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Royal Ambassador Field Test: Focus Group Report

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Contents

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Royal Ambassador Field Test: Focus Group Report</i>	1
Setting	1
Previous Experience with RAs.....	1
One thing they liked better about the new material over Classic RAs.....	1
Transition from Classic RAs to the new materials.....	1
Is there anything about the new materials that would make it easier to get the support of the pastor and/or church staff?	2
Activities and projects	2
Record keeping.....	2
Will the new materials assist boys in becoming ambassadors for Christ?	2
Did the projects reinforce the virtues?	3
Did the theme stories fit in with the other materials?.....	3
What one thing did you like best about the new materials?.....	3
What one suggestion would you make to improve the materials?	3
What would you tell a person from another church about these materials?.....	4
Conclusions	4
Appendix A – Moderator’s Guide.....	5
Appendix B – Transcript of RA Focus Group Tape	9

Royal Ambassador Field Test: Focus Group Report

A focus group was conducted at the North American Mission Board on September 4, 2002, to discuss new Royal Ambassador (RA) materials. The group was comprised of 8 RA leaders who field tested the new materials during the summer of 2002.

Attached is a copy of the moderator script used to guide the discussion (see appendix A). This report follows the major issues raised in the script. A second attachment (appendix B) is the actual transcript of the audio tape from the focus group session.

Setting

Participants were asked the setting in which they conducted the field test.

- ◆ All 8 respondents used the materials at their homes
- ◆ 4 worked with 1 boy, the most in any group was 4
- ◆ A son (7) or grandson (1) was involved in each case

The interactions of each of these participants involved a parent/child relationship in a home setting. Most participants had extensive experience leading RAs. The feedback from this group of leaders is instructive for producers of the material, but should not be generalized to all RA settings in our churches.

Previous Experience with RAs

All the participants either led or were involved in Classic RAs previously. None had used Easy RAs, although a couple admitted that at times their version of Classic RAs may have defaulted to Easy RAs.

One thing they liked better about the new material over Classic RAs

The number one thing highlighted was tying virtues to the pledge. Several participants mentioned this. Another item was the flexibility of using the new materials in different settings and different size groups. This was mentioned, although none of them actually did the field test in a church setting.

Transition from Classic RAs to the new materials

Even though one respondent said “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” when referring to Classic RAs, he also thought churches with the traditional approach would have little difficulty with the new approach. Some concern was raised about advancement rewards and how they fit into the new plan.

Is there anything about the new materials that would make it easier to get the support of the pastor and/or church staff?

Nothing concrete was shared to indicate the new approach would be easier to sell to the church leaders. Only one participant actually said the new approach had the potential to broaden participation in RAs in his church (by encouraging fathers and sons to work through the materials together). This digressed into a discussion of the Awana program that did not seem very productive. Participants gave testimony for RAs and against Awana as a tool for teaching missions.

Activities and projects

- ◆ Most participants allowed the boys to choose (with adult input in some cases) the commitment activities to complete.
- ◆ Two folks mentioned the water bottle project as being something the boys needed help with and were reluctant to do on their own.
- ◆ One suggestion was to do multiple commitment activities sequentially during the course of the month.

Record keeping

Issues included:

- ◆ Whether to send the commitment charts home
- ◆ Need reward or credit for bringing books back each week
- ◆ How to involve parents
- ◆ Must not look like more school work
- ◆ Boys needed adult help or encouragement
- ◆ Suggestions were to make the chart reproducible and to add space to keep track of electives

Will the new materials assist boys in becoming ambassadors for Christ?

The proactive nature of the new pledge was again highlighted as an important step in encouraging boys to be ambassadors for Christ. Much discussion followed, not all of which was on target. One participant mentioned that even unchurched parents would appreciate their sons learning character development through the study of virtues.

There was a call for even more emphasis on the virtues as they relate to the pledge. There was also discussion about the different names of the virtues for the different age groups. The overarching concern was for consistency.

Did the projects reinforce the virtues?

Several expressed concern with the virtue of loyalty and the projects available for the younger boys. After completing the project, one boy was not sure if he had become more loyal. A four week commitment to prayer and Bible reading did not translate to loyalty for one 7 year old.

Did the theme stories fit in with the other materials?

One leader of Lads did not see loyalty in their theme story. Comic book form was suggested as a hook for the boys. There was much discussion about the best way to deliver the stories, such as on line in Adobe format (.PDF).

There was strong sentiment that the stories needed to be more obvious in supporting the virtue each month. The idea of building a bibliography of available stories to support each virtue was well received.

What one thing did you like best about the new materials?

- ◆ The flexibility, large or small group, city or rural
- ◆ Tying virtues and Scriptures to the pledge
- ◆ The virtues are the highlight, along with the simplicity
- ◆ Outdoor projects were one person's favorite
- ◆ Breaking the pledge into components supported by the virtues
- ◆ Virtues and the improved pledge

What one suggestion would you make to improve the materials?

- ◆ Marketing RAs to the church leadership
- ◆ Improved communication with parents
- ◆ Each section of the materials should consistently reflect the appropriate virtue
- ◆ More in-depth materials the boys can sink their teeth into
- ◆ Alternate formats, distinctive covers on books
- ◆ More self-explanatory and simpler for use by leaders and parents
- ◆ No pen and paper activities that are like school work
- ◆ More computer-based tools

What would you tell a person from another church about these materials?

- ◆ This is one tool. Not the only tool, but one that needs to be included.
- ◆ It develops a walk with Christ.
- ◆ The emphasis on virtues follows up character development at the public schools.
- ◆ The virtues apply to every aspect of life, making you a better person and Christian.
- ◆ It allows kids to develop their faith.
- ◆ It helps boys grow into men who are out there serving the Lord.
- ◆ The new concept focusing on virtues is really going to simplify the learning process.

Conclusions

Positives

- ◆ Teaching character development through tying the virtues into the pledge was an absolute hit with the participants.
- ◆ Flexibility regarding group size and church or home setting was also important.
- ◆ Making the RA pledge more proactive on sharing their faith was very well received.

Negatives

- ◆ Theme stories need to be more related to the virtues.
- ◆ Some uncertainty still about record keeping, especially how the new system handles advancement and rewards.

Another issue

- ◆ There is a need for helpful suggestions for promoting RAs in the churches.

Appendix A

Moderator's Guide

Royal Ambassador Field Test

Focus Group, Wednesday, September 4, 2002

I. Introduction

Welcome to the North American Mission Board. My name is Richie Stanley. I am part of the Research Services team at NAMB, and I will moderate our discussion today. Before I get to know you, let me introduce the other NAMB staff present. Bob Rennie, who works with me in research, will be taking notes and handling the recording equipment. Rob Carr and Keith Jones are here as observers from NAMB's children's mission education unit. These staff members will not actively participate in our discussion.

- ◆ I hope you enjoyed the meal. If you need to get more food, stretch, or use the restroom (give directions), you may do so quietly.
- ◆ We will be finished by 2:00, and we will not have a planned break.
- ◆ Please be sure all cell phones and pagers are turned off.
- ◆ You can see that we are recording the session on audiotape. Please speak one at a time in full voice so the equipment can do its thing. This tape will help us summarize the session and will not be used to identify any individual's responses. After the final report is written, the tape will be destroyed (to protect the moderator!) Do you have any questions before we begin?

You were invited here today to participate in a discussion of the Royal Ambassador materials that you recently tested.

- ◆ The most important thing that will happen during this session is hearing your reactions to the materials and the experience of using them.
- ◆ There are no wrong answers.
- ◆ The best feedback you can give is honest feedback, whether positive or negative.

If you would, begin by introducing yourselves. Please share your name, where you serve, and whether you tested the materials in a group or one-on-one setting. Let's start on my right...

- ◆ If one-on-one, was it at church? Was it with your son?

II. Comparison to previous materials

Let's go around the table once more. This time please share whether your previous experience included classic RAs, Easy RAs, or some other approach to mission education.

How would you compare the approach to RAs presented in the test materials to what you have used previously?

III. Use of the materials

Tell me more about your experiences in using the new materials.

- ◆ How did you choose and use the activities?
- ◆ Talk about whether the activities were appropriate for the age of the boys.
- ◆ Was the child drawn into the materials?
- ◆ What were your experiences with record keeping?

Call attention to the motto, pledge, and memory aid on the wall.

How will the new materials assist leaders in helping boys become ambassadors for Christ by exhibiting the behaviors stated in the pledge?

Do you have any other issues related to the materials?

The RA Motto:

We are Ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20)

The RA Pledge:

As a Royal Ambassador, I will do my best...

...to become a well-informed, responsible follower of Christ,

...to have a Christ-like concern for all people,

...to learn how to carry the message of Christ around the world,

...to work with others in sharing Christ, and

...to keep myself clean and healthy in mind and body.

We also have a 'memory aid':

The Motto is the Message

The Pledge is the Purpose

The Virtues are the Vehicle

Virtues: We have a virtue for each part of the pledge for the younger and for the older boys (10 in all).

