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# Focusing Our Future: Panel Presentation

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# FOCUSING OUR FUTURE

## Panel Presentation

Association of Christian Librarians  
1993 Annual Conference

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LYNN A. BROCK

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When asked to respond to the question, "What one or two things should we focus on as we seek to improve the quality of library services on our campus?" the current challenges facing our libraries make an answer to that question difficult, if not almost impossible. I have not prepared a formal presentation, but let me share some thoughts that take into consideration some of what we have heard at this conference. The forces driving the future of our libraries are many—limited funding, pervasive technology, increased access demands, exploding information sources, multiplied formats, global environment, staff stress. In this sea of change, where do we find direction and stability?

In a day of revolutionary change, our only piece of solid ground, it seems to me, is the mission and purposes of our libraries. If you have sensed nothing else from the last three days of this conference, you should have sensed how critical it is to know your library's mission and purposes. Our success within our institutions is directly measured against the accomplishment of mission and purpose. The present danger is to be so caught up in the challenges of the day—funding, access,

technology, information delivery, systems—that we lose sight of why we exist as libraries. For example, we cannot treat technology as a smorgasbord; the integration of technology into our library operations must be consistent with our mission and purposes. Just because some other library is doing "it" or has "it" does not mean it is automatically right for my library. Technology should not be a gimmick, but a tool to help us accomplish our purposes more effectively.

I guess what I am saying is that what is required for a more effective future is a greater commitment to systematic proactive strategic planning, which always begins and ends with library mission and purpose. Approaching the future reactively is sometimes necessary (others would call it haphazardly), but when it becomes a way of life, it can threaten the effectiveness of our libraries, the attitudes of our staffs, and the relevance of our services to our patrons.

If I had to pick one focus that I believe would have a significant impact on library effectiveness in the future, it would be a proactive strategic planning process built solidly on a commitment to my

library's mission and purposes. This process will not provide all the answers for the future, but it will provide a framework in which to formulate those answers that best fit what we are about. With all the options available to us, with all the pressures to change this and provide that, with all the uncertainties about technology, don't lose sight of who you are and, in your institution, why you are there. The future demands effective, regular, mission-based planning.