Today, we meet Tom Chilton, Area Director of Europe and North Asia.

My calling to work in children’s ministry started when, as a high school student, I volunteered to teach youth group lessons to middle school boys and serve as a camp counselor. I continued this work through college where I earned my teaching certification. After four years of missions work in public high school classrooms, God led me to full-time ministry with Awana, where I began serving on the International Office staff in August 2000.

Awana combines my passions for child discipleship, biblical education, and international missions. Over the past 18 years I have served in a variety of roles, including Program, Training, and International Operations. In 2008 I earned a Master’s Degree in Intercultural Studies in order to be more effective in my cross-cultural ministry work. Over the years I have had the privilege of traveling to over 40 countries with Awana, to lead training events and to encourage and equip field leadership.

Most recently, I was asked to serve as the Director for Awana Europe and North Asia. Together with my wife, Heather, I accepted the call in August 2018.

There is great need and potential for children’s ministry across Eurasia, and we believe that God will open doors and partnerships there that will equip thousands more churches to evangelize and disciple children and youth for Christ. The Great Commission in Matthew 28 is one of the most important passages of Scripture in my life—as I believe it must be for all followers of Jesus. What was Christ’s mission while he lived on earth? He came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). He came to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

One definition of commission is to mission with or come alongside of the one doing mission. Jesus invited us to join him in his mission when he said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations …”

Children and youth form a significant part of our world, making up one-third of our planet’s population. That’s 2.3
billions of children and youth in the world today, and all of them are unreached until someone preaches to them. “And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” (Romans 10:14b) Not only that, but children aged 4-14 are more open and receptive to the gospel message than at any other age. Awana is an incredible tool for evangelism and discipleship—for children, youth, and even whole families! If we want to see communities reached and whole nations transformed for Christ, we need to prioritize the Great Commission to children. “The harvest is plentiful … Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” (Luke 10:2)

Children in Europe and North Asia face every struggle imaginable: war, poverty, exploitation, isolation, addiction, and depression. Yet the greatest challenge facing children in Europe today is hopelessness. Less than two percent of people in Europe claim to have a personal relationship with Jesus. Europe is unreached and needs the gospel. We are praying, and we believe that God can start a revival through the children and youth of Europe. Children in our world are hungry for truth, and they are desperate for relationships with loving and caring adults. Churches and ministries partnered with Awana have an open-door opportunity—one might even say a critical responsibility—to reach young people across Europe and North Asia with the good news of the gospel. The time for reaching children is now!

God is already doing an incredible work through Awana Europe. Awana Ukraine just celebrated 25 years of ministry. They have discipled a generation of young leaders in the church, and they are continuing to reach more than 23,000 children in over 500 churches every week! Even in the face of conflict with Russia, they minister to internally displaced refugees pouring into western Ukraine with holistic ministry and a message of love in Christ.

In Norway, 75 churches have started Awana programs in the last two years with exciting plans to expand through Scandinavia. Our partner there put it this way: “We have so much goodwill in Norway now, and almost all the key leaders working with kids and families are so positive … and want to cooperate. God is doing things which are much bigger than we understand at the moment.”

In Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania, we have the opportunity to start hundreds of clubs—if we can provide the resources for training and equipping. Then there is Mongolia, where 44 churches were trained in April 2017. Over the course of the summer, six more trainings were held and now there are 120 churches ministering to nearly 3,000 children every week!

Stilian is a pastor in Bulgaria who came to faith in Christ in the early 1990s at the age of 18, just after the fall of Communism. Stilian describes that time as a revival, when many young people gave their lives to Christ. Today, many of those saved in the revival are leading churches and ministries across Bulgaria. Stilian’s prayer is that God will send another revival to Bulgaria through today’s children and youth. That’s why his church hosted the very first Awana Seed Planters’ Training for leaders from 30 Bulgarian churches, churches which will now begin their own Awana clubs. Stilian, his wife, and their two daughters have invested time and resources to translate the Awana materials, start Awana in their church, and help train other churches interested in the program. This family’s vision for reaching their nation for Christ is an inspiration to me. I praise God for the workers he is raising up for the harvest all across Europe.

In the same way, children, families, and churches here in the U.S. can be partners in the Great Commission. Reaching our friends and neighbors locally is our first calling, and we pray for thriving clubs and children’s ministry right here in our communities. But we can also make a difference globally. When we share what God has given to us and invest it into Kingdom work, God does the work of multiplying our offerings. Think of the boy who shared his five loaves and two fishes with Jesus (John 6). That boy didn’t have enough to feed a huge crowd, but Jesus took his offering and multiplied it to feed everyone—with twelve baskets of food left over!

When we trust God with our time, our talent, or our treasure, we often see that he has a much bigger purpose for our offerings in his Kingdom.

Tom Chilton
Area Director of Europe and North Asia

Thank you for listening to the heartbeat of our international ministry partners. Most of all, thank you for discipling the children in your family, church, and community!

Did you know you can mobilize your family, Awana club, or children’s ministry to reach kids with the gospel all around the world? February is Missions Month. Take advantage of our free resources and get your kids involved in the Great Commission!