

Case Studies on Analyzing Growth Trends by City or Administrative Division

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Analysis of LDS Growth in the Canary Islands

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Overview

Consisting of seven primary islands, the Canary Islands are an autonomous community of Spain located off the coast of Morocco and Western Sahara. An aboriginal people related to Berber peoples in North Africa called the Guanches inhibited the islands prior to Spanish conquest in the fifteenth century. Today most of the Canarian population descends from a mixture of the indigenous Guanches and European settlers from the Iberian Peninsula. omega replica watches

This case study reviews the history of the Church in the Canary Islands. Past church growth successes are examined and opportunities and challenges for future growth are explored. The growth of the Church in the Canary Islands is compared to other island groups in the North Atlantic and to mainland Spain and Portugal. The size and growth of other outreach-focused Christian groups is summarized. Limitations to this case study are provided and prospects for future growth are predicted.

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LDS Background

In the early 1970s, the Church baptized the first Canary Island natives in mainland Spain. In 1979, the Church baptized the first converts in the Canary Islands, assigned proselytizing missionaries for the first time, and organized a member group. In January 1980, the Church organized its first branch in the Canary Islands. In 1984, the Church organized its first district (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria) with eight branches. In 1988, the Church organized a separate mission based in the Canary Islands from a realignment of the Spain Seville and Portugal Porto Missions called the Spain Las Palmas Mission. The new mission baptized 1,000 converts within the first year of operation. In 1989, the Church organized a second district based in Santa Cruz de Tenerife with six branches. By year-end 1989, there were 1,500 members and eight branches.[1] The Church organized a third district in the Canary Islands based in Fuerteventura in 1992 or 1993. In 1993, there were 3,500 members and 18 branches.[2] In 1998, former LDS Church President Gordon B. Hinckley spoke to 775 members in the Canary Islands.[3] Returned missionaries who served in the Canary Islands during the late 1980s reported that branches in major cities such as Las Palmas had up to 100 attending church services whereas branches in smaller cities generally had fewer than 20 active members.

In 2001, there were three districts in the Canary Islands headquartered in Fuerteventura, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, and Santa Cruz de Tenerife. The Fuerteventura Spain District included two branches (Arrecife and Puerto del Rosario), the Las Palmas de Gran Canaria Spain District included eight branches (Arucas, Ciudad Alta, Galdar, Las Palmas 1st, Las Palmas 2nd, Santa Brigida, Telde, and Vecindario), and the Santa Cruz de Tenerife Spain District included six branches (Guimar, La Laguna de Tenerife, Los Cristianos, Ofra, Puerta de la Cruz, and Santa Cruz de Tenerife). The Spain Las Palmas Mission also included two mission branches (Los Llanos de Aridane and Santa Cruz de la Palma). In 2006, the Church closed the Spain Las Palmas Mission. Islands formerly covered by the mission were incorporated into missions based in mainland Portugal and Spain. The number of missionaries serving in the Canary Islands declined from as many as 120 to as few as 36 during the 2000s.

In the mid to late 2000s, the Church discontinued districts in Fuerteventura and Santa Cruz de Tenerife and closed nine branches (Arucas, Ciudad Alta, Galdar, Guimar, Las Palmas 2nd, Los Llanos de Aridane, Ofra, Puerto de la Cruz, and Santa Brigida). Missionaries reported that this massive realignment of districts and branches was in preparation to organize a stake. In 2012, there were nine branches that pertained to one district for the entire Canary Islands (Arrecife, La Laguna de Tenerife,

Las Palmas, Los Cristianos, Puerto del Rosario, Santa Cruz de la Palma, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Telde, and Vecindario). In 2013, missionaries reported that some branches had as many as 80 attending church on Sundays. In September 2013, the Las Palmas Spain Stake was organized and included six wards (Arrecife, La Laguna de Tenerife, Las Palmas, Los Cristianos, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, and Vecindario) and three branches (Puerto Del Rosario, Santa Cruz de la Palma, and Telde). Currently the Spain Madrid Mission administers the Canary Islands.