IV. Involving the Child(ren)

What were your experiences in involving the child?

Talk to me about how the boys chose projects and activities.

In what ways did the projects chosen reinforce the desired virtue(s)?

- ◆ Loyalty for younger boys
- ◆ Faith for older boys

V. Theme Stories

One of the new features of this material was the use of a theme story.

(Make sure they have materials in hand at this point.)

- ◆ How well did the theme story fit in with the materials?
- ◆ How did the children react to the theme story?

VI. Conclusion

- a. What is the one thing about the new materials that you liked best?
- b. What is the most important suggestion you would make to improve the materials?
- c. What would you tell others who were considering using these materials?

Thank you very much for giving us your time today. Your discussion will be a huge asset as our plans for Royal Ambassadors move forward.

Appendix B

Transcript of RA Focus Group Tape

Moderator: Richie Stanley

(His comments are in bold.)

I would like to introduce the folks in the room. Two of whom you probably know. One of my co-workers is Bob Rennie. He works in Research with me and he is helping take notes and operate the equipment. You probably know Keith Jones and Rob Carr from Children's Mission Education Unit. They are here as observers. In a perfect focus group world they would be behind a two-way mirror, but we don't have that kind of facility here so they are observers and will not be participating in our discussion today. I hope the meal was satisfactory. If you need to get up and stretch or want to get another cookie or brownie, that is all perfectly fine. If you need the restroom, you go out this door and go down to the hallway to the right and turn right, the restroom is on your immediate right. If you need a restroom break, it's fine to take. I just ask that you come back as quickly as you can to rejoin us. We will be finished by 2:00. If we finish before then, I'll try to realize that. I will commit to you that we will be done by 2:00. In case I forget to say it now while I'm still doing general announcements, for some of you, Rob has something else for you to do after 2:00. So I will remind you of that. If you have a cell phone or pager, if you will cut it off, I would appreciate that. You can see that we are making an audio tape of the session. That will help us later to do a transcription of the tape to write a report about the focus group session. The purpose is not to identify any individual response at all. After the report is written the tape will be destroyed to protect the moderator. Do you have any logistical questions about the layout of the building or anything before we begin?

You have been invited here today to participate in this session because you have field tested the new material for Royal Ambassadors. The most important thing that is going to happen during our session today is for us to hear what you have to say, to hear your reactions to the materials and to some of the proposed changes to Royal Ambassadors. This is good news for you because we didn't bring you here for me to tell you something. We brought you here to tell us something. I want you to know there are no wrong answers to the questions or discussions and most importantly the best feedback you can give us is honest feedback. So we don't want sugar-coated feedback, we want to hear honest feedback whether it's positive or negative. I would like to begin by going around the table. We have met at different levels. I think I've shook most of your hands. To begin, please tell us whether the field test that you did was in a group setting or one-on-one.

I have had about three years of experience working with RAs, and when I did the field test I've been doing that with my son in 4th grade and it's been a one-on-one interaction with him alone.

I did the field test with my two boys, second grader, fourth grader and two of their friends (third grader and another fourth grader). **Was your field test done in your house or church?** We did it in our house, the backyard.

I did my field test with my son who is in the first grade at home. I've been an RA leader for 8 years. I have been certified as a trainer as of last year, and I do a little bit of training for NAMB and GBC. I helped write some for the Lad books and Crusader magazines.

I have been doing this for about 20 years. I worked with my 6 year old son. I cheated a little bit. I got a little extra help from my RA leaders. Since I had two leader magazines, I had another leader do it with his two sons (one Lad and one Crusader). I did it one-on-one with my son. That was the setting we used.

I've been in RAs since I was born, essentially, because my dad was an RA director before I was born. I am now RA director. I came up through the program while ambassadors and pioneers were still part of the program. I am not currently certified on Crusaders, but I am in Challengers. The setting that I used was with my son's best friend. We did most of it right at the kitchen table.

I am a rookie. My son and I did it, a third grader, so we did the Lad. I have been involved for a couple years, but at this level of critiquing it I have no experience except through Cub Scouts and Awanas.

I've been working with RAs 35-36 years, somewhere around there. I used my grandson and two other young boys in my RA chapter at my home.

I did the field testing with my third grade son.

Thank you. One more time we will go around the table. In the future we won't necessarily go around the table, but will let you share as the Spirit leads, as long as the Spirit leads each one. This time we will go around the table. I would like to know what types of RA groups you have led in the past. In other words, have you done Classic RAs, Easy RAs or have you had exposure to Awana or some other program. And then the follow-up question to that is how you would compare these field test materials to those materials you have used in the past.

Well my background would have been with Classic RAs and Easy RAs. The church that I attend now uses the Awana program. From what I have gathered from the field test materials, I like the format better than the Classic or Easy RAs that I've used before.

Could you tell us one thing you like about the format that you like better?

I like the idea of breaking the pledge down into the five parts and having a Bible verse for each part. I believe that it cements home in the boy, the RA pledge, instead of just something to memorize, it gives it meaning, something they can utilize.

I've worked with RAs for about 25 years in both Spanish and English churches. Typically it's been more a Classical Royal Ambassador program. They really like the format of this field test. I like the aspect of dividing the 5 parts of the pledge with the

verses and the character values of virtue. I think in the past the kids have memorized the RA pledge but sometimes we have difficulty having them live that out or relate it to real life, but with the virtues I think that really brings things back home, so I really like that format. Also the fact that it is flexible for a church that is small and they only have 20 boys. They can do RAs just as easy with a father/son. And I like that aspect of it because I'm a firm believer in strengthening the relationship with the boys and their dads. RA gives an avenue now to do that more so than when it did with the old classical format.

I have traditionally been with Classic RAs, and I was saved as an RA as a youngster. I don't know if we called it Classic then, it seemed a lot like what we do today. I like the format and I have the benefit of not only seeing this format but also writing for Lads and seeing that the concept of dividing the pledge and emphasizing the pledge is really part of the curriculum overall. And the Lad magazines are written so as to emphasize a component of the pledge every month. So in that sense I like it, but at the same time struggling because I'm used to doing advancement, trying to figure a way to do advancement every month and at the same time handling all the activities that are in the Lad magazines. I'm trying to conceptualize where this is going to fit in my month to month planning because I'm not going to spend a whole month in advancement. I'm always going to use the Lad magazine and at the same time I'm trying to figure out where this is going to lay in my presentation and how I am going to implement it. I certainly see the correlation of it, but it's just not that crystal in my mind. The second part of it is, I'm used to thinking of advancement in the terms of rewards and the rewards the boys get. And as I go through this I'm seeing that if they do this essentially five times a year they will get a pin and a patch, which is why they are there. Let's don't fool ourselves. And I'm saying, "What is the difference if they choose planning as opposed to home-town safari?" For example, in my booklet the distinction because one requires more activity than the other. But I'm not seeing it. I just don't see the reward, but perhaps the outline is there. I'm also thinking about the memory verse, what about electives, what about athletic patches. All the things the boys are wanting and I don't see that drawn out here. It may not be because it is not there; it is just that in this little one-month part I didn't get that out of it.

So you like what you see, but you're sort of withholding judgment until you see the full-blown picture?

I'm waiting to see how it is going to interplay. I do see how it interplays with the Lad magazine or the Crusader magazine. Each month during the year those magazines have a specific theme that is part of the pledge. I know that because I'm writing for the magazines. I don't know how many other people realize that. I do training and I spoke to people two weeks ago that really had no clue. Those magazines are designed to emphasize a component of the pledge every month except for I think December and maybe August, when there is not a theme of the pledge but a theme of RAs motto overall.

Okay thanks.

We basically have always done the Classic. Even the times before I took the training, sometimes we did the Easy RAs and didn't know it was called the Easy RAs. We didn't have the materials but I'll say this. When your church has a time-frame on Wednesday night you can tell your program to meet your time-frame. You can't get all 8 parts in and stuff like that. I'll be honest with you, the old advancement program; we have not been that strong. As I was looking at the material and going through it with my son, this reminded me what we used to use back when I was to become a Pioneer. We sat down with a booklet and it was suppose to bring us to a closer relationship with the Lord. It didn't have the rewards and the patches and things like that in it. It was like a one-on-one devotional book between you and the Lord. This is more what this compares to me, and I like that part of it. If there is going to be an advancement book like the full concept like we had before, like you said we have not seen all of it yet. Right now we are seeing the devotional part, the one-on-one Bible study and I like that because when it comes to other groups that get together for the kids (Mission Kids, Disciple Kids, Team Kids, Awanas), you have a lot of opportunity for Bible club to talk about stuff. When we build in the mission part of it and give them activities on top of it, that is part of what makes RAs unique is those opportunities. One thing that I was left was a lot of questions and I don't know if this is the proper time to ask them or not.

You can ask one now, if you have more at the end we will give you a chance to ask them.

