

Case Studies on Analyzing Growth Trends by City or Administrative Division

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Analysis of LDS Growth in South East Queensland, Australia

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Overview

Queensland is an administrative state of Australia located in the northeastern portion of the country populated by 4.58 million people.[1] The majority of the state population resides in the extreme southeast portion of the state in an administrative region called South East Queensland where 3.05 million people reside. South East Queensland is generally defined as an agglomeration of 10 local government areas (LGAs) including Brisbane, Gold Coast, Ipswich, Lockyer Valley, Logan, Moreton Bay, Redland, Scenic Rim, Somerset, and Sunshine Coast. In the past couple years, population growth in Queensland has outpaced all other states and territories in Australia with the exception of Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory, growing by 1.7% between 2010 and 2011.[2] Approximately 70% of the population of Queensland (4.33 million) resides in South East Queensland.[3]

Over the past decade, the LDS Church has experienced significantly more rapid congregational and stake growth in South East Queensland than in any other region of Australia. This case study reviews the growth of the LDS Church in South East Queensland and identifies successes, opportunities, and challenges for growth. A comparative growth section compares the growth of the LDS Church in South East Queensland with other administrative divisions in Australia and contrasts the growth of the LDS Church in the region to other proselytizing Christian groups.

LDS Background

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Church began missionary work in Australia. Brisbane numbered among the first locations that were targeted by missionaries. In 1904, the Church constructed its first meetinghouse in Australia in Brisbane.[4] Little growth occurred during the first 100 years of proselytism due to emigration to the United States and low receptivity.

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The Church experienced steady congregational and stake growth over the past half century in South East Queensland. In 1960, the Church created its first stake in South East Queensland, today called the Brisbane Australia Stake. Additional stakes were organized in Eight Mile Plains (1978), Ipswich (1981), Brisbane North (1988), Gold Coast (1995), Sunshine Coast (1996), Brisbane Logan (2002), Brisbane Centenary (2007), Brisbane Cleveland (2012), and Coomera (2012). In 1973, the Church created the Australia Brisbane Mission to service Queensland. Between 2002 and 2012, the number of congregations steadily increased in South East Queensland from 39 (36 wards, 3 branches) to 53 (all wards). Maps displaying LDS congregations in South East Queensland are available for 2002 and 2012.

Active membership growth in South East Queensland has surpassed all other locations in Australia as demonstrated by steady congregational and stake growth over the past decade. In late 2012, the Church reported that South East Queensland had more Latter-day Saints on church records than any other region in Australia. Between 2002 and 2012, membership in South East Queensland increased by 64%[5] whereas total Australian church membership increased by only 26% during this period. Many, if not most, wards report between five and nine converts baptized a year. The Australia Brisbane Mission has been the highest baptizing mission in Australia for many years. In mid-2012, full-time missionaries reported that the mission had already baptized over 300 converts within six months; more converts than most Australian missions baptize in an entire year. In late 2012, the number of missionaries assigned to the Australia Brisbane Mission totaled 180 with an anticipated increase to 200 within the near future as a result of worldwide increases in the full-time missionary force attributed to the adjustment in minimum

mission age. Local members report that the current member activity rate for most congregations in the area ranges from 30-40%. The number of active members for most wards ranges between 100 and 200, with some wards reporting over 250 members attending regularly.

The Church has performed some ethnic-specific outreach that has primarily centered on organizing congregations that meet specific ethnolinguistic groups. In 2002, the Church operated three Samoan-speaking wards and one Tongan-speaking branch in South East Queensland. In late 2012, no wards or branches in South East Queensland were officially designated as non-English speaking although Samoan speakers continued to comprise a strong majority in several wards. The ethnic composition of wards and branches significantly varies in South East Queensland. Member reports indicate some wards consist almost entirely of English-speaking white Australians whereas other wards have large Polynesian and New Zealander minorities. There are many wards in the region such as in Ipswich and Coomera where 90% of active membership is Samoan or New Zealander. In the early 2010s, Chinese-specific outreach began in Brisbane. In late 2012, full-time missionaries reported plans for organizing a Mandarin-speaking branch in Brisbane but were facing challenges due to a lack of Melchizedek Priesthood holders among Mandarin-speaking membership.

