

Equipped for your needs: My church's magical supply closet

by [Lee Hull Moses](#) in the [July 20, 2016](#) issue



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On the seventh floor of the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Harry Potter and his friends discover a particularly magical room. Called the Room of Requirement, it emerges whenever it is needed. As Dobby the Elf explains to Harry, “Sometimes [the room] is there, and sometimes it is not, but when it appears, it is always equipped for the seeker’s needs.”

My church contains such a room, just off the balcony, at the top of the stairs and across from the elevator. As far as I can tell, our room—unlike its Hogwarts counterpart—does not disappear and reappear. But there is a bit of a mystical nature to its existence. “I never knew that closet was there!” I’ve heard more than once, from volunteers or staff who had walked by it many times but had never cracked the door.

The room is commonly known as the Christian education supply closet, but I've come to think of it as our Room of Requirement. It contains everything one could need, for just about any purpose. I come to this room in search of props for a children's moment, inspiration for a sermon, supplies for a prayer station. I've found Santa hats for caroling in the neighborhood, fishing nets for a message on the call of the disciples, popcorn containers for movie nights.

There are markers, crayons, scissors. Glue sticks. Scrapbooking paper. Stickers. An aged cardboard box labeled "Ducks, plastic." Maps of the Holy Land and an incredibly outdated globe of the world. Bucket upon bucket of plastic eggs for the Easter egg hunt we host every spring. Costumes for every conceivable Bible character. Bins of fabric scraps. Empty mason jars. A collection of stuffed sheep. At least one beautifully gnarled walking stick that could serve as Moses's staff or a shepherd's crook.

One recent morning, I was preparing for a leadership retreat and realized I'd forgotten a key ingredient for a game we were going to play. I walked into the supply closet and literally said out loud, "Something for blindfolds." A stack of neatly folded bandanas materialized on the shelf in front of me. *It is always equipped for the seeker's needs.*

It is not magic that equips our Room of Requirement, of course. It's the careful tending of faithful and highly organized volunteers, armed with label makers, who once a year or so spend a Saturday morning sorting through stuff. They enjoy it, they tell me, and not just because of the label maker. They enjoy it because they do it together; they chat and laugh and tell stories as they work. I suspect they also enjoy it because they know they are equipping the church to meet the needs of those who walk in our doors, seeking something.

Sometimes, when I'm just feeling stuck in general, looking for a boost of creativity, I go and stand in the doorway to the closet. There's something profoundly inspiring about the carefully labeled boxes, the neatly hung Christmas pageant costumes, even those folded bandanas. Those supplies are symbols of our community life, the stories of our faith tradition that are told and retold and carried on.

There are some needs that won't be met in our closet at the top of the stairs. Those bottles of finger paint won't solve the problem of hunger; the fancy craft scissors won't make racism go away. But if what we require to keep on doing the work of the church is a dose of hope, well, then an almost magical supply closet isn't a bad place

to start.