Maps displaying the locations of LDS units in the Canary Islands are available for 2001 and 2013.

Successes

The Church headquartered a mission in the Canary Islands between 1988 and 2006 and experienced rapid growth within the 1980s and early 1990s. The quick mobilization of mission resources during this period yielded explosive growth in the Canary Islands similar to the nearby Cape Verde Islands where the Church experienced comparable membership and congregational growth rates. Today the Church in the Canary Islands reports some of its most penetrating outreach in Europe as only two other countries (Portugal and the United Kingdom) exhibit higher percentages of nominal Latter-day Saints than the Canary Islands.

The organization of a stake in the Canary Islands signals progress in increasing the number of full tithe-paying Melchizedek Priesthood holders and the overall number of active members in the islands. Improved local leadership sustainability has also been essential towards the district progressing into a stake.

Opportunities

The organization of the first stake in the Canary Islands may refocus mission resources from supporting and preparing leadership and members for stake responsibilities to expanding missionary work into locations that once had branches organized and missionaries assigned and into locations that have never received LDS outreach. Most of these cities are located on Gran Canaria and Tenerife. There are six cities that once had an LDS branch but currently have no congregations organized including Arucas (36,771), Puerto de la Cruz (31,349), Gáldar (24,358), Los Llanos de Aridane (20,493), Guimar, and Santa Brigida. These locations likely continue to have scores, if not hundreds, of members on church records, presenting good opportunities for stake and mission leaders to organize member groups and reestablish an LDS presence. Prospects appear most favorable for reopening these cities to missionary activity if the organization of member groups does not detract significant numbers of active members and resources for currently operating wards and branches. Cities that have never appeared to receive LDS outreach also present good prospects for the introduction of proselytizing missionaries, cottage meetings, regularly scheduled family home evening (FHE) groups, and other church planting strategies. There are currently 13 cities that have at least 20,000 inhabitants including Santa Lucía de Tirajana (66,725), San Bartolomé de Tirajana (53,440), Adeje (42,886), La Orotava (41,552), Granadilla de Abona (41,209), Los Realejos (37,517), Ingenio (30,022), Candelaria (25,928), Tacoronte (23,623), Icod de los Vinos (23,314), Mogán (22,847), La Oliva (22,827), and Teguise (20,294). Unreached cities with the largest populations generally present the greatest opportunities for missionary work. A map displaying the location of cities in the Canary Islands and status of LDS outreach can be found here.

There are good opportunities to establish non-Spanish speaking congregations in major cities where there are sizable numbers of foreign workers and immigrants residing. International branches or member groups that conduct church services in English and provide translation assistance into additional languages and hold Sunday School classes in additional languages may be the most effective and realistic method to extend purposeful missionary efforts among the non-Spanish speaking population. Languages that may benefit from specialized outreach efforts include English, Chinese, Arabic, and Tagalog.
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Challenges

The Church has experienced very slow or stagnant growth in the Canary Islands since the mid-1990s due to mediocre member activity and convert retention rates, the population exhibiting diminished receptivity to LDS outreach, and leadership development problems. Several growth indicators illustrate these findings. The number of branches operating in the islands was unchanged between 1993 and the early 2000s. During the 2000s, the number of branches decreased by 44% notwithstanding no noticeable change in the number of nominal members in the islands. Extremely few convert baptisms appeared to occur during the 2000s as demonstrated by widespread branch consolidations and the closure of the Spain Las Palmas Mission in 2006. Missionary reports indicate that member activity rates in the Canary Islands appear dramatically lower than most areas of mainland Spain. The consolidation of all three original member districts into a single district points to member activity and local leadership development problems as there were not a sufficient number of active members, congregations, and total church members in 2013 to maintain more than one stake for the islands. Returned missionaries estimate that convert retention rates were as low as 20% in the late 1980s when the most rapid membership growth occurred and increased to as high as 50% in the mid-2000s when perhaps the fewest numbers of convert baptisms occurred.

