

Case Studies on Stagnant or Slow LDS Growth

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Slow LDS Growth in Zambia

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Overview

Inhabited by 14.2 million, Zambia is a landlocked country located in Southern Africa. The Church has maintained a continuous presence in Zambia since 1992 but slow membership and congregational growth has occurred during most years. Cartier Tank Replica Watches

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This case study reviews the history of the Church in Zambia and identifies past church growth successes. Opportunities and challenges for future growth are analyzed. The growth and size of the Church in Zambia is compared to the Church in other nearby Southern African nations and other missionary-focused Christian denominations in Zambia. Limitations to this case study are identified and the outlook for future growth is predicted.

LDS Background

The Church established a permanent presence in Zambia during the early 1990s although missionaries visited some areas of the country during in the 1960s. The Zimbabwe Harare Mission serviced Zambia during the 1990s and 2000s. In 1993, there were 200 members and two branches. Membership totaled 500 in 1997 and 779 in 2001. In 2003, the Church organized its first branches outside of Lusaka in Kitwe, Luanshya, and Ndola and assigned missionaries to these cities. Accelerated membership growth occurred during the early and mid-2000s as membership reached 1,442 in 2004 and 2,095 in 2007. Annual membership growth rates decreased in the late 2000s and early 2010s from over 10% to as low as 4.9% in 2012. Membership reached 2,587 in 2010 and 3,044 in 2012.

The number of branches totaled three in 1999, four in 2000, five in 2002, 10 in 2003, 11 in 2006, 10 in 2009, and 12 in 2011. Within the past 15 years, the average number of members per branch ranged from as high as 259 in 2010 to as low as 119 in 2003. In 2003, the Church in Zambia organized its first district in Lusaka. In 2005, a second district was organized in Kitwe. In 2011, the Church organized the Zambia Lusaka Mission to service Zambia and Malawi and created the Zambia Lusaka Mission Branch to service members who reside outside the boundaries of ordinary branches. In the early 2010s, most branches appeared to have between 50 and 100 active members. In 2013, senior missionaries reported that district and branch presidencies in Lusaka met together to discuss what remaining qualifications needed to be met in order for the district to become a stake. Provided with the number of congregations parentheses, the Church currently maintains a presence in Lusaka (seven branches, one group), Kitwe (two branches), Ndola (one branch, one group), and Luanshya (one branch).

As of late 2013, the Church had translated materials into two indigenous languages commonly spoken in Zambia. Translations in Bemba included Gospel Principles (old edition) and the Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith whereas translations in Nyanja included Gospel Principles (old edition) and the 13 Articles of Faith.[1]

Successes

The organization of the Zambia Lusaka Mission constitutes one of the greatest church growth achievements in Zambia within the past decade. The Zimbabwe Harare Mission administered Zambia for two decades and allocated extremely limited numbers of missionaries and resources to Zambia due to distance from mission headquarters, challenges crossing international boundaries and supervising missionaries in another country, and the high administrative burden of the mission which at one

time included Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, and the northern half of Mozambique. The new mission provides the needed administrative infrastructure to support larger numbers of full-time missionaries assigned to Zambia once the Church decides to increase the missionary complement. The organization of a separate mission for Zambia also provides for a mission president to reside within the country for the first time. Increased contact with the mission president has greater potential for local leadership training and development which may facilitate the advancement of the Lusaka Zambia District into a stake within the near future.

In recent years, the Church has organized member groups in lesser-reached areas of major cities to spur growth. This approach has been responsible for the organization of all new branches since 2011 with the exception of the Zambia Lusaka Mission Branch. Organized in 2011, the Kawama Branch in the Kitwe Zambia District originally began as a member group under the Kitwe Branch. In 2011, the Church organized a member group in the Bauleni area of Lusaka. In 2013, the mission operated a member group in the Masala area of Ndola.

Opportunities

The Church in Zambia continues to operate at a small fraction of its potential. Only two of the 10 administrative provinces have an official LDS branch operating, namely Lusaka and Copperbelt. Mission leaders have expressed interest in opening additional areas of the country to missionary activity but a lack of senior missionary couples has posed a serious challenge to accomplishing this goal.

There remain several large cities that have no known LDS presence. Mission presidency members and senior missionary couples have not appeared to visit unreached cities to assess conditions for establishing an LDS presence. Five cities support populations exceeding 100,000 people yet remain totally unreached by LDS missionary efforts and official congregations, including Kabwe, Chingola, Mufulira, Livingstone, and Kasama. Utilizing the handful of senior missionary couples and scheduling mission presidency visits to these locations will be crucial toward achieving any noticeable national outreach expansion. There are likely several members and investigators who reside in these locations, presenting good opportunities for establishing a foundation of local church members and leaders that can one day operate as a member group. Holding cottage meetings and carefully planning visits by church leaders to unreached locations has good potential to attract interested individuals to meetings and instill self-sufficiency.

