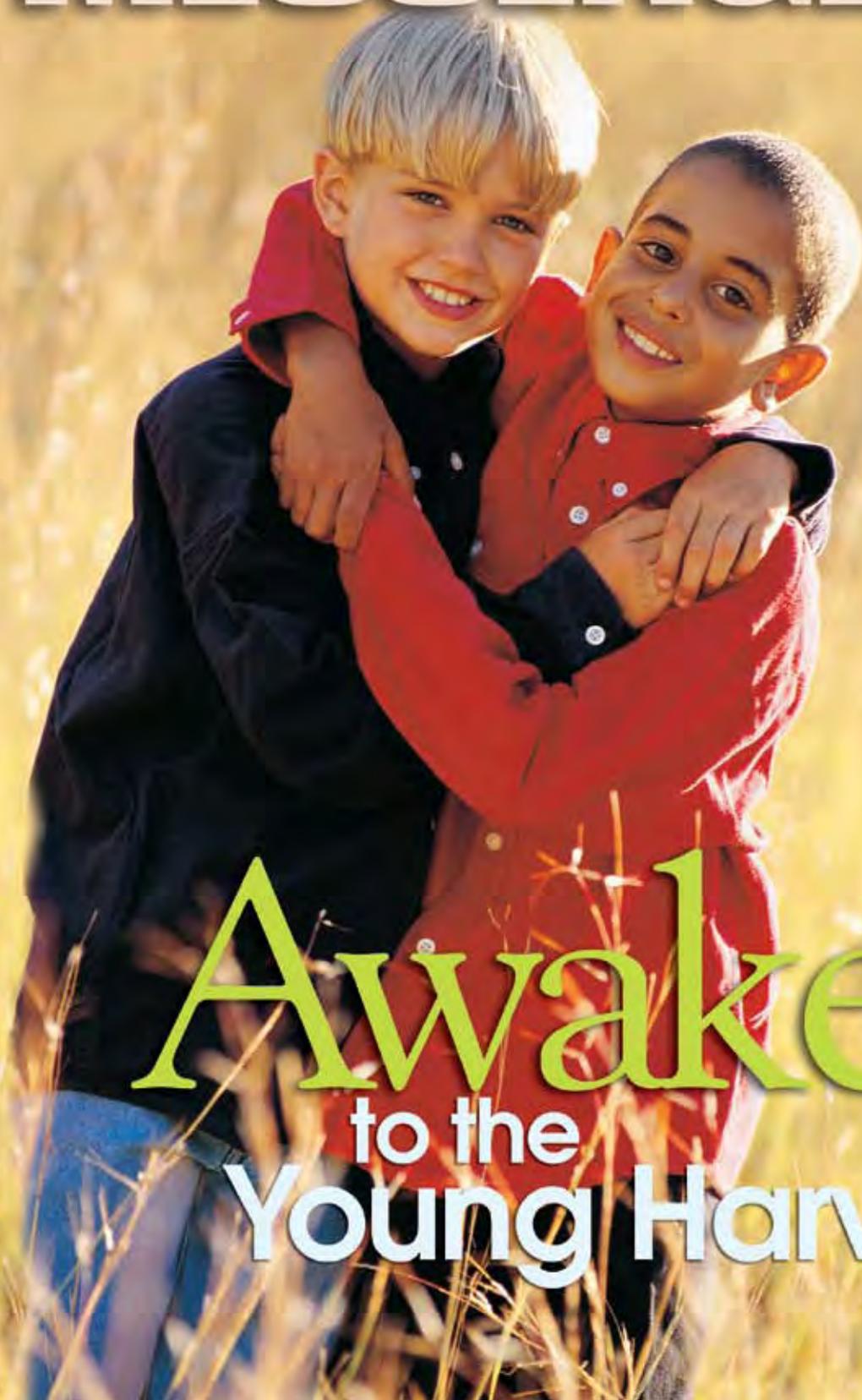


White Wing
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Awake
to the
Young Harvest



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Making It REAL!

Relevant Ministry to a Young Harvest



Recently, I ordered a new gadget for my computer. When the gadget arrived, I excitedly opened the box and pulled out the instruction manual. When I began to read the manual, I realized that the instructions were written in a language I did not know. Although I would have benefited greatly from using the gadget, it was now irrelevant to me.

In Mark 16:15 (NLT), Jesus commanded us to “. . . go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone.” But, many times, our preaching of the Good News is much like reading instructions that are in another language. The message we are preaching is true, but the method of presentation causes the truth to seem meaningless and irrelevant.

What can we do to make our message relevant to kids?

First, we must gain an understanding of the environment in which our kids live. It is an environment created by family structure, economic conditions, educational experiences, the influence of media, and an easy access to technology. This environment is best described by Walt Mueller, President of the Center for Parent and Youth Understanding, as the “cultural soup that our kids swim in every day.”

As we strive to gain understanding through building relationships with kids and their families and through reading current literature on children and youth culture, we will eagerly take the second action step—evaluate and modify our

ministries so that they are relevant to today’s kids.