Like the change of the pledge. Is that something that is still undercover, or is that going to be out later?

The one change in the pledge is going to be permanent.

So when all of them start coming out, that change will be in there.

Yes, September.

I may be asking this out of line, but is there anything that will be said to point that out to all the teachers, leaders and the boys?

I'm getting an affirmative from Keith. That will be highlighted.

The second part is that I really like the virtue teaching. I am calling it character training. The boys sign a covenant to say that they will do this. When my son signed this right here, he had not seen it anywhere else. So without an explanation of what these virtues are and how they relate to these sections, there needs to be something to explain that—this goes with this part and this goes with this part. That came later. They signed the covenant and said they would do it, but no explanation where it is coming from.

So they need to see the virtues and know more about what they were committing to before they signed it.

That is especially true if you have a first grader sitting there and looking at it by himself. I know they don't understand what self-discipline is in the first grade—most of them in the first grade. How can that tie in so they know what they are committing to and the responsibilities that go along with it?

There will be different advancement themes for the different ages and the one that was featured in the test material for Lads was second grade. So a first grader would have a slightly different tape.

So the concept being to build up their spiritual background, I definitely like that part of it.

Okay, good.

Because that is one thing I think we needed to be stronger in our material.

Okay, thanks.

I've taught RAs in a variety of settings, and I've also been the game director of Awana's the first two years they brought that in until the Awana missionary insulted RAs. That kind of ended that. Most of what I've done has been Classical RAs. There has been some influence of Easy RAs just because of time frame. I've had as little as 45 minutes on a weekly basis. Now I'm a little over an hour. It can be a challenge whenever you have to scrimp on the time frame. I also like the way you are tying the virtues to the different portions of the pledge. I have some questions about some of the ones that are being tied to certain portions of the pledge that we can get into later. The other thing I really like is that you are building in portion of the meeting that tie directly into advancement. That is something I tried to do on my own for some time, and having the materials actually do that for you is going to be a big help. Out of the 8 steps, you can usually get 4-5 of them to tie directly to advancement. I try to have the activities whenever they are arriving and other portions of the meeting tied directly to their advancement, so that when they show up they are 85-90% there.

You mentioned the appropriateness of the virtues. Was there one in particular that you had a question about it?

I work with the Crusaders. The one I was questioning was where you have faith in the first portion of it. I see faith as a predicate to the part of the pledge that says as a Royal Ambassador I would do my best to become a well informed responsible follower of Christ. I see the "well informed responsible follower of Christ" more of an education after the faith. I see faith as a predicate to that.

Okay.

We are set up as Classic. We have all the materials and I believe all the paraphernalia that comes with it, all kinds of gimmies that are provided, but the Easy prevails. There will be kick-ball in the book and that is all that really happens. I think that is because the way the

church supports it. When I took on this, I went about it a little differently—like a school project for my son. Learning and experiencing the ministry behind and just one-on-one father/son stuff. It won't fit in my church without pastoral support, it just won't happen. You try to get it from the pulpit, some sort of announcement, it won't happen. The time frame involved is there on paper but it's not there facility wise. I was disappointed to see such great material from my perspective—almost over-qualified for the children that are going to receive it. The children deserve but the church staff don't support as much as a priority. They don't want Awanas and anything else. They would rather have the RAs. I don't know why they are tied to it, Baptist tradition, etc. I've done some Awana's stuff last year at another church and my kids loved, five year-old loved it. I think because there are more adults involved—more parents. It wasn't a baby-sitting activity. We sat around a camp fire and we shot out stories and my kids attached the verses in the Bible from memory of knowing the story. This approaches it in a similar realm. I guess it gives a lot of leeway to the instructor, a lot of choices to the instructor. I really think that the heart of the program is not supported by the church.

I would like to follow up on that thought. While that thought is out there, it raises a questions for me. Will the new material help to address that problem of getting accepted in the churches? Is there anything about the new material compared to the old material that would make it easier to get the support from the staff that would be needed?

From what I see, now again I don't have the depth of experience of the RAs, but with my conversation with other RAs and what they have experienced, I think this is above and beyond what you were doing. And yes, it has potential. I want to see more homework for the kids. (The charting—what levels you are going at as far as what you are accomplishing.) And yes, the kid's patches are so important. These kids want to absorb something. In my opinion, unless your heart is for the kids, and our church is, but if the pastor doesn't allow it is not going to happen. You have to convince the pastor to allow us to speak from the pulpit to announce RAs next Wednesday or this is what we are doing. They just don't put it in the curriculum. That is my take on it.

Okay, I want others to have a chance to address that point. Is there anyone else that would like to speak to the question of whether or not this new material or this new approach would be easier to sell in your church?

Let me say that I see in this material an obvious effort to correlate it to the pledge and develop activities to draw out the virtues that are assigned to the component of the pledge. At the same time, given the traditional advancement that I'm familiar with, in my mind I don't see a whole lot of difference. I see maybe a spin on it, and maybe a different presentation, but it's still mission work and still mission education and that is what RAs is all about. I have absolutely no experience with Awanas and never have and probably have a connotation in my mind that is adverse to Awanas because I have a different view of what it is for. But I can relate to what he is saying because I am hearing RA leaders and church people and church leaders and pastors from around at least this state that have gone to Awanas not because they prefer the material but because they don't have a

sensibility from within the SBC that this is a Baptist program. Awanas is not. That this is what we as on-mission Christians are about and Awanas is not. And I think that there is some tendency that Awanas that is coeducational is an easy program to implement because in reality all Wednesday night program really is is a time to put the kids somewhere while mom or dad are in Bible study or in choir practice or doing something else and they just want something. And we have a leadership, starting from the top and going down through the staff of both of the Convention and the church that doesn't put this stuff out first. They don't give it time in the program. They are not giving any more time in the program. It is just easier because you don't have the leadership commitment that you do for RAs and GAs and mission friends and mission kids, or whatever it is they are using. That is my comment.

I've never done Awanas. My wife is beginning to teach Awanas today. The church we attend do Awanas Wednesday's and Royal Ambassadors on Sunday evenings. What I see with Awanas is that it requires a great number of people to be able to carry out. And what is happening in our church is that it takes a lot of the leadership getting involved in RAs and other missions, such as Awanas. I see it more of a lack of training and education of what we as Baptist use RAs and promote it, because RA leaders upcoming may not be as well trained and experienced in RAs. For Awanas they provide a lot of training, a lot of preparation for its leaders. For me it's more of being able to put it out there, and that this is not only a Baptist organization, but we don't have anything in our churches that promote and teach missions that RAs does. Awana doesn't. But we need to train also these RA leaders to do RAs attractively and not babysitting, and not just to fill in the gaps.

To summarize that little rabbit we just chased, I would say that we have some educating to do among our pastors, our churches and our staff to elevate the possibilities of RAs, whether it be an old program or new materials, there is some work to be done.

One thing I've noticed is that there are some churches in our association that are not mission-minded and don't send missionaries out or where they don't have a strong missions program. The first time somebody offers something new, they want to jump on the new thing because they think it will fix all the problems and it will be a whole lot better. I recently ordered an Awana package to see what it was based on because I was at a training down here and they said whatever you do don't knock Awanas. They do what they do and we do something different. They are not mission based, and we are. In my church we don't have to sell RAs. WE have a strong missions based church. My pastor grew up with RAs, he goes to RA events with us, and so I don't have to sell it. But I can see if someone comes up and convinces the children's committee to try something different in another time frame, if you go for competing time frames, one of them is not going to work. And a lot of times they will go with something new and see if it works. Even big churches in our area settle on trying the new thing, and RAs are what pays the price.

I guess we are just different, because we are really well balanced. We are in the position where we have a really mission minded pastor. But we don't have enough leadership to do everything between my husband (the pastor) and myself. We don't currently have an RA program, which is one reason, for my son, I was happy and really interested in this. One thing I found in talking to some of the men in our church is that we have a history in Classic RAs. These dads in the church now with grade school aged boys were RAs. We cannot get them to get interested enough or behind RAs to bring it back. But they would be glad to send their sons, as long as someone else did it. In talking to them about what I've been doing with Noah this last month, they are very interested in something they could do as a family or as a dad with their son that would be missions. Once they get out of preschool in our church there are no more missions. Talking about what I was doing with Noah in this month-long field test has generated more interest in RAs than anything that we have come up to do prior to this.

So these materials, then, have the potential to be very beneficial in restarting RAs in your church?

That is it. Because in talking with them whether they would do this one-on-one with their son, the answer from at least five or six of the dads was "Yes, I would do this in my home." So I've been really excited about that. The leadership of every church is different and it may be because we have a mission-minded pastor, and it opens the whole door that has been closed in our faces numerous times in the last six years.

Thanks. You have been doing RAs for 35 or 36 years. You have probably been exposed to several different sets of materials in the past. What have you done in the past and does this material compare?

