

# “GAP YEAR” MISSION INTERNSHIP

By Matt Shields

Wisdom from the Fields, July 2022

In 2018, Awakening Lives to World Missions (ALWM) began a journey to provide a gap-year program for young adults to serve and learn in a cross-cultural setting. This program is called the Young Adult Missionary Internship. In 2020, that program was put on hold. As travel restrictions are being lifted around the world, we are working toward getting that program up and running once again.

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## What is a “Gap Year”?

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Ethan Knight, the executive director and founder of the nonprofit Gap Year Association, defines a Gap Year as “a semester or year of experiential learning, typically taken after high school and prior to beginning a career or postsecondary education, in order to deepen one's practical, professional and personal awareness.”

In the summer of 2007, my wife and I finished college and got married. A year later, in August 2008, we moved to Port Elizabeth, South Africa (now also known as Gqeberha). We were 23 years old, and we were trying to learn about who we were and what God’s calling was for us in our life together. We stayed in Port Elizabeth for approximately 11 months and served in various church ministries, such as soup kitchens and youth ministry, and volunteered at a nearby nursing home.





Matt Shields and wife with gap year group in 2008 at the Cape of Good Hope



Playing with children at daycare center in South Africa



Playing games at youth group night in South Africa

However, the greatest part of the experience was living in a different culture for a long period of time. We were half a world away from friends and family. While many people in South Africa speak English, we were quickly overwhelmed by how new and different everything was. We experienced difficult times of loneliness and homesickness, but we also had incredible experiences filled with joy. We made wonderful new friends. We saw hippos and crocodiles in their natural habitats. On one safari, we saw a lion eating a giraffe! We visited important cultural sites in South Africa and learned about the diverse and tragic history of the country.



Pastor Matt Shields and wife on safari in South Africa

The experience of living in another country for a year is hard to encapsulate in a few short sentences, but it has continued to make an impact on my life and ministry now. It is the reason I have been working with Awakening Lives to World Missions (ALWM) to develop a faith-based, Christian gap year program for young adults, especially in the LCMC and NALC. But if you are not Lutheran, you are still welcome!

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## BISA

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We have developed a relationship with the Bible Institute of South Africa (BISA) located in Kalk Bay, South Africa, off the coast of False Bay and near the city of Cape Town. Through this partnership with BISA, young adults will have safe housing on the campus, be able to interact with other young adults from South Africa daily, serve in various local ministries around the area, and even take classes if they desire. We are very excited about this partnership because of the connections BISA has to local churches and various learning opportunities on campus.



Bible Institute of South Africa in Kalk Bay

ALWM is offering two options for young adults ages 18-24 to participate in this gap year program:

### **8 Week Summer Immersion Trip**

- For students who are not ready to commit to a full year living abroad.
- Longer than a typical 10-day "mission trip" to allow for deeper learning experiences and more personal reflection.
- Easily fits into a summer break.
- Includes a week-long, in-country orientation, a one-week class at the Bible Institute of South Africa and various excursions, such as visits to historical sites and a safari.

### **12 Month Gap Year Trip**

- Focused on deeper experiences.
- Candidates for the 12-month gap year program will work with ALWM and Director Pr. Matt Shields to determine how to make this the best possible Gap Year for them as an individual.
- Guidance will be offered throughout the year to help with the ups and downs of the year.

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### **Gap Year Program Application and Information**

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Both the shorter 8 Week Immersion Trip and the 12 Month Gap Year Trip will be available starting in May of 2023. We will begin accepting applications later in 2022.

For more information, contact Pastor Matt Shields at [pastormatt@alwm.org](mailto:pastormatt@alwm.org) or visit the program website: [alwm.org/young-adult-missionary-internship](http://alwm.org/young-adult-missionary-internship)

### **About the Author**

Pastor Matt Shields is an ordained LCMC pastor currently serving a congregation in central Illinois. He grew up in the Lutheran church, the son of a pastor. He and his wife have served in South Africa twice, 2008-09 and 2014. In 2014, with their first child, they lived in northern South Africa helping to plant a church that is still thriving today. Pastor Shields is also in the Augustana District of the LCMC and serves as part of their Board of World Missions. He loves spending time with his wife and three daughters, camping, woodworking, and traveling the world. You can contact him at [pastormatt@alwm.org](mailto:pastormatt@alwm.org) or [matthew.shields07@gmail.com](mailto:matthew.shields07@gmail.com).