



Case Studies on Analyzing Growth Trends by City or Administrative Division

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Analysis of LDS Growth in Santiago, Chile

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Overview

The fourth most populous metropolitan area in Spanish-speaking South America, Santiago is the capital and most populous city in Chile and had a metropolitan population of 6.8 million in late 2013.^[1] Santiago Province is located in the Santiago Metropolitan Region and includes Santiago city proper. The province is divided into 32 administrative municipalities that have a combined population of 4.98 million as of 2012.^[2] The LDS Church has experienced some of its most penetrating and rapid growth in South America within the Santiago Metropolitan area during the last 25 years of the twentieth century, but has reported decline or stagnant growth during the early twenty-first century.

This case study reviews the history of the Church in Santiago. Past church growth and missionary successes are identified and opportunities and challenges for future growth are examined. The growth of the Church in other major metropolitan areas in South America is reviewed and the size and growth trends of other missionary-focused Christian groups is summarized. Limitations to this case study are identified and prospects for future growth are predicted.

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LDS Background

In the 1950s, foreign members from the United States began relocating to Santiago in small numbers for employment purposes. In 1956, the Church organized its first branch in Santiago,^[3] the first missionaries arrived, and the first locals joined the Church.^[4] Chilean members and full-time missionaries registered the Church with the government the following year.

The Church announced a temple for Santiago in 1980 and dedicated the Santiago Chile Temple in 1983. Headquartered in Santiago, the Chile Missionary Training Center (MTC) opened in 1981^[5] and has since trained Chilean members beginning full-time missionary service. The Church organized the Chile Area with headquarters in Santiago from 1996 until 2012 when the area was consolidated with the South America South Area.

Mission Growth

In 1961, the Church organized its first mission in Santiago. However, the original mission in Santiago was later relocated to Rancagua in 2004. Provided with the current mission name in parentheses, additional missions were organized in 1977 (Santiago North), 1995 (Santiago West), 1997 (Santiago East), and 2013 (Santiago South). The number of missions headquartered in the Santiago Metropolitan Region totaled one in 1961, two in 1977, three in 1995, four in 1997, three in 2004, and four in 2013.

Stake Growth

In 1972, the Church organized its first stake in Santiago (Huelén). Additional stakes were organized in La Cisterna (1974), República (1976), Ñuñoa (1976), San Bernardo (1979), Independencia (1979), Cinco de Abril (1979), La Florida (1979), Conchali (1979), Quilicura (1980), El Bosque (1980), Zapadores (1982), Las Condes (1983), San Pablo (1983), Renca (1984),

Puente Alto (1985), San Miguel (1985), La Granja (1992), Javiera Carrera (1992), Maipú (1992), O'Higgins (1992), Vicuña Mackenna (1993), Gran Avenida (1993), La Reina (1993), Cerro Navia (1993), Jose Miguel Carrera (1994), Lo Espejo (1995), Cordillera (1995), La Bandera (1995), Los Cerrillos (1995), Lo Blanco (1995), Alicahue (1995), Las Araucarias (1995), Los Manantiales (1995), Ochagavía (1995), Lo Prado (1996), Gabriela (1996), Fermin Vivaceta (1997), Progreso (1997), Estacion Central (1997), Peñalolén (1998), San Joaquín (1998), and Olimpo (1998). The number of stakes in Santiago totaled one in 1975, 11 in 1980, 17 in 1985 and 1990, 35 in 1995, and 43 in 1998.

In the 2000s, the Church discontinued 12 stakes in Santiago. Provided with the year discontinued in parentheses, these stakes included Jose Miguel Carrera (2000), Cerro Navia (2001), Lo Prado (2001), Los Manantiales (2001), Fermin Vivaceta (2002), San Joaquín (2002), Peñalolén (2002), Lo Blanco (2002), Estacion Central (2002), La Granja (2003), Lo Espejo (2003), and Progreso (2003). The highest concentration of discontinued stakes is located in the north central areas of the city whereas the lowest concentration of discontinued stakes is located on the outskirts of the city, particularly on the north and east. There were 31 stakes in Santiago by year-end 2003. A map displaying currently functioning and discontinued stakes in the Santiago area can be found [here](#).

