

THE 4/14 WINDOW: CHILD MINISTRIES AND MISSION STRATEGY DAN BREWSTER

Cutting-edge mission groups today are making some of the most significant advances in the history of Christianity by looking closely at the 10/40 window. Here live most of the remaining people groups who have never had opportunity to hear the gospel. The concepts of the 10/40 window and people groups are among the most important innovations in missions thinking in generations. These two principles have enabled mission leaders to focus evangelism efforts in ways never before possible.

Another window, within the window, however, may be just as significant, and may enable many frontier mission efforts to be even more effective. I call that window the 4/14 window.

WHY THE 4/14 WINDOW?

In 1992 Dr. Bryant Myers, director of World Vision's MARC division, made an eye-opening presentation to the EFMA Executive Retreat. His paper painted a sobering picture of the numbers and conditions of children and youth throughout the world and noted some of the implications that this huge and often suffering people group presents to mission strategists today. He presented a stunning graphic showing that in the U.S.A. nearly 85 percent of people who make a decision for Christ, do so between the ages of 4 and 14.

The extent to which these data hold true for populations outside the U.S.A, is unclear, though there is much to suggest that they do. At the very least, however, they confirm evidence that children and young people are indeed "the world's most fruitful field."

Each time I have shared the data on this graph. I have conducted my own survey among 4-14-years-olds. My exercise has largely confirmed this incredible missiological fact, although my informal results have yielded a somewhat lower figure than Dr. Myers'—generally about 60 percent to his 85 percent.

CHILDREN AS A PEOPLE GROUP

The category "children" is, of course, much too broad to fit the normal definitions of a people group. People groups are typically defined along ethnic, geographic, habitat or social affinity lines. But such delineations have a distinct adult bias. Many distinct groups of children and young people warrant not only ministry to address their physical needs but also the attention of missiologists in development of effective mission strategies. Strategic consideration should be given, for example, to the children who have migrated to cities in search of employment or education. In the 4/14 window many children in such situations provide gateways to their people. Unfortunately, adequate attention to these groups has yet to materialize among mission strategists.

An enormous people group

The number of children in the world is reason to make us concerned about their state. Over one-third of the world's population, 1.8 billion children, are under the age of 15. One and a half billion of them—almost 85 percent—live in the Two Thirds World.

Dr. Myers used another remarkable graphic to illustrate these facts. It shows the composition of developing world societies and the astonishing fact of the huge proportion of the populations of those societies who are less than 15 years of age.

A receptive people group

Missiologists also document the reasons for apparent changes in receptivity to the gospel. The School of World Mission's shelves at Fuller Seminary are brimming with theses and dissertations exploring the reasons for resistance and receptivity. One clear and consistent factor is that people tend to be receptive when their lives are disrupted. The poor and exploited tend to be much more receptive to the gospel than those with means. No people group today has lives more disrupted by poverty and exploitation than those of children and youth.

Any review of the conditions of the world's children confirm that children are suffering, unwanted and victimized.

Suffering

For years we were told that some 40,000 children die around the world **every day**, many of them from malnutrition and preventable diseases. Thankfully, UNICEF has now reduced the annual childhood death figure to only 35,000 per day.

UNICEF's **State of the world's children 1995** indicates that considerable progress has been made in dealing with many childhood diseases over the last three years.

Malnutrition has been reduced; immunization levels are generally being maintained or increased; measles deaths are down by 80 percent compared to pre-immunization levels; large areas of the developing world, including all of the western hemisphere, have become free of polio; iodine deficiency disorders are being eliminated Such progress means that approximately 2.5 million fewer children will die in 1996 than in 1990 And it means that at least three quarters of a million fewer children each year will be disabled, blinded, crippled or mentally retarded.

Nevertheless, many challenges remain and children in many countries still face enormous risks. Those in the 4/14 window remain the most affected and vulnerable group for every kind of disease and suffering.

unwanted

We know that very many of these children are still unwanted, evidenced by the appallingly high rates of abortion, especially in the so-called developed nations.

An equally shocking and growing problem is the number of street children around the world. In August last year I saw firsthand the horror of the street children problem in Sao Paulo, Brazil. I noted the following in my personal diary.

Family abuse is extremely common here in Sao Paulo. There were 42,000 cases of abuse reported in Sao Paulo in a three-year period of time. Only 10 percent or less of abuse cases are reported which means there were nearly one-half million such cases. Many children in Brazil die of malnutrition, but may more die because they're on drugs and therefore don't eat. They die of malnutrition, but the real cause is drug addiction.

Actually, visiting where the children live was like a descent into hell . . .

We followed the leader over the railing of the bridge, hanging out over the street then slithering down a steep slope to get close so he could peek in a couple of cracks and see who was there. he told us to wait: apparently they were having sex. . . . The counselor (pastor) had a talk with the youngsters, and they invited us in. They helped us crawl through a little hole and drop down into their cave-like area beneath the bridge.

The place was unimaginably foul, the smell of urine and feces powerful. The young people had some blankets and a few possessions laid out. The amazing and beautiful thing was the relationship Suzanne Holanda, director of JEAME, has with the kids. She hugged them and talked with them, and we gathered around and prayed together.

