

Case Studies on Analyzing Growth Trends by City or Administrative Division

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Analysis of LDS Growth in Manaus, Brazil

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Overview

The most populous metropolitan area within the Brazilian Amazon Basin, Manaus ranks as the thirteenth most populous metropolitan area in Brazil with an estimated 1.98 million inhabitants as of April 2013.[1] The Portuguese founded Manaus in the seventeenth century as a fortress due to its prominent location at the confluence of the Negro and Solimões Rivers. In the mid-nineteenth century, Manaus became an official city and played an important role in the rubber trade during the 1890s and early twentieth century. Following the collapse of the rubber industry, Manaus experienced high unemployment and pervasive poverty that persisted until the late twentieth century.[2] In recent years, Manaus has evolved into an important economic and industrial center for Brazil. The population is predominantly Roman Catholic and of mixed ancestry.

This case study reviews the history of the LDS Church in Manaus and examines successes, opportunities, and challenges for future growth. A comparative growth section compares LDS growth in Manaus to other major cities in Brazil and contrasts LDS growth in Manaus to other nontraditional Christian groups. Limitations to this case study and prospects for future growth are discussed. http://www.watchpig.com/

NOTE: This analysis includes the nearby city of Manacapuru.

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LDS Background

The first LDS Church activity occurred in Manaus in 1967 but the first branch was not organized until 1978.[3] In the mid to late 1980s, one member district operated in Manaus.[4] In 1988, the first stake was organized called the Manaus Brazil Stake. In 1990, the Church organized the Brazil Manaus Mission.

Rapid membership and stake growth occurred in the 1990s and 2000s. In 1995, the Church reported that 116 men were sustained to receive the Melchizedek Priesthood in two separate stake conference meetings for the Manaus Brazil and the Manaus Brazil Rio Negro Stakes.[5] In 1996, former church president Gordon B. Hinckley predicted that the number of church members would substantially increasing in the coming years.[6] Additional stakes were organized in Manaus Rio Negro (1993), Manaus Cidade Nova (1995), Manaus Solimões (1997), Manaus Rio Amazonas (1998), Manaus Samaúma (2005), Manaus Mindu (2006), Manaus Ponta Negra (2007), and Manaus Guarany (2012). In 2012, the Church reported that there were 30,000 members in Manaus[7] indicating that approximately 1.5% of the city population was nominally LDS, or one in 66 people.

Steady congregational growth occurred in the 2000s and early 2010s.Swiss Replica Watches In 2001, the Manaus Brazil Stake had seven wards, the Manaus Brazil Cidade Nova Stake had seven wards and two branches, the Manaus Brazil Rio Amazonas Stake had six wards, the Manaus Brazil Rio Negro Stake had six wards and one branch, and the Manaus Brazil Solimões Stake had six wards and one branch. By mid-2013, the Manaus Brazil Stake had five wards, the Manaus Brazil Cidade Nova Stake had six wards, the Manaus Brazil Guarany Stake had six wards, the Manaus Brazil Mindu Stake had five wards, the Manaus Ponta Negra Stake had five wards and one branch, the Manaus Brazil Rio Amazonas Stake had six wards, the Manaus Brazil Rio Negro Stake had six wards, the Manaus Brazil Samaúma Stake had five wards, and the Manaus Solimões Stake had six wards and one branch. The total number of units increased from 36 (32 wards, 4 branches) in 2001 to 52 (50 wards, 2 branches) in mid-2013. Within the past decade, rapid congregational growth has occurred in northern areas whereas slow or stagnant growth or

congregational decline has occurred in southern areas. In 2001, the average ward or branch in Manaus serviced 39,000 people whereas in early 2013 the average ward or branch serviced 38,100 people. Maps displaying LDS units in Manaus are available for 2001 and mid-2013.

In 2007, the Church announced a temple for Manaus. Construction began in 2008 and the temple dedication occurred in 2012. Prior to the completion of the temple, church members made the arduous journey to either the Sao Paulo Brazil Temple or the Caracas Venezuela Temple in order to participate in temple ordinances.[8] In 2013, the Manaus Brazil Temple was moderately utilized as evidenced by at least four endowment sessions scheduled on Mondays through Fridays and six endowment sessions scheduled on Saturdays.[9]

Successes

The Church in Brazil has experienced some of its most rapid growth in Manaus among cities with at least one million inhabitants as evidenced by the number of congregations increasing by 44% and the number of stakes increasing from five to nine within a 12-year period. During the 2000s, the Church experienced a slowdown in membership, stake, and congregational growth in most areas of Brazil whereas the Church in Manaus reported steady increases in the number of stakes and congregations during this period. This suggests increasing numbers of active members and full-tithe-paying Melchizedek Priesthood holders.