Congregational Growth (2001-2013)

The number of congregations sharply declined between the early 2000s and the early 2010s as the Church consolidated many small wards and branches in order to salvage local leadership manpower. The number of congregations declined from approximately 213 at year-end 2001 to approximately 150 in 2005 (a 30% decrease). The magnitude of this decline was representative of the country as a whole as the number of wards and branches nationwide declined from 850 to 607 during this period (a 29% decrease).

LDS Congregation Analysis

In late 2013, there were approximately 148 congregations within the city limits of Santiago and the average congregation included 33,600 inhabitants within its geographical boundaries. The Church extended the most penetrating outreach in La Cisterna (one unit per 16,182), El Bosque (one per 16,267), Cerrillos (one per 19,791), Conchalí (one per 20,186), and La Florida (one per 21,406). The municipality with the most Latter-day Saint wards and branches was La Florida where 17 congregations operated. The least reached municipalities with at least one ward or branch included Providencia (one per 130,808), Lo Barnechea (one per 97,230), Las Condes (one per 94,324), San Joaquín (one per 94,255), and Ñuñoa (one per 65,137). Three municipalities had only one LDS congregation (Lo Barnechea, Providencia, and San Joaquín). A map providing city district-by-district statistics on the degree of LDS outreach in Santiago can be found [here](#).

Successes

The Church in Santiago stands as a major center of strength for the Church in South America notwithstanding low member activity and poor convert retention rates. The Santiago Chile Temple was the first temple constructed in a Spanish-speaking country and was the second temple built in South America. Santiago houses one of the Church's 15 MTCs and one of the few MTCs that solely trains missionaries serving from the country where the MTC operates. Santiago has one of the largest numbers of missions headquartered in a single metropolitan area due to the Church channeling significant missionary resources into the city and the large number of nominal members in the area.

Santiago is one of the most well-reached Latin American cities by the LDS Church as at least one ward or branch is headquartered in all 32 municipalities. The average ward or branch services less than 40,000 people and nearly all people reside within a kilometer of an LDS meetinghouse. Congregations are well distributed throughout the city with little variation in the average number of members per congregation between most municipalities.

The Church has largely avoided additional congregation consolidations since 2005 despite scores of congregations closing between 2000 and 2004 and ongoing member activity and convert retention challenges. This finding suggests that the Church has regained stability in its leadership and that most congregations are self-sufficient in meeting their administrative and ecclesiastical needs.

Opportunities

There are good opportunities for the Church to extend the maximum penetration of LDS outreach within the Santiago metropolitan area due to the widespread presence of the Church. Recent focus by worldwide and regional church leaders on member-missionary participation has potential to improve the effectiveness of missionary efforts and increase convert retention rates. The Church has translated its recently launched Hastening the Work of Salvation website into Spanish and use of this website by ordinary members, full-time missionaries, ward and branch leaders, and stake and mission presidencies can reverse stagnant growth trends experienced within the past decade.

The Church in Santiago has yet to take advantage of opportunities to reach populations who do not speak Spanish as a native language. Non-Chileans have relocated to Santiago for employment purposes and may provide good opportunities for growth. Prominent immigrant or foreign ethnolinguistic groups include English-speaking North Americans, Chinese, Haitians, and Koreans. The Mapuche people are the most populous Amerindian people in Chile and many have relocated to Santiago within the past several decades. Today the Mapuche population in Santiago numbers in the tens of thousands and presents good opportunities for LDS outreach due to close proximity to mission resources and the size of the target population. Designating even a couple full-time missionary companionships to proselyte these ethnolinguistic minority groups and coordinate with mission and stake leaders to establish Sunday School classes and member groups or branches may have long-term payoffs for the Church in reaching this lesser-reached demographic.