We listened to the young people talk about harassment by the police and about their friends who are being beaten by the police We visited with these kids for half an hour, then climbed back out to the hole and onto the street below.

Victimized

We all know these are not the only problems children face. My exposure to the suffering of children during the Rwanda war was far too up-close and personal for my comfort. In three trips to Rwanda during and following the war, I personally saw countless children with limbs cut off. Wounds and scars too ghastly to describe and, invariably, horror stories of mistreatment, torture and abuse.

What happened in Rwanda in 1994 is doubtless the worst such tragedy in recent history, but sadly it is not the only place where children are victimized. Indeed, it is now clear that the very nature of warfare is changing. UNICEF notes that

at one time wars were fought between armies: but in the wars of the last decade far more children than soldiers have been killed and disabled. Over

that period, approximately 2 million children have died in wars, between 4 and 5 million have been physically disabled, more than 5 million have been forced into refugee camps and more than 12 million have been left homeless.

The needs and injustices behind such shocking statistics cry out for attention. But the net result globally is a suffering, disrupted people group which is often hungry for the touch of the gospel in their lives. Increasing numbers of traumatized children surely present significant ministry opportunities and challenges. Attention to this 4/14 window is, I believe, imperative for any missions agency serious about reaching truly receptive people in any other “window” of the world.

A FORGOTTEN PEOPLE GROUP

In light of all these factors, the relative lack of attention mission agencies give to children’s ministries is curious. What do we have to say, from a missiological standpoint, to the poorest, most numerous, most disrupted, most hurting and possibly most receptive of the world’s population groups? sadly, not much.

Overlooked in our strategy planning

At the GCOWE 95 consultation held in Seoul, Korea, the “How do we get there?” section of the planning workbooks suggested the consideration of the needs of children and youth. And yes, several of the tracks could be said to have related peripherally to children and youth. Obviously there are many millions of Chinese children, Muslim children, urban children and the like. But none of the tracks nor any of the main plenary or workshop sessions were specifically devoted to children.

Overlooked in mission literature

Similarly missions journals show a paucity of articles relating to reaching this most receptive group. A colleague of mine, Gordon Mullenix, has searched the back issues of **Evangelical Quarterly** and **Missiology** for articles on children and mission strategy. What literature exists is primarily of the how-to variety. material on Christian education, curriculum design and Sunday school programs receive attention, but strategic analysis is missing. The number of articles specifically on the subject of children and missions can probably be counted on both hands with a few fingers change.

There are a couple of notable exceptions. One is Wolfe Hansen’s article, “Young People in Young Nations—Strategic Objective” (EMQ II: Summer 1966), in which he suggested that “the time has come to make the younger generation our prime objective in evangelism. To neglect it,” Wolfe says, “would be a strategic blunder. Winning young people must be made a definite goal and be given priority in our plans.”

That observation, stated almost 30 years ago, is still true but has not been given priority in our plans.

Another of the few articles on child ministries is Jim Reapsome’s “Editor’s Analysis: Where do kids fit in mission priorities?” (EMQ 22/3: July 1985). In this editorial, Reapsome asks, “Are [children] being slighted by more majestic issues, by more serious concerns? Do we, subconsciously perhaps, look down our noses at agencies that work with children?” The answer to that question may be “yes.”

THE 4/14 WINDOW AND SOCIAL ACTION

The Great Commandment is as valid as the Great Commission. Yet the adult bias that tends to overlook children in furthering the Great Commission is common among relief and development agencies as well. This preference prevails in spite of child survival programs which many agencies use and which attract so much government funding.

UNICEF research consistently indicates that the most significant interventions for **national** development are child health and education.

Again, Compassion's experience bears out this concept. We do not say we do community development, and our funds do not assist in broad community development activities. But our child development projects, if well designed and managed, often result in better quality community development outcomes. We have found that communities can often unite around the needs of their children even though other issues are divisive. Parents will join together to make improvements to schools, water supplies and roads as a response to the challenges of their children. Thus, even if agencies set goals for doing national or community development, many would do well to look more closely at ministry to children.

CHILDREN AS COMMUNITY HEALTH AND EDUCATION RESOURCES.

National development strategies should not only look on children as recipients of health and education efforts. They should also view children as effective community health and education resources. The Child-to-Child Trust initiatives around the world recognize the role children play in dissemination of information. Children often have major responsibility for the care of their younger siblings.

We know someone who is a teacher and health worker. She looks after two children. One is four and one is two. She keeps them safe She helps them when they are sick She helps them to grow up healthy

Who is this teacher who does so much for her pupils and does it so well? She is their elder sister—and she is eleven years old.

Many development practitioners know that children play an important role in promoting change and are sources of useful information. David Drucker illustrates:

Our Jeep bumps along to a stop in a fairly isolated village. While I am talking to the village midwife, three or four hundred children, some carrying smaller ones, come to stare at me, the foreigner. I notice the doctor going among the children looking at their arms [He] tells me that he is taking this opportunity to check the immunization status of the children by looking for scars on their arms. "How long will it take you?" I ask. "Perhaps 45 minutes," he says, "but it is worth taking the time since we are here."

