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Letter to the Editor: Libraries, the Homeless, and Fax Policies

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To the Editor of the Journal of Religious & Theological Information:

Karen M. Venturella's article on "Disparity of Internet Access and the Role of the Librarian" [*JRTI* 3, no. 1 (2000): 5-18] illustrates just one of the ways that many libraries have failed (if not discriminated against) the poor and the homeless. Another example, in my opinion, is the way that some libraries administer their fax policies. For example, at a large public system with which I am well acquainted, any state resident can fax a citation to their central library, and the library will fax a maximum of 15 pages (which covers most periodical articles). Think about this for a moment. Those with access to a fax machine – i.e., those who are either upper middle class with a fax at home or who are at least gainfully employed – are being treated differently from those who do not enjoy the same privilege and who walk into a library in person. Because of their fortune (no pun intended) of having fax access, these persons are being saved (a) time, and (b) money – they do not have to make a special trip to a central library, find a place to park, locate the proper part of the library that houses the periodical, wait on line, use a photocopy machine, etc. Those *without* access to a fax machine (i.e., the poor, the unemployed, the lower classes), then, are penalized: they must go to the library in person and pay all necessary costs associated with that trip, which may or may not also involve a certain amount of stress. Thus, simply because of their economic status, those who already have some degree of success and/or wealth are being rewarded, and those without it are being punished. Those who *can* afford to pay for information do not always have to pay, and those who *cannot* afford to, must. What's wrong with this picture?

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