



**From the Desk of
Pastor Brent**

*Grace and peace to you from
our Lord and Savior,
Jesus Christ!*

You are receiving this newsletter because of your past involvement with AWANA at COBC. I wanted you to know about some exciting changes planned for the 2011-2012 program.

Did he say, "Changes?" Yes, I did. Don't worry, AWANA will still be the same great program we know and love, but some significant changes are necessary to get this ministry back into balance.

For three years, I have had the privilege of getting to know the ins-and-outs of AWANA. As the pastor overseeing AWANA at COBC, the father of four children participating as clubbers, and the husband of a wonderful wife who serves as an AWANA secretary, God has positioned me in just the right place for observing the largest ministry of our church: serving in AWANA as a family. When I first came to COBC, I decided to refrain from making any major changes to the ministry until I really understood how it worked and what motivated the people who were involved in it. During the last three years, I have made minor adjustments in order to keep the program running, but it has become evident that it is time for significant changes to help AWANA get back in line with its original purpose. So, consider this letter a sort of "state of the union" address. The state of AWANA is this: AWANA at COBC is a great ministry with wonderful people serving in it, but there are some very clear indicators that it is drifting dangerously far from its mission.

AWANA is designed to do two things well, and when the whole church is working towards these goals, a third goal is achieved. When these three elements are working in harmony, the program thrives, because the church thrives. These three elements are:

- 1. Reaching the "unchurched" boys and girls in our community with the Gospel of Christ.**
- 2. Training those children in the Scriptures.**
- 3. Working together as families to accomplish the first two goals.**

In fact, this was the original vision for AWANA when it started 60 years ago, and it is still reflected in the mission statement of the organization and recited by the clubbers and leaders every Wednesday:



"To reach boys and girls with the Gospel of Christ and train them to serve Him."

What was the Original Intent of AWANA?

60 years ago, the founders of AWANA were concerned about "unchurched" kids in Chicago who didn't have access to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ and the life-transforming power of God's Word. They knew that the best way for a child to be evangelized and disciplined is through faithful Christian parents in the home supported by the solid preaching and teaching of a local church. But, they also had a heart for the kids in the community who did not have anyone to train them in the Scriptures. And, well they should!



The New Testament clearly teaches that Jesus came to save the lost, and He established his Church to equip the Saints for good works and spreading the Good News. The AWANA founders knew that the early formative years of a child's life is the best time to shape and mold a heart for Christ. The Lord Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me!" The founders of AWANA were being faithful to the Great Commission when they designed the program. It was never their intent to design a club for their own kids, though they knew that **participation of Christian kids and their parents was the key to ministering to "unchurched" kids.** (Interestingly, the original intent of the Sunday School movement was also to reach "unchurched" kids with the Gospel, not to disciple the children of believing parents. It was assumed that Christian parents would teach their own children at home.)

Certainly, Christian parents can use AWANA as a tool for discipling their own children. The handbooks, uniforms, games, and awards provide parents with a fun system for teaching the Scriptures. However, the bulk of instruction must happen in the home. So, a Christian parent may ask, "Then why should I even bother putting my child in AWANA?" This kind of question reveals a consumer mentality from which all of us must repent.

Instead of asking, "What can AWANA do for me;" we need to ask, "What is the purpose of AWANA and how can my family get involved?"

We have seen amazing results when families choose to participate in AWANA together. At first, the children are in it for the games and awards, but as they mature in Christ they acquire a real desire to serve Christ by reaching out to kids who don't know Jesus yet. Through AWANA, these kids become saturated in the Scriptures and have learned to have a servant's heart by watching their parents in action.

You can see how the whole program is designed to work. As the church reaches out to "unchurched" kids, our own children grow spiritually, especially when parents are serving alongside their own kids. However, there is always the danger of a program like AWANA or Sunday School turning into a place where parents think their children are getting all the spiritual nourishment they need. For children outside the church, these ministries represent the only opportunity they have to learn God's Word. But, for children from a Christian home, these ministries are just a small part of the spiritual instruction they should be receiving. However, little-by-little we parents depend more and more on these ministries until one day we realize that things have gotten out of balance. Well, there are certainly signs that our AWANA program has become out of balance.

