



## Elizabeth Gnanaselvam: BUMC Librarian

**How long have you and your family been coming to BUMC and how did you initially get connected?**

Elizabeth: *My family and I have worshipped at BUMC for about 15 years. It was our daughter, Shiro, who got us connected with the church during one of our vacations in the U.S. many years ago and we subsequently attended service here whenever we visited with her. When we moved permanently to live here in 2006, we attended services here on a regular basis and joined as members in 2007. As members we continue to worship regularly, have been part of Bible studies, a Discipleship course, and many other activities. Volunteering in the Library has been one of them.*

**You are originally from Sri Lanka. Can you share a little with us about your experiences as a Christian living in Sri Lanka, especially in light of the recent attacks on Easter Sunday?**

Elizabeth: *Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious island nation (70 percent of the population is Buddhist with the remainder Muslim, Hindu and Christian). Christians make up approximately eight percent of the population. The attack of churches in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday came as a shock to one and all and appears to follow a pattern of religious terror familiar around the world. This kind of violence however was unfamiliar in Sri Lanka (the civil war that the country was engulfed in from 1983 -2009 was due to ethnic rather than religious tensions). During the time I lived in Sri Lanka, we were able to fearlessly worship in church. The church in fact served as a safe haven for minority communities seeking refuge during times of ethnic tensions. The church's many outreach programs were extended to refugees, irrespective of their religious origins. I was instrumental in starting a free medical clinic, which was held on weekends and served refugees and the underprivileged living in the neighborhoods around the church.*

**You have been instrumental in keeping the BUMC Library an organized and inviting space over the last few years and have indicated that you are ready to turn the reins over to someone else soon. What does this role entail and why do you think it is important for us to maintain this space?**

Elizabeth: *I have volunteered in the church library for six years. Initially, I was kept quite busy as there were many duties to perform. However, the work and time involved in organizing and maintaining the space has changed significantly which has made the role much less time consuming (usually 1-2 hours/week). I sincerely hope that this will encourage others to volunteer their time. If two people could take this on, each one would only have to commit to volunteering every other week. It is also a great opportunity for the youth to get involved. Our library is an important and valuable resource and as members I feel we must endeavor to maintain it and improve it if necessary, to better serve the needs of the congregation.*

**Our Library has evolved over the last decade and will likely continue changing to meet the needs of our congregation. Tell us a little about some of the more recent changes and give us some insight into ways that you think it would be worthwhile for the library to be updated in the future.**

Elizabeth: *When I joined as a volunteer, the duties included accessioning books, preparing them for the shelves, getting them into the system, etc. About a year and a half ago, we decided to simplify the system and with Rev. Jenny's guidance we adopted a new system, discontinued the small fiction section and reorganized the library. We now mainly focus on providing spiritual reading material for adults and also have a small children's section.*

*Looking ahead, I think it would be worthwhile to update the library. I have two ideas that I would like to offer for consideration. One is to expand the children's section. This is the most widely used part of the library at present and with so many children in our congregation and the presence of Wesley Nursery School on site, I think an expansion in the books offered will be greatly appreciated. The church could even offer book readings and other literary activities for kids. My second idea is to offer events in the library for senior citizens and other interested adults. While some libraries in the area offer things like computer literacy classes, crafting, etc, I have noticed that the Bethesda library's offerings of this nature are very limited, representing a gap in our immediate community. Therefore, there might be an interest in such events within our congregation as well as in surrounding communities. Church members could volunteer to host events that are in line with their interest and share their passions and hobbies with others. Last, I think it would be a good idea to survey the congregation and WNS families to get their input on these suggestions and solicit additional ideas and also assess the level of interest in a library/community space.*

**Who are some of your favorite writers that speak to issues of faith?**

Elizabeth: *John Stott is one of my favorite writers of spiritual books and I had the privilege of hearing him speak in Sri Lanka. What I like about John Stott's books is the simplicity of his writing. He was an expositor of the Bible and a teacher of faith. His book *Basic Christianity* is one of my favorite books and brings the message of Christianity and the truth and importance of it within one's grasp. William Barclay is another writer whose books I have enjoyed reading. He was a brilliant writer, yet somewhat baffling because he denied some accepted doctrines of faith. He wrote with elegance and expressed the wide knowledge he had of the scriptures. One of his books, *The Mind of Paul*, is one that I have read a few times over.*

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