Challenges

The Church in Santiago has experienced some of its lowest member activity and convert retention rates in the world. Perhaps as few as 10% of members on church records who reside in the Santiago metropolitan area currently attend church on a regular basis. Many wards had as few as 30 attending church on Sundays prior to the mass consolidation of wards and branches in the early 2000s. The original approach of organizing smaller congregation in order to provide new converts with leadership experience and callings^[6] ultimately resulted in serious shortages of leadership and low member activity and convert retention rates. Although individual wards currently have more active members than wards a decade earlier, there has appeared to be no increase in the number of active members in the city within this time period.

There are no indications from official statistics released by the Church, reports retrieved from local members and recently returned missionaries, and census data on religious affiliation that the Church has made any improvement in rectifying disastrously low member activity and convert retention rates within the past decade. The implementation of the Preach My Gospel missionary guide in 2004 has appeared to have made no noticeable impact on reversing convert attrition and member inactivity problems. This lack of progress appears rooted in the inconsistent implementation of the principles and teachings in the manual and a disconnect between mission and stake/ward leadership. Returned missionaries who have recently served in the Santiago area continue to report pressured approaches to quickly baptize large numbers of new converts with minimal prebaptismal preparation and little to no local member involvement. Local members indicate that a weak testimony of the Church, poor fellowshipping from local members, and inadequate prebaptismal preparation as the primary reasons for why members and new converts stop attending church. Returned missionaries indicate that the vast majority of converts baptized during the years when the greatest membership growth occurred in the 1980s and 1990s quickly fell into inactivity due to the large number of converts overwhelming the infrastructure of individual congregations. The poor quality of prebaptismal preparation for many of these converts presented another major burden for local church leaders to retain these converts and help make up the difference when these new converts did not gain a solid testimony of the Church and struggled to commit to following LDS teachings and worthiness standards. Cultural conditions have also posed challenges for the Church to instill habitual church attendance in new converts and seasoned members. Returned missionaries have observed that many self-affiliated Latter-day Saints struggle to see the point of attending church more than a couple times a year. These conditions have further exacerbated retention and inactivity problems. No increase in the number of wards and branches in the metropolitan area within the past decade substantiates recent reports on ongoing convert retention and member activity problems. The Chilean census also reported a slight decrease in the number of self-affiliated Latter-day Saints between 2002 and 2012 from 103,735 to 101,456^[7] notwithstanding the Church adding 49,744 members to its records during this 10-year period. No new stakes have been organized in Santiago since 1998, further support findings of stagnant active membership growth within the past decade.

The organization of new missions has not improved the productivity of missionary work in Santiago or successfully revitalized reactivation and convert retention efforts. Only two missions serviced the Santiago Metropolitan area between 1977 and 1995 yet 30 of the original 42 stakes were organized during this 18-year period. These findings suggest that receptivity to LDS outreach has decreased within the past two decades and that increasing numbers of full-time missionaries assigned to the area has neither improved convert retention and member activity rates nor accelerated membership and congregational growth.

Comparative Growth

In 1998, the Church in Santiago had more stakes than any other metropolitan area in the world outside of the United States. In 2013, the Church in Santiago continued to maintain one of the largest concentrations of stakes among metropolitan areas of the world but no longer had the most stakes among metropolitan areas outside the United States due to stake consolidations and steady stake growth in other metropolitan areas in Latin America. Currently only two other metropolitan areas in Latin America have more stakes than Santiago including Mexico City, Mexico (44) and Lima, Peru (42). Santiago numbers among one of the only major metropolitan areas in Latin America that has not had a new stake organized within the past decade.