What are the signs that COBC's AWANA program is out of balance?



- **Fewer "unchurched" kids are attending AWANA.** Only 10% of our clubbers come from "unchurched" homes. We are forgetting to invite the very kids for which AWANA was designed.
- **Fewer "churched" kids are coming to club prepared.** Many of our clubbers from "churched" homes are not working on their memory verses with their parents. This means that our leaders on Wednesday nights do not have enough time to spend with the "unchurched" kids, because they are busy supervising the "churched" kids who have come to club unprepared.
- **Fewer family units are participating in the program together.** A successful AWANA program needs Christian families to serve and participate in the program so that they can minister to the "unchurched" kids. The mainstay families that have been keeping the program running strong the last few years are starting to send their adult children off to college. It's time for some new parents to step-up and lead the way for other families to follow. When parents get involved as AWANA leaders, the whole family thrives. They are more likely to work on their verses together, discuss the meaning of the Scriptures, look for ways to apply God's Word in their daily walk, and invite "unchurched" kids to AWANA and take responsibility for their spiritual growth. It is not a surprise that the AWANA organization has found that kids whose parents serve in AWANA generally have a closer walk with the Lord when they reach their adult years. I am so grateful for our dedicated volunteers, many of whom do not have their own children in the program. But this is the year we must get more parents involved, working side-by-side with teens, seniors, singles...the whole body of Christ to reach boys and girls with the Gospel of Christ.
- **Leader fatigue.** The number of kids attending AWANA at COBC is increasing, but numerical growth is not always a good thing. Our program is out of balance, and it is causing many of our leaders to become fatigued. Though they love all the kids in the program, they have a special heart for the kids who don't get to spend a lot of time hearing about Jesus from God's Word. Our leaders want more one-on-one time with these kids.

So, these are the signs of a program that is out of balance. AWANA at COBC is a great ministry, but it is in jeopardy of becoming too much like an evening after school program for church kids. I believe God will continue to bless our AWANA ministry only if we seek to obey Christ by getting more of us involved with evangelizing our community through AWANA and not just be content with having a fun, midweek Bible club for our own kids.

How can we get our AWANA program back into balance?

This letter is being sent out to all our AWANA leaders and parents so we can all be of one mind about the purpose of AWANA. This information will also go out in the August newsletter. This will give our church time to think about the challenges facing AWANA and prayerfully commit to making the program a better ministry for evangelism and discipleship. In addition, the following structural changes are planned to help us get back into balance:

1. **We are setting a student-to-leader ratio of 4-to-1 for our Cubbies, Sparks, and T&T clubs so that** our leaders will be able to spend more individual time explaining the meaning of verses to the clubbers, especially the "unchurched" kids. This may mean that some children will be placed on **a *waiting list*** until more leaders become available. This will also help our leaders from becoming overwhelmed.

2. **We are implementing a new registration system** (see below) in order to accommodate our leader to clubber ratios and to help us get back into balance. We believe that the best way for a church family to utilize AWANA is to do it together; that way we are all working side-by-side to evangelize the children of our community and disciple our own children together. It's important that our kids see us laboring together for the sake of the Gospel. Most of us are not knocking on doors or passing out tracts at the soccer field. AWANA is an excellent opportunity to obey Jesus by getting involved with the Great Commission. So, the new registration system is designed to encourage more parents to get involved with AWANA. We also will continue to offer substantial discounts on registration fees for clubbers whose parents serve as AWANA leaders.

New Registration Plan

As mentioned above, we will be implementing a new registration plan. We want our leaders to have plenty of time to listen to verses and explain the Scriptures, especially for the "unchurched" kids who don't have parents at home teaching them God's Word.