The Church in Manaus reports one of the highest percentages of nominal membership within the general city population of major cities in Brazil. Receptivity to missionaries has been among the highest in Brazil resulting in greater ease in finding investigators than other locations with lower receptivity. The Church has allocated larger numbers of missionaries to service the city in comparison to other cities inhabited by more than one million people. This has occurred largely due to the lack of small and medium-sized cities nearby Manaus with missionaries assigned and the city population of Manaus ranking as smaller than many other major cities in the country resulting in increased saturation of LDS outreach. These conditions have generated a higher percentage of Latter-day Saints in Manaus than all other major cities in Brazil as well as more penetrating LDS outreach among the nonmember population. Currently the average ward or branch in Manaus services a population comparable in size to Spanish-speaking Latin American countries where the percentage of nominal Latter-day Saints is three to four times higher than in Brazil.

Opportunities

The formation of branches in lesser-reached areas of the city has some of the most promising prospects for growth. With perhaps a few exceptions, all wards appear to have hundreds of inactive and less-active members within their geographical boundaries. Careful coordination between mission leadership and stake leaders can help identify communities which appear most favorable for beginning cottage meetings and family home evening (FHE) groups to begin forming a sense of LDS community within targeted locations. Church leaders can form member groups in these locations that hold sacrament meeting services and Sunday School classes until active membership and leadership development becomes sufficient in numbers and strength to merit the organization of an official branch. Locations for organizing member groups and branches appear most favorable in lesser-reached neighborhoods within central and southern areas of Manaus and in areas on the peripheries of the city. Currently the Church does not operate separate wards and branches for communities on the outskirts of Manaus. Close proximity to established church centers and strong receptivity suggest that the Church could experience greater growth if member groups or branches are organized in these locations. Locations that appear favorable for future outreach include Colonia Antonio Aleixo, Puraquequara, Tarumã, and most areas on the outskirts of densely populated areas on the northern, eastern, and western sides of Manaus proper.

There are some limited opportunities for non-Portuguese language outreach among immigrant and Amerindian groups. Full-time missionaries have reported some recent successes with Haitians living in Manaus. The formation of language-specific Sunday School classes appears the most practical method for exploring prospects for outreach among these lesser-reached ethnic minority groups who speak different languages such as Spanish, Haitian-Creole, and Amerindian languages.

Challenges

Poor convert retention and low member activity rates pose the greatest barrier to church growth in Manaus. In 2012, the Church reported 30,000 members in Manaus[10] whereas the 2010 census reported 3,924 self-identified members in the entire Amazonas State; a mere 13% of the number the church reported just in Manaus. In 2012, the average stake in Manaus included approximately 3,300 members within its boundaries and the average ward or branch serviced 625 members whereas census figures indicate that the average stake included approximately 430 self-identified members and the average ward or branch included no more than 75 self-identified members. Returned missionaries report the wide implementation of quick-baptismal tactics in Manaus for many years with little local leadership involvement and member-missionary participation. Previous mission leaders have set goals to organize several new stakes within short periods of time in order to achieve real growth but many of these plans have never come to fruition due to revolving door baptismal practices. Virtually no progress occurred in increasing the saturation of LDS outreach in Manaus within the past decade as city population growth increased commensurately with the number of wards and branches. This finding is concerning due to the baptism of thousands of new converts within the past decade at a rate that has appeared to far exceed the rate of city population growth. Currently functioning stakes generally have the minimum number of wards needed to properly function as a stake and the Church has been unable to organize additional units due to member activity problems. One branch - the Cidade do Leste - briefly attained ward status in the late 2000s but was downgraded back to a branch

due to member activity and leadership development problems. Missionaries report delays in organizing additional wards and branches for similar reasons. The small number of wards in individual stakes at present makes some stakes vulnerable to consolidation if a net decrease in the number of wards occurs as a result of church leaders desiring to form wards with larger numbers of active members due to low member activity and convert retention rates.

Within the past decade, the Church in Manaus has relied on splitting wards with large numbers of active members rather than organizing small branches to achieve congregational growth. This approach has been heavily utilized in locations with high densities of Latter-day Saints in the Intermountain West of the United States but has experienced often poor results in Latin America as many congregations never reach a sufficiently large "critical mass" of active membership to create another ward from dividing large units. The organization of branches in lesser-reached areas of the city and in locations with sizable numbers of less-active and recently baptized converts may be the most appropriate method to accelerate congregational growth and ameliorate convert retention and member activity problems.

The scope of LDS outreach has decreased in some areas of Manaus within the past decade notwithstanding increasing nominal membership and net increases in the number of wards and branches. Congregational decline has occurred in southern areas of the city. During the 2000s, there appeared to be as many as four wards that were closed within the Manaus Brazil Stake alone. Ward and branch consolidations have widely occurred in other major cities of Brazil within the past decade largely due to inadequate numbers of contributing active members to staff ward and branch callings. Careful coordination between mission and stake leaders in regards to any wards or branches with few active members and that may be vulnerable to closure will be an important step to rectifying these problems and revitalizing missionary work and reactivation efforts. Increasing numbers of full-time missionaries assigned to Brazil coupled with a renewed emphasis on member-missionary participation may help address some of these ongoing problems.