The Zambian population exhibits strong receptivity to Christian missionary groups and has demonstrated good receptivity to LDS outreach efforts in newly opened locations to missionary work. The Church in Zambia has historically experienced rapid growth when additional cities have opened to missionary work. Accelerated membership growth experienced between year-end 2001 and the mid-2000s coincided with the opening of three cities to missionary work in Copperbelt Province and the organization of several new branches in the Lusaka area. Previously unreached populations have exhibited good receptivity to the Church and strong to rapid growth usually follows once full-time missionaries arrive and a member group or branch begins to operate.

Most of the country's ethnolinguistic groups have appeared to never receive an LDS gospel witness. Many of these peoples will likely exhibit strong receptivity to outreach as other missionary-focused Christian groups have reported rapid growth. However, it is unclear how these groups will respond to LDS outreach once extended. The Church may achieve greater successes among some currently unreached peoples than experienced among the handful of ethnolinguistic groups that currently receive outreach if mission leaders implement more aggressive missionary and church growth strategies.

Challenges

The Church has experienced decelerated growth within the past decade as evidenced by the recent trends of several different church growth indicators. Membership growth has increased arithmetically since 2002, suggesting that the annual number of converts baptized has remained unchanged within the past decade notwithstanding the opening of additional cities to missionary activity and the formation of the first mission. Very slow or stagnant congregational growth has occurred since 2004 as the number of branches increased from 10 to 12 between 2003 and 2013 (a 20% increase over a decade). Inactivity and convert retention problems appear to have worsened as membership increased from 1,191 in 2003 to 3,044 in 2012; a 156% increase in nine years. If congregational growth rates were commensurate with membership growth rates during this period, the number of branches would have been expected to increase from 10 to 16.

Stagnant congregational growth in Lusaka since 2006 has strongly influenced national LDS growth trends. The Church in Lusaka has played and will continue to play a critical role in influencing national growth trends as the majority of the full-time missionary force, church membership, and congregations are located in Lusaka. Lusaka is the only city in Zambia with over one million inhabitants and presents many good opportunities for organizing additional congregations in order to reduce travel times, increase the penetration of LDS outreach, and spur local leadership development and a sense of LDS community. The Church has appeared to take little interest in expanding outreach in Lusaka as only one member group has opened within the past seven years. This member group continued to fall short of becoming a branch as of late 2013. The lack of progress with opening the new group may correspond to diminished interested by mission and district leaders to pursue additional church planting efforts in Lusaka and elsewhere.

No additional cities in Zambia have opened to missionary work since the early 2000s. No expansion of national outreach has

coincided with no substantial increase in the number of missionaries assigned to serve in Zambia since the organization of the Zambia Lusaka Mission in 2011. A lack of mission resources has appeared a major contributor to sluggish growth within recent years, especially a lack of senior missionary couples assigned to the mission.

The Zambia Lusaka Mission cannot solely focus its resources and vision on missionary work and church growth within Zambia as the mission also administers Malawi. Mission leadership frequently travels to Malawi to supervise missionary activity and oversee church administration. These responsibilities limit the mission's ability to concentrate on expanding missionary activity within Zambia. The Church in Malawi has experienced accelerated membership and congregational growth within recent years, requiring increased attention and resources from the mission to properly accommodate this growth.

As virtually all other missionary-focused denominations in Zambia have achieved rapid growth and report a widespread presence, the LDS Church has likely missed opportunities to reach previously receptive individuals. Many of these individuals have likely joined other churches and currently exhibit diminished interest in learning about other denominations. Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists report some of the highest percentages of members in the population among countries and dependencies in the world with a Witness and Adventist presence. These denominations have large numbers of members in Zambia due to many decades of proselytism, the self-sufficiency of these denominations in meeting their own ecclesiastical and administrative needs, and more aggressive church planting and national outreach expansion efforts.

The Church has only translated a couple of materials into two indigenous languages notwithstanding more than a dozen commonly spoken indigenous languages in Zambia. A lack of materials translated and only two indigenous languages with materials translated pose challenges for individuals with limited proficiency in English to study the gospel and develop a testimony.

Comparative Growth

The Church in Zambia has experienced slower church growth trends than most countries in Southern Africa within the past decade. Incommensurate membership and congregational growth rates occurred for the Church in Zambia during this period as membership increased by 156% whereas the number of congregations increased by 20%. Most countries in the region have experienced commensurate membership and congregational growth rates, implying steady or improving overall member activity and convert retention rates. In Zimbabwe, membership increased from 10,655 in 2002 to 23,117 in 2012 (117% increase) and the number of congregations increased from 29 to 60 (107% increase) during this period. The number of stakes in Zimbabwe increased from one to five whereas the number of districts was unchanged during this period. In Malawi, membership increased from 377 in 2002 to 1,421 in 2012 (277% increase) and the number of congregations increased from two to eight (300% increase) between 2002 and late 2013. Accelerated membership growth has occurred in recent years as annual membership growth rates surged from less than 15% for most years prior to 2010 to 25% and 23% in 2011 and 2012, respectively. In Angola, membership increased from 563 in 2002 to 1,257 in 2012 (123% increase) and the number of congregations increased from one to seven (600% increase) between 2003 and 2013. Annual membership growth rates in Angola have increased from less than 10% for most years prior to 2009 to over 10% since 2010. In Mozambique, membership increased from 1,352 in 2002 to 6,029 in 2012 (346% increase) and the number of congregations increased from seven to 21 (200% increase) during this period. Although rapid growth occurred during the first half of the 2000s, significant member activity and convert retention problems have occurred within the past decade resulting in diminished membership and congregational growth rates. In Botswana, membership increased from 1,001 in 2002 to 2,152 in 2012 (115% increase) and the number of congregations increased from three to eight during this period (167% increase).