I persuade him to ask the children themselves each to look at the child next to him, and if there is no scar to hold up the arm. Two false starts, while the explanation is clarified and soon with a buzz of curiosity and excitement

[they] inspect each other. I say to the doctor, “From beginning to end the activity took four minutes and now we have 40 minutes saved to tell why we are looking [and] why it is important” I add, “None of these children have had any special education or spent seven years at medical school. Yet they are the experts—experts at standing next to other children and inspecting their arms.”

THE 4/14 WINDOW AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Frontier mission agencies have done all of us a great service in focusing our attention on AD 2000 and Beyond. However, while few have omitted the “Beyond” in their labels, the heavy emphasis has always been on the AD 2000. (I am personally pleased, though, to see David Barret’s AD 2000 **Global Monitor** is now **AD 2025 Global Monitor**). While I enthusiastically support all efforts to evangelize the world by AD 2000, I also applaud the longer-range view. In the push to meet the AD 2000 “deadline,” some Christians may have assumed we don’t have time to wait for young Christians to mature into their place of leadership. Looking toward AD 2000 and beyond affirms that we can still afford to grow the church.

What are our strategies for growing the leadership needed to lead the churches in 2025? A final example from our experience in Compassion suggests the potential of this approach. We were interested when Mr. Gene Davis, a researcher for the Unreached people’s Clearinghouse, told how significant our programs were in developing the leadership for the church in India. He recounted how at least 17 of our formerly sponsored children were among the evangelists who have accounted for over 6,000 people coming to Christ in a formerly unreached group. A patient approach to ministry in the 4/14 window has apparently resulted in a substantial people movement among adults—in the 10/40 window.

Certain distinctives in Compassion’s ministry make this kind of spin-off benefit possible. Among them are—

- Deliberately, exclusively and effectively working with children **through churches**, thereby helping them catch the vision for ministry to children and equipping them to do so.
- Working with **individual** children to ensure that each one has adequate opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel.
- Staying long enough to make a difference and give time for genuine Christian maturity to emerge.

Parents know it takes at least 18 years to “develop” their children. We realize that child development is a long-term proposition. But the long-term commitment, as was discovered in India and elsewhere, results in many of the children receiving enough Christian training to equip them to be serious Christian leaders.

THE 4/14 WINDOW AND UNREACHED PEOPLES

There is even much potential for reaching into unreached people areas through a strategy of focusing on meeting the needs of this most vulnerable part of virtually every people group. Dr. Danny Martin of Missions to the Unreached, now based in Singapore, told me that he would like nothing better than to have child assistance programs in each of his new churches along the southern Chinese rim. Such ministries, he says, would help consolidate and solidify the new young churches and provide a strong foundation for further church growth and outreach. More recently, missionaries working in Mongolia and other parts of China have told me the same thing. A variety of child-focused ministries could constitute a “second wave” of reinforcements for these pioneer church planters.

THE 4/14 WINDOW AND MISSION PRIORITIES

The most effective mission groups today are interested in getting into the 10/40 window. Many such groups may find the 4-14 age group—the window within the window—to be the one of the “doors” to that window. Initially, missions involved with the CoMission in the former Soviet Union found this concept true. The 4/14 window can also, of course, be key to more effective ministry to parents of that age group and other adults. But just as importantly, ministry in the 4/14 window is productive and fruitful for its own sake and for the sake of developing the Christian leadership we need for the future.

WHAT SHALL WE DO? (ACTS 2:37)

The plight of children around the world is well known to most of us, though perhaps most of us do not take time to reflect on their needs. Clearly missions, churches and development agencies must deliberately include children in any efforts to relieve human suffering and become more aggressive advocates for alleviating the suffering and exploitation of children. From a kingdom perspective, though, it is just as important for mission agencies to consider carefully the spiritual needs of children and young people, and the potential of such ministries, for fulfilling the Great Commission.

At the very least, we must agree that we cannot ignore the 4/14 window. Ignore the children now and we’ll have more difficulty reaching them later. We also must not assume that taking children and youth seriously is only someone else’s mission. Clearly, deliberate mission to children and youth represents a great potential for many mission organizations.

Finally, we should look for ways to cooperate in more effective outreaches to children and youth. The call to “Celebrate the Child” in 1997 [see information on the page following this chapter] by representatives of various child and youth ministries is one promising initiative. We might also participate together in consultations in which we explore ways, for example, to pilot test initiatives in Unreached Peoples’ areas. Joint partnerships in which we share vision, resources and responsibilities in forms of youth ministries may also be possible for some groups and in some areas.

Let’s take a closer look through this window within a window.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSIONS

- What are the implications of the 4/14 window for mission strategizing? What are the implications for your mission?
- Is there an adult bias in our “usual” mission strategizing?
If so, is that a problem.
- What are our strategies for “growing” Christian leaders for the next generation?
- What is your experience in relating child ministries to church planting and growth?
- What is your experience in child ministry as a door opener in unreached peoples initiatives?
- Are seminaries equipping and challenging students with the potential of child ministries?
- What are some ways we can cooperate in new initiatives?