I've used the Classical material almost the whole time. If there is nothing wrong with it, if it ain't broke don't fix it. I have a tremendous experience with my kids and my leadership with Royal Ambassadors as it is now. I like the virtual aspect that is coming through. I'm still looking for more material. The Classic program has always worked for me and it's what I've used. I've never used Easy RAs, or I might have accidentally. We currently don't have a pastor but I have had the good fortune being under a pastor that was strongly behind an RA program, except for maybe 4-5 years in that time frame. The main issue that I see is not necessarily the materials we are currently working with but it is being able to build strong leadership. Every program that I have had any contact with that has failed with the RA program is because of weak leadership. I would like to see more in the materials that would deal with closer relationships to the pastor and the minister of music and the minister of education. Many times we are fighting with time frames. My church three years ago made a major change and I think it is for the better. We used to have 45 minutes of RAs, and that was it. We didn't have much time for anything. We had Awanas come in. We switched and did missions one Wednesday night for an hour and a half and music the next Wednesday night for an hour and a half, and missions the next Wednesday night. It gave us a lot more freedom of operation and time frame. This has been a correlation of work and support with the minister of music and the missions program. It worked greatly.

I would like to follow up on one idea that you raised, your comment about Classic RAs, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” Comment on how you see a church that is very steeped in Classic RAs. How do you see the continuity between the Classic RA approach and switching to this new material?

Here again counting on the leadership themselves in buying it. I don’t see a problem. I think the virtue thing is going to be a tremendous plus in making that transition.

So you think that the new material is not going to be a real stumbling block for a church that has been doing Classical?

I agree. I think that we are going to be advanced with Lads one and Lads two, etc. We are going to change some of the content in them. But I’m not sure that is a whole lot different than what happened 7 years ago when we redesigned the covers of the existing books. It’s not something that is going to be hard to sell as part of the Classic method. This is the same stuff with some new parts. The same activities redesigned in the book. Now I’m looking for athletics, memory verses and things like that. I’m still trying to figure out a way to put it in. It doesn’t seem to be something I’m going to have a hard time selling to my church. They think the Classic method is a pretty strong program too.

I like Mission Kids as well. I’ve used that program with some other churches with some leadership. The interesting thing about that is that I can kind of make a correlation between Mission Kids and RA program. It’s just a different cover. The essence of it is that it does give you some options to go to. I see no problem with the transition.

Can I ask you a question on the virtues or should I wait until later?

You can ask it now.

On the virtues, is that going to be reflected in the magazines, too, so that the weekly lessons will reflect those virtues?

Yes, it’s supposed to be.

So they will start seeing that after September?

Not this September, but 2003.

One of the things I’ve always emphasized is that in the RA plan you get twelve months in advance—you know what the subject matter will be every month in the publication. Being able to have that correlation with the virtues and everything will help that tremendously in being able to plan ahead. I cannot do things today and then do things tomorrow. I need to plan ahead to be able to achieve it. I love the ability to see what is going to happen twelve months in advance.

Is this open question time?

I will allow one more open question. If I think it will fit in better later, I'll tell you.

I'm new so I don't have a lot of input as far as comparing. I know my child, who started last year, was intrigued. When I got involved, I saw the excitement. The attendance started to get larger in RAs, and I couldn't figure out why. The regulars know that this time of the year when the derby races start, you have to be there to get your car. And I just picked up on that and kids from out of the woodwork started coming. My son last year did very well in the derby race and that was exciting. But it did not last. It's like ice cream and big sugar rush. I was really disappointed that that happened. My son doesn't want to go to the RAs anymore because it is boring. Again, I go back to the leadership. We have time for missionaries to leave our church to go to camp. We sent around the plate to support this. We show videos on the screen. We have Bible drills during church, but RAs is not that. It's just absent.

Good point.

Could I respond to that? It's not really deep, but as the old saying goes "The squeaky wheel gets the attention." I've been encouraging a lot of RA leaders to start making some noise and talking RAs up. Awanas has this big bulletin board the size of a wall. In RAs you are lucky to see a piece of literature on the wall. Let's ask for a bulletin board, a sticker, let's do something.

Visibility is a big key. What you need to do is to get the boys in front of the church in ways that they know that they are boys and that they know they are RAs. You may even see if they let the boys hand out the bulletin before church and put their vests on. Sometimes churches will allow the RAs to help collect the offering in the evening service. As many times as you can and as many groups you can get them in front of for them to see them as RAs, as you build that visibility, that is where you start building the awareness and then you start getting the attention.

We tried some of those.

If that doesn't work, incorporate as many deacons in as many different ways, even if it is serving cookies or refreshments, and let your deacons put the pressure on your pastor.

You can also invite your staff members from church to be your special guests during your RA meetings and tell them what they do in the church.

You may have men in your church that are wonderful with woodworking. They have equipment in their garage that they work with. Have your boys make some kind of birdhouse. Or you may have men that are former military personnel. They may know something about survival skills or camping. Get those guys involved. Some the athletes, get them involved in some kind of sports. Find the people in your church that have a particular interest and then incorporate that into RAs. It may not be particularly what the

magazine asks for, but you are trying to create excitement. To me that is the best way. Get these men that have a particular interest. It may be something as simple as fishing. Some of these kids may not have a dad they can go fishing with. Take them out on a fishing trip, teaching them how to hook a worm and have a fun time with it. But that creates an excitement.

Trying to get the parents involved in the RA program was one of the successes. You can be a ditch digger or a carpenter, if someone asks you to share your interest or your talent, they will jump right in the middle of it. Being able to do that correlation is good.

Our books talk about our RAs fall under the administration of our children's minister. While that may be true, it has been apparent to me for some time that you get more bang for your buck by incorporating this supervision not only of your children's director or children's minister but also your outreach or faith or evangelistic minister and your children's choir. It's good if you can incorporate those people's input into what you are doing in your program. The minister in my church in faith and evangelism looks at RAs not as a mission program but as just a children's organization. It took an actual orientation, this is what we are about and we are an on-mission program. We are here and you can reach people in the community by pointing out that we have this program available for their children. It is part of your ministry as much as anyone else's. I have found that people respond well when they see that there is that part or component of your church organization so that it is not just your children's minister.

Much of our discussion so far has been about the new materials as a package and how it compares to the old former programs, the Classic and Easy RAs. I would like to get a little bit more specific now and give you a chance to talk about these actual materials and some of the experiences you have had as you were using these materials. And also now, as long as everyone participates, instead of calling on someone I'm just going to throw this question out. If you would like to share, you can. The first question that I will throw out under your experience of using new materials is "How did you choose and use the activities?"

In my situation if you are talking about the commitment activities, I took my two boys and we read through these and we talked through them and what they each meant and give them some additional ideas to help them understand what is required. But rather than just giving them the magazine and let him read and decide, we read it together so that he will understand exactly. Is that what you are asking?

Yes, the activities and projects are on page 10 and 11.

My son picked his own. He is currently tying knots in a rope as he prays. So he picked, and I've got the rope and he is doing it.

My older son did the knot tying activity. But it served to me to teach my son how to pray with thanksgiving, praise, intercession, confession; you know, the different aspects of the

types of prayers. So not only did he pray and tie his knot for what is requested, but it gave me an opportunity that he could do it for other types of prayers.

For those of you that had more than one boy you were working with, did they individually choose it or did they do it as a group?

I let them choose it individually. They both ended up choosing the same thing.

Any other experiences about how they chose the activities or projects?

I did it with my son who is six, and frankly because of a busy schedule, we looked at different choices. We were looking at the Lad choices. We were trying to pick something that was normal and routine for us that could be fitted in with this thing. We chose the Explorer together and to pray for things at meals, which is something we do every night. We hold hands and pray. We incorporated into that praying for missionaries once a week in our meals so that we could make it part of our routine. That to me was a very attractive option. It is something we are doing all together. And also, I throw this in as an aside, in connection with the memory verses, I like the express statement that was in there. If you do Bible verses in Sunday school these count if you just tell your leader. I think we all recognize our leadership capacities but there is always some ambiguity whether that is going to count or not. And to fold these into our day to day lives so we can show how we can make Christianity part of what we do on a day to day basis is very attractive to me. Also, just looking at the concept of tying a knot for every time you do a prayer looks pretty appealing.

I like your statement about if someone was doing Bible verses in a Sunday school class that they should receive credit for it in RAs. We have a Bible drill in our church in which my RAs get credit for the verses that they do. I have kids that are in scouts. If they tie the square knot in scouts and the scout master will initial the book that they did it, I recognize that he has done it and I don't make him do it again.

It sometimes takes a little more work for a leader to find what boys have done [25 memory verses in Sunday school], but if we can make sure that our leaders think to do it, we are accomplishing something because they want those medals. That gold medal or bronze medal or silver medal will pull a boy into RAs and we can then teach them to learn to do Jesus' work for missions.

One thing I like says that you can use them for Sunday school, but you have to be able to say them.