Virtually all proselytism-focused Christian groups that report a worldwide presence have achieved substantially greater growth than the LDS Church. Zambia ranks as one of the countries with the most members for many of these denominations. Evangelicals claim approximately one-quarter of the national population.[2] Jehovah's Witnesses report a pervasive presence in Zambia. In 2012, Witnesses reported 162,370 active members, 10,090 baptisms, and 2,488 congregations.[3] There are more Witness congregations in Zambia than the LDS Church reports in any country in the world with the exception of the United States. Witnesses operate congregations that conduct worship services in 20 languages including Bemba (500+), Nyanja (300+), English (195), Silozi (87), Kikaonde (70), Chitonga (60), Lamba (28), Luvale (25), Lunda (15), Mambwe-Lungu (8), Cinamwanga (5), Nsenga (4), Zambian Sign Language (3 congregations, 4 groups), Lenje (3), Mbunda (3), Mandarin Chinese (1 congregation, 3 groups), French (1 congregation, 1 group), Chitumbuka (1 congregation), Gujarati (2 groups), and Swahili (1 group).[4] Witnesses translate proselytism materials into all of these languages as well as Lala-Bisa, and Luchazi.[5] The Seventh Day Adventist Church reports 830,000 members, 2,119 churches (large congregations), and 3,649 companies (small congregations). Adventists generally report an increase of approximately 100 congregations a year and usually baptize between 60,000 and 70,000 converts within a single year.[6] Adventists translate materials into Bemba, Kaonde, Lala-Bisa, Lamba, Lenje, Lozi, Lunda, Luvale, Nyanja, Tonga, and Tumbuka.[7] The Church of the Nazarene in Zambia reports over 36,000 members, an average of 19,700 people attending church services, and 337 congregations (117 organized [established congregations], 220 not yet organized [recently planted congregations]).[8]

Limitations

Few current missionary reports were available during the writing of this case study. No local member or church leader reports were available. The Church does not publish official statistics on the number of converts baptized per country or mission. Consequently it is unclear how many converts join the Church a year in Zambia and how these trends have changed over the years. The Church in Zambia does not publish membership figures by administrative province or city. There are no official

statistics that provide the number of members who reside in locations without a branch. The Church does not publish the location, names, and numbers of member groups. It is unclear whether any member groups currently operate in Zambia at present. The Church does not annually publish data on the number of missionaries serving per country or the number of missionaries assigned per country or mission. No official statistics on member activity and convert retention rates are available to the public.

Future Prospects

The outlook for future LDS growth in Zambia appears positive as the Church recently organized its first mission and the surge in the number of members serving full-time missions worldwide will likely result in an ultimate increase in the number of missionaries assigned to the Zambia Lusaka Mission. The organization of a separate mission in Malawi appears likely within the near future due to accelerating growth and challenges for mission leaders to effectively administer the Church and expand outreach for two separate countries simultaneously. Greater local leader and member-missionary involvement in bringing converts into the Church and heading outreach expansion efforts will be vital towards any more rapid, self-sufficient, and long-term reversal in slowing LDS growth trends experienced within the past decade. The advancement of the Lusaka Zambia District into a stake presents many good opportunities for the mission to redistribute mission resources from leadership support and preparing members for the responsibilities of a stake to opening additional cities to missionary work.

[1] store.lds.org, retrieved 19 November 2013.

[2] "Zambia," Operation World, retrieved 19 November 2013. http://www.operationworld.org/country/zamb/owtext.html

[3] "2012 Service Year Report of Jehovah's Witnesses Worldwide," jw.org

[4] "Congregation Meeting Search," jw.org, retrieved 19 November 2013. http://www.jw.org/apps/E_FRNsPnPBrTZGT

[5] "Publications," jw.org, retrieved 19 November 2013. http://www.jw.org/en/publications/

[6] "Zambia Union Conference (2004-Present)," www.adventiststatistics.org, retrieved 19 November 2013. http://adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldInstID=2253775

[7] "2013 Annual Statistical Report," sda.org, retrieved 19 November 2013. http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&ved=0CCwQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.adve

[8] "Church of the Nazarene Growth, 2002-2012," nazarene.org, retrieved 19 November 2013. http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&ved=0CDwQFjAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fnazarene.org%2Ff