Dewey and the Comma!
Contributed by Eva Nell Hunter

Church librarians, we have a terrible case of DDDs. We have a Dewey Decimal Dilemma! Mevil Dewey invented the Dewey Decimal System in 1876 while listening to a dull sermon in church. He kept his eyes focused on the speaker while the wheels were spinning in his head. He said that it was about all he could do to keep from standing up and yelling "Eureka." Don't be discouraged when you are in the audience of a dull speaker. There is no telling what wheels may be spinning in your head.

The Dewey Decimal System is used in libraries in 135 different countries and most are not English-speaking. In trying to make it easier for all of them, it has been announced that we will now have a Dewey System because the decimal will change to a comma. Many European countries already use a comma in their writings as a decimal marker. In fact, Germany can now use the numeric pad to input the entire Dewey number. How wonderful! Many of our church librarians still use the Scriptural method—seek and ye shall find!

The ground must be cracking over Dewey's grave because the decimal has been lost. It is predicted that the new look of the Dewey numbers will grow quickly around the world. It is hoped that libraries will quickly adapt and change their data, signage, and spine labels. We think we are doing great to get church librarians to put on spine labels in the first place and how in the world will they do it a second time! Can you imagine a 248.48 standing on the shelf beside a 248,48? We've always been taught that consistency is most important in our libraries and that just wouldn't work. Church libraries must be conservative in using all supplies. It takes more ink to print a comma than it does a period.

We can expect more changes in the future to enhance the utility of Dewey numbers for organizing knowledge of all kinds. That will enhance our system when we run out of real numbers. We are told not to be surprised to see a Dewey number like (808,882+006,752i). Mevil, they just lost church librarians! I'm sure that "i" at the end means international or imaginary, but to church librarians, it says I ain't gonna do it! In fact, your national team has decided that church libraries will stick with the period. And that's that!

The message above was given at our national conference at Ridgecrest in August 2013. A librarian from Texas sent me the copy of the message from OCLC asking how church libraries would react to it. I must admit that at that time I thought it was for real. A few librarians at Ridgecrest thought that it was a joke. It does seem logical after it followed a skit by Rita Kirkland and Carolyn Walker about an electronic worship program of the future!

After I got home from Ridgecrest, I googled "Dewey comma" and got the exact article sent to me. It was the first time I noticed the date—April 1, 2013. Now I know what April Fool's Day means most of the time. Our first child was born on April 1st and that was no joke! After looking at comments following the article, I noticed that the lady who is in charge of Dewey at the Library of Congress made a statement saying that it was a work of the devil and that the author did a good job. That convinced me!

Two weeks later at a Texas library conference, I just went on pretending that it was true. My mistake! Glenn McEowen's emailed me after the conference asking how that would affect library programs. I responded that all one had to do was to place a period where Dewey had a comma. I got caught! Glenn did a little research and found the same article I had used with a note that now he, Anne, and I knew the truth but wouldn't tell. Time for confession. Well, it was a funny story but we are thankful that it isn't true. Now, Mevil, we've filled those cracks in your grave and you can rest in peace once again!