

The 4—14 Window
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For several years now missiologists have provided information about the 10—40 window. This geographic designation 10 degrees south and 40 degrees north of the equator is inhabited by a vast number of people groups who have yet to be reached with the gospel. General Baptists have joined the ranks of hundreds of other missionary movements in a concerted effort to make disciples, develop leaders, and grow healthy churches in the 10—40 window through our work in India, China, and the Philippines.

Christian educators and church development specialists have recently profiled another window of opportunity for the gospel. This 4—14 window, however, is not a geographic designation. The 4—14 window is a chronological, developmental window. This window identifies that children in the age bracket of 4-14 years have a 32% probability of accepting Jesus Christ as Savior. Researchers now suggest that adults 18 and over have only a 6% probability of accepting Jesus Christ as Savior.

While research into this phenomenon is recent the phenomenon itself is as old as mankind. Developmental and educational psychologists in the 20th century discovered a fact of life built into humanity from creation: children grow and mature in a developmental sequence which leads them to be sensitive to and aware of spiritual influences in their middle to late childhood. This tendency is so strong that some educators assert that what a child believes by age 13 remains relatively unchanged throughout life.

Implications of the 4—14 Window

- Preschoolers while unable to mentally or spiritually process the decision to become a believer can gain base information about God, the Bible, Jesus' sacrificial death and the church which will prepare them for a meaningful decision in their years of middle childhood. Evangelists of a previous generation referred to this as reaching an age of accountability.
- Reaching children today must be done differently. Coloring book pages and flannelgraph pictures are often not creative or interactive enough for today's students. Educational styles and classroom behaviors have changed dramatically with the introduction of computers, holistic learning and an emphasis on sensory learning through multi-media components.
- Children's ministry is an optimal time to shape a church's rising leadership. Children who learn to lead prayers, read Scripture, play in the children's worship band, take up an offering, operate a sound board or PowerPoint in children's church are better prepared to assume leadership roles in the larger ministry of the church.
- 80% of all children will not walk into a church so effective children's ministry must either go beyond the church walls or find creative means to bring students into the church. A national missionary engaged in a church plant framed the needs of today's children when she reported that a neighborhood child from a stable, middle class home asked "Why do you wear a T on your necklace?" Her own preschooler asked a similar question "Why is there a cross in the middle of the alphabet?"

A great man who knew the value of children's ministry once said "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God." Mark 10:14 KJV