

Publishing House Profile: Judson Press

By Rachel Gilmore

Ten years ago Judson Press was publishing thirty books a year. More recently it's been ten to twelve. Acquisitions Editor Rev. Rebecca Irwin-Diehl explains that this scaling back is the result of downsizing trends across the industry, both in terms of staffing and sales. However, that's not to say Judson Press isn't interested in new authors. They are. And unlike many of their counterparts in both secular and Christian publishing, Judson deals with very few agented submissions. Irwin-Diehl says that she enjoys hearing from the authors themselves.

Named the Baptist Tract Society when it started in 1824, Judson Press has evolved over the past two centuries as the publisher for moderate Baptists as well as multicultural, ecumenical audiences. Now housed under the American Baptist Home Mission Societies in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, Irwin-Diehl says that Judson Press specializes in church resources where "practical" is the key word. This practicality reflects Judson's publishing roots, which at one time focused on tracts for missionaries to use in the field along with Bibles, Sunday school curriculum, nonfiction and fiction books, as well as denominational resources. As the American Baptist Publication Society, the organization registered the trademark Judson Press in 1922 in honor of Adoniram Judson to preserve both the denominational and missionary spirit.

According to Irwin-Diehl, Judson Press seeks to provide Christ-centered leadership resources for the transformation of persons, congregations, communities and cultures. Its backlist of 350 titles is distributed internationally, and resources can be found in churches, libraries, educational institutions, and secular and Christian bookstores. Judson publishes titles on African American issues, Christian living, Christian education, Baptist history and beliefs, church leadership, Bible study, preaching, and discipleship. Other products include church supplies, an adult curriculum for American Baptists and the devotional periodical, *The Secret Place*, which is a good entry point for writing for Judson (visit http://www.judsonpress.com/catalog_sp_guidelines.cfm for guidelines and a sample devotion).

"We really want to be moving toward reaching a broader multicultural market," says Irwin-Diehl, who describes the publisher as theologically moderate and socially progressive. "We have been publishing for the African-American church since the 1970s, and we will continue to develop resources for that loyal market. Recently we have expanded our Hispanic resources, as well as pursuing projects for the Asian North American church. Judson has also moved into the trade market and the ABA in exciting ways. Some of our biggest successes have been there. Even a small win in such a large market is significant."

One of those big wins was the Christian living title *Crazy Faith* by Rev. Dr. Susan K. Williams Smith, which received a Publishers Weekly Starred Review in January 2009.

Judson's best-seller in 2010 has been *I'm a Piece of Work*, an inspirational women's book from megachurch pastor Rev. Dr. Cynthia L. Hale. Other new top-sellers are *What We Love about the Black Church* by Rev. Drs. William Crouch and Joel Gregory, which shares the white authors' personal experiences as well as perspectives from African American leaders, and *Tending to Eden*, by Scott Sabin of Plant with Purpose, which offers individuals and churches new ideas for creation care.

In terms of the submission process, Irwin-Diehl does not accept phone queries, although email queries are welcome. She wants to see sample chapters and a thorough market analysis, including a marketing plan describing how the author intends to promote the project through his or her own networks. Response time is typically six to nine months with publication in eighteen to twenty-four months. It hasn't been that long, but the economy has affected multiple areas of publishing, not just a list with fewer titles.

While Irwin-Diehl does accept unsolicited manuscripts (30-40% of their titles are from the slush pile), Judson Press also uses Writer's Edge. Irwin-Diehl says she has also been intentional in reaching out to denominational leaders and soliciting book ideas from them. In addition, she and her editorial team come up with ideas and seek potential authors who could write well about a subject from the Judson Press perspective. And, writers do not have to be members of the American Baptist denomination. Judson Press authors represent a cross-section of Protestant America, including other Baptists, Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians and more.

"Our mission is to equip leaders to equip God's people, from a practical, multicultural perspective. If your book can help us do that, I'm interested in looking at your proposal," says Irwin-Diehl. For more information on Judson Press, please visit www.judsonpress.com.