We did the home-town safari because of scheduling purposing. I can never be in one place at the same time. I think it back-fired on me just because I can be controlling. I walked with them in the neighborhood. It started pretty innocent, good father/son time together. But I think that particular one was the wrong one for us.

Did you choose that for practical reasons?

I chose it selfishly because I think it is good to get out and walk and that was time I could spend with him. We got to see some disadvantaged children, and not just in our neighborhood, but we would go places, visit our neighborhoods, the mall. Being mission minded we would pray for each situation as we saw it; whether it was a physical handicap or a lady in the street, who whomever we ran into. But toward the end of each week, I think I was pushing the Spirit instead, versus letting it work. I think it would have worked if I was a little less controlling and let the Spirit work. Sometimes the children are smarter than we think. They see things.

I let my son pick which one and we also picked the home-town safari. We live in a very rural area and we don't have a neighborhood. If we walked our neighborhood we would have to walk 2 or 3 miles a night to get to a neighborhood, depending on which direction we went. So we did prayer rides instead of prayer walks. That was really kind of fun to do with him. Because it's a small town you know who lives in every house.

I forgot how many boys you had.

Just my son.

How did you choose a project?

Basically what we are trying to do, and I'm still working on it, is the dive deep concept. I see this program as a way that each of us parents find time to teach our kids to develop a relationship with God, a time to get their homework done and get them to read. What I like about the format of this is that I think it could be done not only in the RA traditional classroom type thing, but it is something that could appeal to any mom or dad that wants to take their son aside and work with them in the evening. What it allows them to do, in addition to their homework time, is to read. It's allowing them to draw closer to God and make a record of their prayers. My son is a very soft-hearted kid, but tough on the outside. I think doing this project with him is beneficial because it allows him to offer up a prayer and record what is going on with those prayers. To be honest with you, it is a good example for me. Maybe something I could benefit from, too.

I mentioned that the younger boys target audience for the test materials was Lad 2, our second graders. For the Crusader materials in the test it was 5th grade. Depending on which material you used, did you find those projects and activities appropriate for the age group?

I did a 6 year old and I thought the materials were probably a little bit beyond his ability. I did the water bottle project. Frankly we took him to football practice. Not a single boy knows anything about the water bottle project. Now I did get some parents that came to me, and I found that 2 or 3 of my parents were also members of Baptist churches and had RAs. My son plays on the 5 and 6 year old football team, and not a one said a word about anything, least not to me or my son. So I thought they were above him, but I don't know if they would be above a 7 or 8 year old.

Does your question include the stories too, or is that just the projects?

We are going to come back to the stories. For right now just the projects and activities.

I did the water bottle with my son. He was somewhat shy of giving it to somebody by himself. So we chose his bus driver that takes him to school, and I went with him. I was giving him moral support while he gave it to him, and shared that he had made the label. I made sure that the bus driver read it and made some comments toward that end because he was afraid or nervous about approaching the bus driver. We also gave it to his PE coach at school—someone I figured would need water. And it worked out, and we enjoyed that.

Let's shift gears a bit and talk about record keeping. What were some of your experiences or reactions to the task of choosing records? In the people's books, that was your record keeping chart "charting your commitment" on page 12. Who would like share?

I thought it was pretty simple and straight forward. It was about the easiest I've ever seen. The real hook I think for RAs and what is appealing to those boys is the uniforms and vest, the medals and the patches. How are they going to get this? I was doing this with my son, and yes it was easy and I know what RAs is about and I know the purpose in all of this. I'm wondering how many men are going to take the time to go home and do all this work with their son and keep this record and to find me or one of my leaders to show me they have done all of this. Much of this work is difficult to get people to did it at home. We have a whole table of leaders here that are happy to do things with their children. But the average guy in church is not like that. I find that keeping records at home, even on this simplistic level, is difficult to do, keep up with, and then communicate with the leaders so that the boys get credit for it. I think you are going to get lost when you leave this stuff at home. Very few churches that I know of buy advancement magazine or advancement workbooks and send them home. They cannot afford it. It's too costly. And if you don't do that what is dad going to have to keep tract of and is dad ever going to remember to come back and give it to you even if he is motivated?

Do you only get a leader book at your church?

We buy an advancement workbook for every boy, but we don't send them home because if we do they won't come back today. You will never see them again.

I was really impressed with this. I like the format. Our church does Awanas, and in my previous church we did the same thing you did. We bought the books and kept them under lock and key in the room. We only broke them out on Wednesday night. Whereas my son now, in the Awanas program, he has a very small little book that he keeps track of his progress. He takes it to Awanas and they get a reward for bringing it. I think if this

format could be made into a small book, say about this size, that would be easy for little kids and a parent to keep track of, I think it would be really beneficial material.

Ten of my 15 won't bring the books back. I like the concept that they are getting some kind of reward or credit for bringing their books. Maybe that might motivate someone. I don't know how you motivate a child today without giving them trophies or patches.

That is basically one of the successes for Awanas is because they get something for most everything they do. And it's been that achievement type recognition.

But at \$6.75 or \$6.50 a pop you get tired of buying if they disappear and you never see them again. Your attendance dwindles depending on the seasons (baseball, etc.), and you may never see the book again, or the parent.

Let me ask this too, because I'm away from the RA program. Do parents pay anything to have their kids involved in RAs?

Just their tithes alone.

The church we attend for Awanas, we pay \$35.00 for each child to participate in Awanas. That is some of the problem. On the other hand, I don't mind paying it, but I don't like the idea of having to go to somebody to try and bring them to Jesus and say, by the way it is going to cost you \$35.00. That is a free gift to us and I think we should make it a free gift to others too.

Does anyone else want to share their experiences with record keeping?

We really like the chart, except that we were already three weeks into school and had already done the homework. It was a really cool thing as long as someone else was doing it. By the time we had gotten to this we had probably done 2 ½ hours of homework at the end of the school day. So he was saying, "No, I'm not writing anything else. I can tell you the answer, and you can write it." Or, "I'll memorize it and say it to you. But I'm not writing anything."

And that is good point. If it looks too much like school, they are not going to do it. If you come into an RA program on Wednesday night and throw another hour of school in there, you've lost them as soon as you start.

Now even though I did this one-on-one with my boys, we used stars instead of check marks. My son got into it, excited about getting the stars. But with the writing, you can forget it. "Dad, you can do the writing. Just give me the star. I'll do the star, but I don't want to do any writing."

Stickers are really popular with children. There are ways that I thought of. In the books we have these little symbols: the Bible, shield and pen. Get some stickers so that could

put those stickers on there to match their activity. They would love that—little children. Now older children don't care much about stickers, but I was dealing with a 6 year old.

I believe you had a thought that you didn't get to express.

I was just agreeing that I had to fill in for my son. I had four in my group. They all chose an activity, but I had to do all the filling in because they would not do it themselves.

I think I'm hearing two issues with record keeping. One is whether the boys' actually do the writing in their books or the parent or leader does it. Another issue was sending the books. If you have a group at church, should records be kept by the leader at church or should they be sent home?

How are you going to get the information back from dads, because a lot of this seems to be projects and activities that you are not going to be able to do Wednesday night.

How do the dads know they need to do it?

How do you get that information out to them to get it?

Well if I can compare it to Awanas. My wife had a parent meeting. She spent almost two hours with parents telling them what Awanas would be about, how much they would have to pay, and what they would get. We don't do that with RAs. You send their kid down the hall to the room on the left and you don't know what happens in there.

I do it with RAs but it still becomes a problem. I have a meeting at the beginning of the year and when new people join I try to tell them and give them an orientation. I even send a letter explaining what we are going to do and what RAs is about. Here are the resources. Every RA leader doesn't do that and every RA leader is not able to do it.

You could put some sample letters in some packets for us.

I would be more than happy to share my letters with you. But the problem is again that when you send the advancement book home with the chart in it, are you ever going to get it back? Even if you tell them, if you could hold their hands, will you ever see it again? If you don't send it home, how are you going to get information from dad or boy, particularly 1st, 2nd or 3rd grader that any of these activities are done. If you lose that information, and you don't have that feedback and information coming to you as a leader, how are you ever going to give the boy the shield and patch that he really is in RAs to earn?

What if you just make sure to make the record keeping page marked as reproducible. Then as part of the promotions make sure you say that before you get this into boys' parents hands it is your responsibility to reproduce this chart for yourself and you keep the records. If part of the point of doing this is so that boys and parents can do it at home, you are going to have to give some of the responsibility to the parents and the boys. As

leaders, we don't want to because we don't think they will do it, but for it to work at that level you are going to have to give the families some responsibility and some credit for being willing to do it.