Increasing secularism in Brazilian society poses a threat to dampening receptivity to the LDS Church. Past experience has taught that receptivity is a factor that can dramatically change in response to societal and cultural conditions, making mission outreach efforts time sensitive. This finding emphasizes the urgency of the Church in capitalizing on current levels of receptivity exhibited by Brazilians to nontraditional Christian groups before receptive individuals are shepherded into other denominations and interest in organized religions and personal religious practice diminish.

Comparative Growth

The Church in Manaus has achieved greater penetration of outreach than in many other cities in Brazil. The average ward or branch in Manaus services the smallest population of any metropolitan area in Brazil with at least one million inhabitants (38,100). João Pessoa ranks as the second smallest (41,100) followed by Fortaleza (41,900), Curitiba (43,900), and Maceió (48,100). The average ward or branch in seven of the 21 metropolitan areas with one million or more inhabitants services 100,000 or more inhabitants. In 2013, Manaus was the city in Brazil with the smallest population that had an LDS temple. Currently the Brazil Manaus Mission numbers among the geographically largest missions in Latin America.

Other proselytizing Christian groups report a presence in Manaus comparable in size to the LDS Church or significantly larger than the LDS Church. In mid-2013, Jehovah's Witnesses reported at least 64 congregations that meet within Manaus.[11] In 2012, the Seventh Day Adventist Church reported 177 churches and approximately 32,000 members in Manaus and portions of Amazonas State.[12] Both Adventists and Witnesses have achieved steady growth in Manaus with less reliance on nonlocal mission resources and with higher convert retention and member activity rates than the LDS Church due to higher membership standards.

Limitations

The Church does not publish official figures on member activity and convert retention rates. It is unclear how many members on church records regularly attend church services and what percentage of converts remain active one year after baptism. No data is available on the number of converts baptized a year in Manaus. There were no reports available from mission leaders and local church leaders regarding church growth and missionary efforts in Manaus.

Future Prospects

The outlook for future LDS growth in Manaus appears mixed as the population continues to exhibit high receptivity to full-time missionaries but rushed prebaptismal preparation, low levels of member-missionary participation, cultural influences that deter disciplined church attendance and personal religiosity, and a congregation-splitting approach to church growth rather than a congregation-planting approach all pose significant barriers for mission and stake leaders to overcome. The formation of several branches and member groups in each stake has potential to reverse recent stagnant growth trends of expanding outreach in Manaus but past experience suggests that this type of intervention is unlikely to be consistently implemented throughout the city. Prospects appear favorable for the organization of additional missions in the Brazilian Amazon which could help reduced the administrative burden on mission leaders in the Brazil Manaus Mission and concentrate on more efficient missionary approaches that emphasize long-term growth rather than less meaningful and often counterproductive goals for baptizing large numbers of converts with little preparation and post-baptismal fellowship. Due to the small number of wards in all nine current stakes in Manaus, no additional stakes appear likely to be organized within the foreseeable future unless congregational growth rates accelerate.

[1] "MAJOR AGGLOMERATIONS OF THE WORLD," www.citypopulation.de, 1 April 2013. http://www.citypopulation.de/world/Agglomerations.html

[2] "The History of Manaus: In Plain English," www.manaus.info, retrieved 22 June 2013. http://www.manaus.info/history-of-manaus.html

[3] Weaver, Sarah Jane. "Amazon River Basin: Faithful members fuel Church growth in Manaus," LDS Church News, 8 September 2012. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/62715/Amazon-River-Basin-Faithful-members-fuel-Church-growth-in-Manaus.html

[4] "9 missions created; world total now 221," LDS Church News, 19 March 1988. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/17973/9-missions-created-world-total-now-221.html

[5] "116 priesthood advancements in a single day," LDS Church News, 9 September 1995. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/25731/116-priesthood-advancements-in-single-day.html

[6] Hart, John L. "A touching scene in soccer stadium," LDS Church News, 23 November 1996. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/27187/A-touching-scene-in-soccer-stadium.html

[7] Weaver, Sarah Jane. "Amazon River Basin: Faithful members fuel Church growth in Manaus," LDS Church News, 8 September 2012. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/62715/Amazon-River-Basin-Faithful-members-fuel-Church-growth-in-Manaus.html

[8] Santiago, Uilson Felipe; Archibald, Linda Ritchie. "From Amazon basin to temple," LDS Church News, 13 March 1993. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/23015/From-Amazon-basin-to-temple.html

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[10] Weaver, Sarah Jane. "Amazon River Basin: Faithful members fuel Church growth in Manaus," LDS Church News, 8 September 2012. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/62715/Amazon-River-Basin-Faithful-members-fuel-Church-growth-in-Manaus.html

[11] "Congregation Meeting Search," jw.org, retrieved 20 June 2013. http://www.jw.org/apps/E_FRNsPnPBrTZGT

[12] "Central Amazon Conference," www.adventistyearbook.org, retrieved 20 June 2013. http://www.adventistyearbook.org/default.aspx?page=ViewAdmField&Year=9999&AdmFieldID=CAZA