IF WE GET ENOUGH LEADERS THEN THIS NEW PLAN NEED NOT GO INTO EFFECT AND THERE WILL BE NO NEED TO LIMIT THE NUMBER OF CLUBBERS OR TO HAVE A WAITING LIST.

We will use the following tier system for registration in case we do not get enough leaders, but we are praying and hoping for enough leaders so we will not have to utilize a waiting list.

- **1st tier:** Children of parents serving in AWANA at COBC. Without leaders, there is no program. (We encourage grandparents to serve in AWANA, but it will not give their grandchildren tier enrollment, unless the grandparents are the primary caregivers for the children.)
- **2nd tier:** Children of parents taking the parenting class "Growing Kids God's Way". The class will be teaching parents how to use AWANA in the spiritual training of their own children; therefore, the parents will not be available to serve in AWANA.
- **3rd tier:** "Unchurched" kids. Remember, outreach is the primary goal of AWANA. We certainly do not want to turn away any kids that don't have access to the Scriptures at home.
- **4th tier:** Children of families that are bringing "unchurched" kids with them each week.
- **5th tier:** Returning clubbers who completed a handbook last year (or a good portion of a handbook depending on the learning abilities of the child) demonstrating that the family is actually using the program to teach God's Word in their own home and not consistently sending their children to AWANA unprepared.
- **6th tier:** Children of parents serving in 9:00 Sunday School or 10:30 Seeds of Faith at COBC.
- **7th tier:** Children of parents who are members of COBC.
- **8th tier:** Children of parents who regularly attend COBC.
- **9th tier:** Children of parents who attend another church without an Awana program.
- **10th tier:** Children of parents who attend another church with an Awana program.

3. **We have reduced the number of AWANA nights to 24** (plus 2 additional nights for Grand Prix and awards ceremony). This will give our leaders a break each month and give families a chance to reconnect. One night each month, all the regular Wednesday night ministries will take a break so that we can do special ministry events that the whole church family can enjoy together.

Leadership Opportunities at AWANA

1. **Club Director:** The club director oversees one of the AWANA clubs (Cubbies age 3-5, Sparks K-2nd grade, T&T 3rd-6th grade). Club directors need to be COBC members and have already served at least one year as a club leader. Club directors need to have good people skills and organizational skills. They need to be available to attend most of the club nights.
2. **Club Secretary:** The club secretary handles all the administrative tasks of the club, including registration, tracking progress in the handbook, ordering supplies, giving out the awards, and preparing for the AWANA store. Club secretaries need to be COBC members and have already served at least one year as a club leader. This position requires extra hours at home, especially at the beginning and end of the club year. Secretaries must be available to attend most club nights.
3. **Club Leader** (We need lots of leaders, but we are keeping the clubber to leader ratio at 4:1): The club leaders listen to the clubbers recite verses and make sure they know the meaning of the verses. Leaders are assigned a group of kids to prayerfully shepherd. Occasionally, the leader may call the clubber at home, mail a birthday card, or connect with the parents. Having lots of club leaders makes the night run smoothly and ensures that each clubber gets plenty of time having the Scriptures explained. New leaders need to have attended COBC regularly for at least 6 months, complete an application and background check, and attend Basic Training Orientation.
4. **Listener:** Our listeners are people who love Christ and love kids, but do not feel called to serve as a leader. Often, "churched" kids have their verses signed off by our listeners so that the leaders can give more attention to the "unchurched" kids. New listeners need to have attended COBC regularly for at least 6 months, complete an application and background check, and attend Basic Training Orientation.
5. **Games Director/Assistant:** Jacob Mendez has been serving as our Game Director for many years, but he is ready to train an assistant who can possibly be the future director. The Game Director oversees game time on the game circle. The Game Director and assistant must learn how to play all the games and teach the kids how to play. The Game circle is high-octane fun and requires leaders who don't mind a little noise.



If you are planning to serve in AWANA this year, please call Pastor Brent immediately so that we can get a good idea of how many kids we can accept into the program this year. We also need to schedule the Basic Training Orientation as soon as possible.

Because Kids Matter to God,

Pastor Brent
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