It is not difficult to make the chart part of the resource kit. We do that already with advancement charts. The question is how are you going to get the information back? I think it is a great idea that we are going to give parents the responsibility. There may be a lot more people out there that are more responsible than I imagine. I'm skeptical about a lot of people's commitment to what they are doing, and I just don't think you are going to get back the information you are sending. If I have a criticism, it is that it is so home oriented that your classic programs with large groups of boys are not going to be able to properly fulfill it because you are never going to get the information back. The advancement we have now, while there is some homework, you can find a way if you know about it to make it happen with your chapter meetings. And when you do that, you're fulfilling the goal that those boys have to get a patch every year, to get a pin.

I like what was said about bulletin board stuff. You can make it part of the resource pack where you can put the child's name on the board. I'm sure that child on Sunday would bring their dad to that board and fill it in. That will keep the records squared away, instead of losing the paper four weeks down the road, and then the kid's out, and the kid is going to be upset, and the father cannot reproduce everything.

We have one parent that keeps records for the whole group. Whenever a kid hasn't turned in his stuff that parent has to go and check with that other parent and make sure he has done the material or whatever it might be. That relieves the counselor or leadership of the chapter from being involved with this nitty gritty, detailed, administrative-type work. It works. You get the parent involved in it. I try to involve the parents in as many aspects as you can, because that is where the support is going to come from in the church itself.

If you can educate your parents, you go a long way towards getting the information back. I personally make copies of advancement books and send them home. I'm the record keeper for our program. I'm after Austin's mom. Where is his advancement work this month? You don't have that many leaders that have that type of commitment. My firm can donate the copies because it costs us very little.

We made a list for the whole year. Every time they were meeting there was a parent that had to be there to do the record keeping. There were about five parents. We just made a projective calendar for the whole year. If you cannot be there it is your responsibility to swap with someone else. It got all those parents involved in the meeting itself.

I'm hearing a lot of flexibility in the way you are doing record keeping. I think that is the key. In every situation you try to decide what would work best for you. Anything else you want to say about record keeping?

I have a couple things. It's not specifically on this chart though. I have a couple of ideas on this front page. Number one I'd like to see a field added on here for either date or year

so that you can pinpoint the year the boy was working on this. Especially if he is going to keep it as a keepsake, and also if you could put a carbonless page behind it that is 3-hole punched so you can tear it out.

Just for the record, you are talking about page 3?

Page 3, but page 5 in the leadership book. If you have that carbonless behind that you can tear out, the first meeting the boy fills this out, you tear that off and you have a three ring binder with your entire membership with your telephone numbers and emails.

Very good.

Richie, could I add something?

Sure.

In the leader's book on page 15, the chart, on the last box that said when you finish this whole chart, I didn't see any use to that. I think what would be useful is to add a column that might correspond to some hand-crafted work or some athletic event at the moment that they could keep the record of that as well.

My addendum to what was just said is that you have to get something there where your record keeping is easy and in one place so that you keep track of electives. Everything is going to go in that advancement book, as far as rewards, ought to be able to be put here or some place very close to that so you are not forever losing it.

Okay. You've given us a lot of good feedback on record keeping. I appreciate that. The RA program is unique from a lot of other alternatives because we are trying to encourage and to assist boys to become ambassadors for Christ and we encourage that by asking them to exhibit the behaviors stated in the pledge. Now so we can stretch our legs, we are going to stand up and we are going to say the pledge. I was an RA as a small lad. I remember the RA motto.

"We are ambassadors for Christ." 2 Cor. 5:20

Now let us go ahead and say the RA pledge. This is the only one that is printed with the new wording here. Let us say the pledge together.

"As a Royal Ambassador I will do my best to become a well-informed responsible follower of Christ and to have a Christ-like concern for all people. To learn how to carry the message of Christ around the world, to work with others in sharing Christ and to keep myself clean and healthy in mind and body."

As part of the new materials there is a memory aide. The motto is the message, the pledge is the purpose and the virtues are the vehicle. We can sit back down now. I hope that was a good stretching break for you, it was for me. If the materials don't

help to assist boys in becoming ambassadors to Christ, then the materials have fallen short. How do you see that these materials either address or don't address assisting boys to become ambassadors for Christ?

I really like the change in the RA pledge in the third item because before learning how the message of Christ is carried around the world gave a sense of sitting back and seeing how other people do it. Whereas to learn how to carry the message of Christ is a proactive statement, teaching the boys how they can be ambassadors for Christ. That is one approach I think will be very helpful—just that slight change.

Any other reactions about these new materials and their appropriateness of them in helping the boys become ambassadors?

I will say one more thing. I'm sorry.

No, that is fine.

Where you have the leaders book that has the pledge broken down and it has a part, for instance, the first one "to learn to be more like Jesus." I think the virtue will add to it and help them learn about Jesus. My understanding is that this will be in the leaders' book but not necessarily in the children's book. But I think that would be helpful for the kids to see that too. This is page 10 in the leader's book.

The whole church is done on a monthly basis.

That is what I'm talking about when I mentioned background information. It even has Scripture applied to it to know where it came from.

I hear a suggestion with some consent that the material should at least be made available to the boys. Not only in the leaders book but make the materials and charts available.

A lot of the boys we have on Wednesday nights do not have any church background. They have not been in Sunday school for years, and may be hearing it for the first time. The only time they hear God's name the rest of the week may be followed by a cuss word. So that is one reason I'm saying it needs to be laid out plain and simple so they can open up and read it.

Subtlety can be effective sometimes, but as an attorney you learn that sometimes you have to bang people up side the head with the object. You have to tell them what you are going to tell them, then tell them what you told them. It doesn't hurt at all for them to see it expressed out on this chart. It shows you exactly what these virtues are and how they relate to the components of the pledge and it's great to have the memory verse to help you kind of define both concepts and an open insert to your book that orients not only the leaders but the boys and what they are about to hear. I knew about these virtues. We sometimes as writers and builders, lose the forest for the trees and he didn't have that

benefit. He didn't know he was going to talk about faith and what it is, as he read it he saw a commitment. What is it and what does it mean? That is what it means.

I think it would help parents of the children that are not active in church for them to actual see that memorizing this will help them be more loyal and courageous. We live in a society where kids are losing a lot of these virtues and character traits. I think for non-Christian parents that would be attractive and positive.

Are there any other comments about the materials and how they relate to the pledge?

I was curious as to why the virtues were different for the younger boys and older boys. I realize they are similar terms, but I was wondering why they using the exact same term?

I can speak to that, but perhaps someone else would like to.

It's age appropriate, for instance, the unit on courage and perseverance, to learn how to care. For the child who is Lad age group. Perseverance means you have to show courage on and on and on; for instance, missionaries where they may be there for years and see no fruit for to their labors. No people come to Christ. But they are living it and telling people about Jesus anyways. And that is a little bit overwhelming and sometimes developmentally a little too much to understand—too big a picture. So you try to pare it down to its simplest form. My 12 year old can understand at a deeper level.

My understanding is much the same. For the younger child it is a simple concept, that a 6 year old can be loyal and understand loyalty and commitment a lot better than he can understand faith and blindness, and belief without seeing. He may not ever really understand faith, but it is a higher degree of loyalty. And that virtue went well with that commitment that you are making in the very first part of the pledge.

And they had to be concrete. For children the abstract understanding doesn't click in until they are 10-12. So when you tell a 6-8 year old that it is raining cats and dogs they are still going to look to play with the cats and dogs.

About faith: What are the practical results of faith according to James 2:14-18? My first thought there was first, they probably won't know what a "practical" result was. And then as I look through, this is where they are applying the five parts of the pledge. Looking in the leader part, I had the things here. Now I understand in the advancement book if you change the way you are talking, you won't say your life, your home, your chapter, your church, your state, but it will be these virtues, right?

I think that is correct.

Does that mean that in our pledge, when we do the recognition service, the five parts of the pledge do not coincide with what is in this material?

Let me answer that question. The mission fields that are presently in the advancement books will be incorporated. I am not as actively involved in this as some people. The mission fields will remain part of the curriculum in that they tie into the virtue and the pledge. Each part of the pledge has one or two or sometimes three mission fields they apply. So the mission fields will not become obsolete. There is an affirmative effort by those who write to tie in certain mission field application in the message you are trying to communicate through the virtues and the pledge component when you hear it. It may not be expressed as it has been in the past. There will be an effort by the writers of your magazine to show where this information hits in the various mission fields. You are not going to lose it, it's just not going to be exactly in the same format.

Does that mean the recognition pledge will be rewritten to coincide with this now?

I can't answer that question.

If one part of what we are doing follows the pledge, then every part of what we are doing needs to follow the pledge.

That is the goal.

If they rewrite one, they end up rewriting all. Right?

I'm seeing an affirmative nod behind you.

We just did our recognition service. If you told me that when you are talking to a boy and that the pledge means this, and later on you read something else and it reads different, that won't work. It needs to be consistent all the way through. I can understand giving the older boys a little more difficult explanation of what they are learning in the virtues. I can deal with that. I'm just saying that when you do something and they are all pledging, it needs to coincide with what they just did for a year or getting ready to do for a year. It needs to mean the same thing, it needs to do the same thing.