From Lecture to Experiential Learning

If our ministries are to be relevant, we have to ask, “How do kids learn?” In the past, it was thought that kids learned by rote, simply repeating and memorizing information. Children’s programs in the church used lecture-style instruction. As the teacher or minister presented a lesson, the children were expected to sit in their seat, listen to the story, and, at the appropriate time, answer questions reviewing the story.

Educational research, however, makes it very clear that children learn best by doing. In fact, learning by doing increases retention by 80 percent. Therefore, children’s ministry has evolved into a more interactive form of ministry where children are actively involved in learning and applying relevant Bible truths. Today’s ministries involve children in the Bible lesson, Scripture memorization, and life application through games, drama, music, art, creative writing, learning centers, and more. Children interact with the Bible rather than hearing the Bible read to them.

Rote learning and lecture methods most often focus on knowledge. In the past, children were encouraged to know Bible characters and story facts, and to

memorize the Bible verse. However, an interactive ministry model focuses on application—the Bible lesson, the Scripture memory verse, and every learning activity guide children as they apply Bible truths to their everyday lives.

This focus on application allows children to effectively navigate the “cultural soup” of their environments. They develop an ability to make wise choices based upon biblical truth, regardless of their cultural environment. They become more than just “hearers” of the Word; they become “doers.”

As you develop programs, select curriculum, and prepare ministry sessions, ask yourself, “Are the children actively involved in the learning process? Are they being introduced to Bible truths in ways that are relevant to the environment in which they live? Are they learning to apply biblical truths to their everyday lives?”

From Segregation to Integration

Since the latter-half of the 20th century, we’ve been ministering to kids—Sunday school, children’s worship, kids’ clubs, and more. These ministry programs provided age-appropriate ministry to kids, and that is important. However, these programs also segregated kids from the life of the congregation.

This segregation created wrong attitudes in both the kids and the congregation. The kids developed the



attitude that church wasn't for them and began leaving the church after becoming teens. Adults developed attitudes in which they felt that children's ministry was the ONLY place for kids; as a result, they often excluded kids from the life and ministry of the church.

Although it is important for children to have learning and worship experiences designed specifically for them apart from the adult experience, it is also important to involve them in the overall life of the church. Throughout the Bible, there are specific instances when children were actively involved in the life and worship of the congregation—i.e., Moses' request for the people to go and worship, Jehoshaphat's call to prayer and fasting, Nehemiah's dedication of the wall, and Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

Because children often lack a sense of connectedness due to family instability, job relocation, or other cultural factors, it is important that we provide opportunities for them to experience a connectedness with and belonging to the local church. This can be accomplished by the following:

- Building relationships between children and adults through programs such as "Big Brother/Big Sister," "My Secret Pal," "Adopt a Grandparent," etc.
- Providing intergenerational worship opportunities that allow individuals

of every age to be participants in meaningful worship activities

- Organizing service opportunities that include tasks for kids as well as adults

Ask yourself, "What opportunities are offered for children to be integrated into service, worship, and fellowship experiences of our local church? Do we expect them to be seen and not heard? Or have we embraced them as fellow believers who contribute to our body as they serve, minister, and fellowship with us?"

From Solo Ministry to Partnering With Parents

Regardless of the instability of the family, parents and close family members still have the most significant impact on children. The Bible still insists that parents have been given the primary responsibility for teaching their children in the ways of the Lord (Deuteronomy 6:7). Therefore, the goal of our ministries to children must be two tiers. While we must evangelize and disciple children so that they become fully devoted followers of Christ, we must also strengthen families in their role as primary nurturers of their children.

There are many opportunities that your church can take to strengthen families in your congregation. Families can be strengthened as the local church specifically intercedes for them in their role as parents. Families can be

strengthened as they build relationships with other families and children's ministry staff.

One local children's ministry has a quarterly parent dinner where parents are treated to a meal and then discuss a topic relevant to raising godly kids. Other ministries regularly schedule parent training workshops or weekend parenting retreats. Families can be strengthened by serving in children's ministry. As they serve in children's ministry, they are introduced to more effective approaches to discipline and creative ways to teach kids Bible truth. Families can be strengthened by providing effective resources on marriage, parenting, and teaching Bible truths in a family setting.

Ask yourself, "How is my church coming alongside parents to equip them to disciple their children? What opportunities do we provide for parents to gain information, support, and ministry needed to effectively disciple their children?"

Experiential learning, integration, and strengthening families are just a few modifications that are being made so that the Good News is more relevant to today's child. There are many others that local ministries throughout the world are implementing. As you get to know kids and the "cultural soup" they swim in, ask the heavenly Father to show you how to make His Good News even more real to them. He has unique strategies and plans for reaching every child with the GOOD NEWS in a language that they understand.

Called to Children's Ministry at an early age, Shaun has been involved in a variety of ministries to children for more than 15 years. He presently serves as the Liaison to the General Overseer, East Tennessee Regional Children's Ministries Director, a teacher for the mid-week pre-school ministry at Peerless Road Church, and serves on the Editorial Board of the *White Wing Messenger*. Shaun and his wife, Stephanie, live in Cleveland, Tennessee. They both serve as members of the International Children's Ministries Task Force and are the proud parents of two-year-old Reagan Caroline.