The Church continues to strongly rely on non-European missionary manpower to staff its missionary needs in Europe, including the Canary Islands. A lack of self-sufficiency in the full-time missionary force combined with low receptivity and limited numbers of missionaries serving worldwide until the early 2010s has contributed to reduced mission resource allotment to the islands. Small numbers of Canary Island natives have regularly served missions but their numbers remain significantly less than the total

number of missionaries assigned to the islands at present.

There are several cultural and societal conditions that have reduced church growth. Most of the Canarian population exhibits strong ethnoreligious ties to Catholicism. Missionaries report frustration teaching Catholic investigators due to a lack of interest in the LDS gospel message and resistance to abandon the Catholic legacy that has endured within families for centuries. There are comparatively few adult males who express interest in the Church, get baptized, and remain sufficiently active to receive the Melchizedek Priesthood and hold a church calling. A lack of priesthood holders in many branches has contributed to active female members dating and marrying nonmembers, resulting in many female members become less-active or inactive after marriage. Many mistake LDS missionaries for Jehovah's Witnesses due to the pervasive presence of Jehovah's Witnesses in the islands. Returned missionaries report that most the population considers Latter-day Saints to be strange and views the LDS Church as incompatible with the culture of the Canary Islands and Spain.

Comparative Growth

The Church has experienced anemic membership and congregational growth in most island groups in the North Atlantic or western Mediterranean within the past decade. However, other island groups have not experienced rapid congregational decline like in the Canary Islands. In the Azores, the Church reports five branches. No branches were created or closed within the past decade but mission leaders created one new member group in 2012. In the Madeira Archipelago, the Church has maintained four branches within the past decade and has not opened or closed any branches. In the Balearic Islands, the number of branches increased from five to six within the past decade as the Church created its first branch in Ibiza. In Cape Verde, the Church experienced stagnant congregational growth and decelerated membership growth rates during the 2000s but achieved explosive membership and congregational growth in the early 2010s that resulted in the creation of the first two stakes and the opening of several islands, cities, and towns to missionary work for the first time.

The size and growth of other proselytism-focused Christian groups that operate in the Canary Islands varies. In 2013, Jehovah's Witnesses reported a pervasive presence in the Canary Islands. Witnesses reported 84 congregations that operated on six of the seven primary islands. Only Ferro does not appear to have a Witness congregation. Witnesses report conducting church services in up to 10 different languages in the Canary Islands including Arabic, Chinese, Danish, English, French, German, Russian, Spanish, Spanish Sign Language, and Tagalog.[4] In the late 2000s, evangelicals reported approximately 3,600 adherents that assembled in 75 small churches and fellowships.[5] The Seventh Day Adventist Church reports a presence in the Canary Islands but does not provide details on membership and congregation totals. Adventists appear to have a smaller presence in the Canary Islands than the LDS Church.

Limitations

There were very few reports available from missionaries currently serving in the Canary Islands during the writing of this case study. The Church does not publish information regarding member activity rates and church attendance in the Canary Islands or anywhere else. No reports were directly obtained from mission leadership regarding the specific reasons for consolidating branches during the 2000s. The Church has reported the same membership and congregational figures for the Canary Islands year after year in the Church Almanac. There have been no updated membership and congregational figures released for the Canary Islands in many years.

Future Prospects

The organization of the first stake in the Canary Islands in 2013 indicates that local leadership has matured and increased in numbers to sufficiently meet the needs to operate a stake. However the halving of the number of original congregations in the islands signals long-term member activity and leadership development problems that have resulted in a significant reduction in the scope and breadth of LDS outreach within the past decade. The creation of the new stake may permit some mission resources previously assisting local members and leaders to reach stake qualifications to become utilized for outreach expansion efforts in lesser-reached communities.

[1] "Spain," Deseret News 1991-1992 Church Almanac, p. 163

[2] "Spain," Deseret News 1995-1996 Church Almanac, p. 287

[3] "Spain," Deseret News 2013 Church Almanac, p. 567

[4] "Congregation Meeting Search," jw.org, retrieved 11 September 2013. http://www.jw.org/apps/E_FRNsPnPBrTZGT

[5] "Spain," Operation World, p. 585
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