tremendously, and I love sharing books."

Some things, it appears, never change.