Other missionary-focused Christian groups report a presence in Santiago similar in size to the LDS Church but appear to have achieved better convert retention and member activity rates as evidenced by increasing numbers of active members and a net increase in the number of congregations. Many of these denominations report slight increases in the number of active members and congregations. Jehovah's Witnesses number among the largest denominations and report approximately 230 congregations in Santiago. Witnesses also maintain a number of non-Spanish speaking congregations including speakers of Chilean Sign Language (seven congregations), Mapudungun (one congregation, one group), Mandarin Chinese (one congregation), French (one congregation), Haitian Creole (one congregation), Korean (one congregation), and Japanese (one group).^[8] Adventists report a presence slightly smaller than the LDS Church. In 2012, the Seventh Day Adventist Church reported 20,289 members, 89 congregations (large congregations), and 34 groups (small congregations) in the Metropolitan

Region. Adventists have reported slow albeit steadily increases in the numbers of members and congregations within the past decade. [9] The Church of the Nazarene reports a limited presence in Santiago and only a handful of congregations in the area. [10]

Limitations

No data is available on the precise location of discontinued wards, branches, and stakes and their previous boundaries. It is unclear how congregational growth trends have varied by administrative municipality in Santiago since 2001. Data on the number of congregations in the Santiago area was retrieved from archived maps of stakes and congregations in March Schindler's LDS Atlas and does not constitute an official source on LDS units. No data on the name, number, and location of congregations prior to 2001 was available. The Church does not publish official statistics on member activity and convert retention rates for the Church as a whole or for individual countries or administrative divisions. The Church does not publish the name, number, and location of member groups and dependent units. The Church does not publish other statistical indicators of member activity rates such as the number of temple recommend holders, the number of members serving full-time missions by country, the number of priesthood advancements by country each year, or the number of full-tithe paying members.

Future Prospects

Incommensurate membership and congregational growth in the Santiago area within the past decade continues to illustrate the deleterious effects of quick-baptismal tactics, substandard convert retention efforts, poor coordination between full-time missionaries and local church leaders, and the lack of vision held by mission and stake leaders to revitalize missionary activity and church growth. Prospects appear poor for the Church to make any significant progress in achieving consistent and sizable increases in the number of active members in the Santiago metropolitan area within the foreseeable future due to a lack of progress experienced thus far with recent changes in the worldwide missionary program. Success in reversing recent growth trends will require local church leaders to take a more proactive and consistent role in heading missionary efforts within their jurisdictions and to collaborate with full-time missionaries in finding, teaching, baptizing, retention, and reactivation efforts.

[1] "MAJOR AGGLOMERATIONS OF THE WORLD," www.citypopulation.de, retrieved 8 February 2014.
<http://www.citypopulation.de/world/Agglomerations.html>

[2] "CHILE: Santiago," www.citypopulation.de, retrieved 20 July 2013. <http://www.citypopulation.de/php/chile-santiago.php>

[3] Iverson, Steven J. "Chile," *Ensign*, Feb 1977, 44

[4] Morris, Michael R. "Chile-A Fruitful Vineyard," *Liahona*, Aug 1996, 35

[5] "Centers prepare missionaries to be 'effective instruments'," *LDS Church News*, 13 January 1990.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/19646/Centers-prepare-missionaries-to-be-effective-instruments.html>

[6] Swensen, Jason. "Sister Chilean cities rich in LDS history," *LDS Church News*, 3 June 2006.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/49047/Sister-Chilean-cities-rich-in-LDS-history.html>

[7] <http://www.cumorah.org/2013/04/07/resultados-del-censo-2012-en-chile-mormones/>

[8] "Congregation Meeting Search," [jw.org](http://www.jw.org), retrieved 9 July 2013. http://www.jw.org/apps/E_FRNsPnPBrtZGT

[9] "Metropolitan Chile Conference (1999-2011)," www.adventiststatistics.org, retrieved 9 July 2013.
http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldID=C12020

[10] "Nazarene Church Data Search," [nazarene.org](http://app.nazarene.org), retrieved 8 February 2014.
<http://app.nazarene.org/FindACHurch/results.jsp?n=&c=&y=CI&s=&z=&l=&SearchChoice=>