Thanks. That is a good suggestion. Earlier when we talked about the projects and activities we talked a little bit about whether you chose those projects and activities or whether the boys chose. We talked a little bit about whether the boys got involved in the materials. Did the materials encourage the boys to become involved in the projects and activities?

My son has watched me for his whole life. Being a leader of RAs and going camping and doing races, coaching basketball and baseball, and doing the things that RAs do and handing out patches and pins. He wanted to be in RAs so when the opportunity came for us to do this, for him to say that "I'm an RA," that is what made him want to do it. It wasn't because of anything that was in it, it was because of what he had seen the other boys doing. He certainly enjoyed the story of the jungle, and he was intense when we came to the break in it. He didn't want to wait another week to hear the end of it. He kept asking a lot of questions. That is what motivates my son.

I'm not sure if this is answering the question, but I wrote a note in my book to bring this up. Where the kids are to pick a personal commitment activity/project, there are four choices. Why couldn't they do one a week for four weeks? If one week they did planning and we did that for a week, and the following week we did swing into action kind of thing, so that they can get a little bit of each. My kids usually had two and they couldn't decide. So I was wondering rather than doing one for 4 weeks, why couldn't they do one a week, so it breaks up the routine.

Would it be difficult for you or for a typical leader to be flexible at that point and to adapt those projects and do different ones each week?

Maybe for your classical RA group it may be more difficult. My suggestion is that perhaps that could be an option for smaller groups or for those that don't have an RA because they want to do it with their son or one or two boys. Perhaps an option would be to change it this way. It may not work for your classical RA and your large number of kids.

Good suggestion.

My response is exactly that for classical RAs. If you have a magazine you are doing with four stories a month, there is no way you can pick up an advancement book every month in an hour to an hour and fifteen minutes. You have a project and a memory verse, do the last story and this story... you have to remember how advancement works into RAs. How are we going to fold this into our Wednesday night meeting in conjunction with what we do, whether it is an eight part method, five part method, or a three part method? Some groups solely purchase advancement books and try to run RA groups out of that without buying the magazines, and they are telling me it is not enough to keep them busy. Well, it is not. If you don't do the magazines, you can't just do this. You've got to do something else. Leadership can be innovative and imaginative and find ways to fill an hour of every week with mission activity. But it is difficult. This is not designed to be an every Wednesday night work.

Are you talking about the drawing?

Yes.

He liked the activities and things like that. He told me the story was boring. Now if you are going to write a story to suit a 4th grader and a 6th grader, that might be hard to do. Different kids will read on different levels. So if you do a short story like that, it would not keep his interest. He endured it because I told him to. Normally, he would read a few items and then put it down. It just didn't interest him. Now the other boys that looked at it from the Crusader view, they didn't have the same opinion. They liked the stories. So different kids like different things.

One of the things I would like to hear is whether your experience showed that the projects completed by the boys worked with and reinforced the virtues. Was there an appropriate link between the projects, activities, and the intended virtues? What were your experiences there? Did that work?

My first thought at your question would be, not necessarily. I saw the project as an opportunity for them to carry the message of Christ around the world. To me that is more going to share the message of Christ as opposed to developing loyalty; loyalty in the sense that I'm going to tell him to go do it, and he is going to go do it. But I saw it more as to put it into practice that third point of the RA pledge.

Good point. That is exactly my opinion.

Which, by the way I thought was wonderful because we really need to teach the boys that. But I didn't think it really applied to the virtue. That is important to hear.

I think some of the activities from an adult standpoint, you know I can look at this and say, you know he has read his Bible and prayed consistently for 4 weeks. As an adult I can link that it's teaching him loyalty to Christ, but as a 7 year old, no. There is a question on the evaluation sheet that says "Are you more loyal because of what you have done?" And he looked at me and said, "Am I?"

My child said, "I don't know."

He really did not get it. From an adult perspective I think this builds loyalty, but the child doesn't get it.

For the Crusader experience the dive-deeper activity did reinforce the faith virtue.

I look back and see that all three of the boys would commit to doing that also.

That is more the commitment activity, but you are talking about the mission project, right?

Are you talking more about the mission project or all the components of it?

I did ask specifically about the mission project activity, but its okay to talk about the entirety, if you think it appropriate. I'm broadening the question to include the materials reinforcing the particular virtues that were stressed.

Let me speak to my perception in the Lad because I didn't see loyalty coming out of my story. The story was interesting, and my son was enthralled by it. I did not have anything that gave me a guide, and perhaps I'm one of those dense people that need a guide, and we do not have leader magazines for advancement. If we are going to have something that there is some subtle message in, you better tell believers. I didn't get it, or just didn't see it.

During the course of our conversation, you have shared a good bit about the theme stories. Again, I would like to just make sure you each had a chance to share about the theme stories. To hear specifically that if you felt that the theme story fit in with the rest of the materials. How did you feel the theme story fit?

I think that in the commitment activities, the title of the commitment activities, and the introduction to them sort of tried to tie those two together; the theme, you know, the overall theme. Is that what you are asking?

Yes.

In that respect, I think it did.

What about anyone else? Did you have a reaction to the theme stories, whether or not they fit in with the other materials (the projects, or any other materials that were there)?

I can see where they tie in with the mission projects, but I didn't necessarily see a tie in with the virtues.

I think they would draw the kid's attention if they were done in comic book form.

My understanding is that, in the future, those theme stories will be part of the magazine.

If it was in the periodical like that, it would be even better than the comic book style because you can have it cliff hanging each month, and at the end of the year conclude the story.

Also, my understanding is that eventually there will be sort of a library of these stories built up that go with the same virtue. In fact, there will be some stories accessed online.

There is already access now online.

The September 2003 magazines will have the theme story in the magazine and probably additional resources online.

That brings up another area or arena that I have many suggestions as far as making things available online; being able to subscribe online to a PDF download, rather than having to pay shipping. It would also save on delays whenever there are problems in the shipping channels.

Particularly when your resource person doesn't order your materials.

Yes. If you can download a PDF file and run over to Kinko's, it would be a whole lot quicker.

Okay. That will be noted, obviously. I don't know how that would work with our publication folks. But certainly to have more resources online seems to be a direction that NAMB, in general, is going.

Your question just awhile ago, was how the stories relate to the virtues?

That was one of the questions. How does the story relate to the virtues? And then how do they fit in with all of the other materials?

Without knowing the history of the stories, you would have no idea. It would be good if they did that they would give some examples. You know like they do sometimes. I don't keep a library.

So for each of the virtues, I hear you saying maybe a little listing or bibliography of articles that go with that particular virtue.

Like when they put in here examples of something, it would actually be nice to put examples of where to find it.

It may not be important to you now, but it eventually will become apparent to you that September of every year is going to relate to the first component of the pledge and the virtues of Lads and Crusaders that go with it. October 2nd, November 3rd, and you'll skip December (will deal with motto), January 4th, February 5th, and then you start over again. And so once your leaders are trained to know that and become familiar with that concept, you will know when you're dealing with that virtue. You will know which month of what year to look at magazine stories to draw that out. Hopefully, that will come out and people will pick up on that. One person already read one set of these stories, so she knows when she is writing about faith and loyalty, and those things. Maybe that is what we need to do as trainers, to train people to know those things.

It will start September 2003, I think it is fair to say, that where now your curriculum says "aim" and it gives you your goal, there is also one that is going to say "virtue" and it's going to tell you specifically what your virtue is, if that is what you are wishing for.

Yes.

I hear you almost saying it could be more obvious.

When they read this it sort of needs to be plain to them, because if it's really deep they might not get it.

I say if an attorney couldn't figure out loyalty, then there is something wrong with the story.

I'm wondering why 3 boys are out in the jungle without an adult.

In our group they don't have to outrun the jaguar, just the other two boys.

That is not loyalty.

You said something earlier about the stories leaving some degree of suspense. I really like that. Kids will really latch onto it.

You have to challenge them somewhere.

Sure.

You have been very patient. I appreciate you hanging in here with us. I have one more round of questions. I just want you to know there is a light at the end of this tunnel. And at this time I want to make sure that each has a chance to respond to this. There are 3 parts, but we will do one part at a time and only 2 of the parts. If you were forced to choose one thing, what would you say was the one thing you like best about these new materials? You are smart enough to figure out what the second part of the question is.

I like the flexibility. Whether I have a small group or a large group, whether I'm in a city or a rural area, I can use this.

I like to tie into the virtues.

On top of that, out of the leader's part, the leaders behind and the Scriptures to back it up, you can teach a lesson just off one page.

I see a lot of opportunities for melding that with the leadership RA book as well. As far as the virtues, the chart here, I have a couple of different ones that I thought had virtues to tie closer to it. But I see a lot of opportunities for these two charts being worked in with leading Royal Ambassadors. But I'm probably talking about an older version of the book where it talks about the different leadership styles of the boys.

The concept is already the same. That is waiting on these to be completed.

I see a lot of what we call in the business world *synergy* between those two concepts and where you can really do some significant improvement in the leaders Royal Ambassador's book in helping men learn how to relate to the boys and even helping the boys learn how to relate to each other.

I saw several people agree by nodding their heads that the virtues need to be tied into the story.

The virtues are the highlight. I like the simplicity of it. I really like the faith, it helps out a great deal. There is a great deal of simplicity here that is not in other materials.

I'm an outdoors kind of guy with my kid. Doing the projects was really my favorite. I would like to see more of that.

Does that appeal to you because of something that a father and son could do together, or just the fact that the son gets exposure to some of those things, whether he is with the father or not?

The latter. I like to see my son deny himself things. It really shows maturity and growth. That he knows that everything on this earth is God's. He shouldn't say this is mine and that is mine. This is my last bag of candy and he should want to give it to someone else. Denying himself at all costs, that is what I want him to do.

I like best the idea that the pledge is broken down into the five parts and then the virtues spin off of those sections of the pledge. I think that brings that pledge home to that child and also the leader or parent.

I agree with the virtue component of the pledge. I keep going back to that change in the RA pledge where it says to learn how I can carry the message of Christ. I think it teaches the boys how to deny themselves and to give. Sometimes in our churches we think that missions is just praying and giving. So if I give my offering and I pray for a missionary I've done my part. But actually, we are all called to be active missionaries in the workplace and the marketplace. I think this shows the boys how to share the message of Christ.

I know you affirm the virtues. Do you have anything else you wanted to add to that?

I like the virtues as an application of the pledge component and the whole concept that the boys can do it, too. That is what virtues are for, to show them that these concepts are not beyond their abilities. They are tangible and that was my comment.

I believe everybody had a chance to respond to that. The second part of the concluding question: If you could only make one suggestion to improve these materials, what would your one suggestion be? You can address anything that comes to mind. It could be the actual writing of the materials; it could be an improvement to how the program is going to be changed, or how RAs is going to be impacted by the shift. Any of those.

I came from a big church years ago. It wasn't until 7 years ago that the church finally got involved in foreign missions. The pastor led it. We all pushed. But not until the pastor led, that is when it happened. So my big thing is whether how it is written, we are all going to modify, to make it work for us. We are going to do one a week, or one a month. Or we will just do textbook, how it is written. My big push for the record is marketing toward the leadership of the church.

I would add to that, then, a section about the letters you send out from the leaders. A copy of a letter to send to a parent, or some kind of actual tool that the leader can take (whether he has been an RA a long time or new), and be able to push this in his church.

My suggestion is to add a specific tool, (i.e. ten steps to promoting RAs in your church or create an atmosphere of excitement for RAs).

Next suggestion. Anybody.

That in each section, whatever you are dealing with, is consistently reflecting the virtue you are expounding upon at that time. The story reflects and challenges, but they can see the virtue in the story and they know the end result when they are through with it. The mission project should reflect that virtue. The at-home project, the activities, everything reflects back so that it is consistent all the way through. When they finish that section they know they were loyal. They know they dealt with loyalty. It goes back to the virtues.

I have a suggestion that there be more in-depth materials that the kids could put their teeth into. These kids today get a hold of books like this that have a great deal of suspense in them, and they just really latch onto them. I wish there was something to tie into the virtues where there could be books produced for these kids to read along those lines. When you go into scouting you have all these different books that you have that correlate. I think that would really support the virtue aspect of the program; to have that additional resource for the kids to use. Then it could be incorporated into the advancement as well.

I would like to see alternate formats like the smaller book that Awana has. I would also like to see it available in loose-leaf, 3-ring binders, and possibly online as well. One minor thing I noticed is on the separate covers, they all have a patch, a slightly different look and a chevron underneath that says, “Lad Crusader and leader,” that might additionally help. Especially for someone like me who is the director and needs all three of those books—it would help delineate.

So it would be quicker and easier to identify which book you are picking up?

Right.

When I first got this it was somewhat intimidating to look at. I was trying to figure out where to start and how to go. But I think one of the things I’ve heard in the last couple of hours is that people are concerned about what may happen if the kids take the materials home. So I think it needs to be something very, very simple, not only for the child to follow but for the parent to follow, and the leader to follow. Very, very self-explanatory and basic so they can just walk right through it.

I would say that the Lad’s would stay away from the pen and paper activities that require actual writing of letters. I think drawing activities are better. That was the biggest problem—that my child was not going to write things.

I think at the beginning of the school-year he was against that.

Y'all mentioned the books. Are there any future concepts of the program working with the computers and change the name of the games to virtues that the kids could purchase on CD and pop it in? These kids today know how to operate the computer better than I do. That is second nature to them. If we don't latch onto that as a learning tool, we are missing the boat.

I will pass that along as your second suggestion. That is a good one. We will accept that.

Well, CD Rom in the resource kit that can be downloaded and distributed to kids is a wonderful concept because they can do things, and they will do things if they have activities they can do online. Whether it is a maze or some kind of video game, anything they can do on computer they will do. And that is at every age level.

I think it will be nice if the materials don't depend on the person buying the full resource kit. If I'm going to use this in the home I just want to buy the books, not everything else.

So you would like for there to be some options to purchasing the materials as well?

One of the things we have to remember is that whatever format this comes out in, it is going to be used probably as a principle tool for 7 or 8 years before it changes. So it's got to be complete in its own self. You cannot be relying on other things to supplement it if that is what you are going to do.

I might of lost track, so I want to make certain we have had a suggestion from everyone. The grand finale question is, and again I want to hear from everyone on this one. If you were sitting down with a person not from your church, but from another church, and maybe they had RAs or maybe they didn't at their church, what would you tell them about this material?

What I tell everybody, and I what I tell RAs is that it is a walk with Christ. That is how I explain it to my children—better than Awanas, better than anything I've ever been involved in.

And this material continues to support that?

Yes, it does.

Okay. What about others of you. If you were sitting down with another person from another church, what would you tell them about this?

I would tell them that this is a tool for the toolkit. It needs to be in there. It's not the only tool, but it's definitely a tool that needs to be in your toolkit.

Okay.

I would say that once we teach them how to become a Christian, we need to be able to go out and witness. Now we are implementing the virtues in there. I know in the closed school district every month they have the character trait of the month. They put them all on the boards. So they have collected character traits for a few years now. Now they will be able to see character traits, virtue traits at church through this program. And then the Scriptures back it up. So, now I'm hoping they can get a better understanding of what they are trying to teach them at school, from Christ' point of view. Not just because the principal says it, but because Christ said to do this. That is one thing I am looking forward to.

Okay. Someone else share. What would you tell another church?

The goal of this material, whether this specific material has accomplished it or not. We are learning values, virtues that are inherent in the program that make us great commission Christians. That make us successful adult responsible leaders and it's what sets it apart from the other program. We can all learn to read our Bibles daily, we can go into Sunday school or we can go into Awanas. This is what helps us to learn to fulfill Christ's great command. These virtues apply in every aspect of our lives. It makes you a better person, a better Christian, makes you a better servant.

I would say that it is a program that helps kids understand the character. It's giving kids a concept of discipleship. So many times in church we are guilty of converting someone and saving them, and then we let them go. The same thing can happen to kids. The kids can be led to Christ at Bible school, or whatever, and then they never develop their faith. This is a program that will allow them to do that.

So not only is it mission education, it is also discipleship.

I don't know if I can add anymore. I agree 100% with everything that has been said.

I think that we are making an effort to develop on-mission Christians that are not going to be sidelined to just church attendance, but to develop these boys into men who are out there actively serving the Lord.

I think the old advancement books and the pledge we had where we were working toward your home, your church, your community, your neighborhood, while that was a great concept, it was so broad. But I think the new concept that directs our focus toward virtues is really going to simplify the process of learning.

Okay. I've covered all my notes. Anyone else have something else they want to add?

I'm looking forward to using it.

When I mentioned earlier about the CD Rom, I'm serious about that. We ought to go to the Gameboy people and say, "can we develop a chip?"

I can see your point.

I can say something. It is not necessarily related to this material per se, and that is, coming from an Hispanic background, I did RAs for many years. For Hispanic churches you can either get RA materials from El Paso, which is written for the Latin American countries and very limited in content, or you can do what I did for many years, which is take what is in English and literally translate into Spanish and make a copy (erase the RA, and put ER). If somehow some of this material can be translated into Spanish, you guys are going to impact the largest ethnic group we have in this country. It's a sleeping giant and one day it is going to wake up. We need to strengthen mission education in our Hispanic churches, and from my personal perspective, it's lacking. I'll do my part if I can, but you guys have no idea how you can impact the Hispanic work by helping translate some of this material. Not every RA leader has the capability to translate, they are not all bilingual. I know some RA leaders that are 100% Spanish in their reading and writing. I realize this isn't really what we are related to, but I hope we just enlarge the vision and keep the vision of what we are doing.