Local members attribute immigration from New Zealand and Polynesia and the resettlement of Australians from other states and territories as major contributors to recent active membership growth. Many Latter-day Saint move-ins have been attracted to South East Queensland because of the mild climate and good economic opportunities. Reciprocal open borders between Australia and New Zealand have attracted many New Zealanders to Southeastern Queensland with few Australians relocating to New Zealand. Larger numbers of convert baptisms in the Australia Brisbane Mission than in other Australian missions has also contributed to recent active membership growth. Additional factors that appear to have had a smaller influence on burgeoning membership growth in the region include the recent "I'm a Mormon" media campaign and area leadership emphasizing local church leaders heading reactivation efforts.

Successes

The Church in South East Queensland has been the only region of Australia that has experienced consistent congregational growth and the creation of new stakes over the past decade. Between 1998 and 2012, four new stakes were created in South East whereas the number of stakes was unchanged in all other administrative divisions of Australia with the exception of New South Wales where the Church discontinued one stake (Sydney Australia Parramatta) in 2011. The Church has increased its percentage of active members in the population of South East Queensland over the past decade whereas the Church has not appeared to accomplish this feat in any other administrative divisions in the country. Stake and congregational growth in South East Queensland stands as a significant accomplishment for the Church in considering the population of Western Australia experienced approximately the same percentage growth as Queensland between 2001 and 2011 (24% versus 23%) yet the Church in South East Queensland reported that membership growth increased by 64% between 2002 and 2012 and the number of congregations increased by 36%. The Church has not published any membership figures specifically for Western Australia over the past decade, but the number of congregations declined from 34 to 32 between 2003 and late 2012, suggesting virtually no increase or possibly a slight decline in active membership during this period. The Church in Australia has experienced stagnant congregational growth between 1997 and late 2012 as the number of congregations increased from 282 to 290 (2.8%) notwithstanding official membership totals increasing from 96,000 to 132,400 (37.9%) between 1997 and 2011. The maturation of branches into wards, the closure of small branches, and the creation of new wards partially explains this discrepancy as the number of wards increased from 178 to 203 (25) whereas the number of branches declined from 104 to 82 (-22). However, the primary reason for incommensurate membership and congregational growth in Australia centers on low convert retention rates and mediocre member activity rates that may have decreased in some locations during this period. This has resulted in the average number of members per ward or branch increasing from 340 to 465. This finding suggests that the Church in Australia has achieved little growth in active membership nationwide during this period and that the Church in South East Queensland as been an anomaly as indicated by the creation of several new stakes and steady, ongoing congregational growth.

The Church in South East Queensland has appeared to develop more consistent member-missionary programs than elsewhere in Australia. Local members and full-time missionaries report good collaboration on teaching and baptizing new converts and reactivation efforts. Local members accompany full-time missionaries to teach all lessons to investigators in some wards resulting in improved integration and socialization of investigators and converts within their assigned congregations. Members and missionaries report that most congregations in South East Queensland have assimilated new move-ins with little difficulty. Most wards and branches have a single missionary companionship assigned, providing sufficient resources for proselytism but not oversaturating congregations with surplus missionary manpower. The Pacific Area Presidency has stressed reactivation efforts that utilize both local members and full-time missionaries such as the "15 names" program to target select less-active and inactive individuals for reactivation efforts. Brisbane is one of the only cities outside North America with a young single adult (YSA) congregation, which has been an important resource in reaching less-active and inactive YSA members and potential converts in their late teens or early twenties who are unmarried.

Congregational and stake growth has not been localized to only one or two LGAs in South East Queensland but has been widespread. Over the past decade, the Church has experienced congregational growth in six of the eight LGAs with a current LDS presence. LDS congregational growth rates surpassed population growth rates for five LGAs including Moreton Bay (100% versus 36%), Gold Coast (60% versus 33%), Logan (50% versus 21%), Brisbane (33% versus 22%), and Sunshine Coast (33% versus 28%) whereas population growth rates surpassed congregational growth rates for four LGAs including Ipswich (37% versus 29%), Lockyer Valley (25% versus 0%), Scenic Rim (23% versus -100%), and Redland (22% versus 0%).

The diverse ethnic composition of missionaries serving in the Australia Brisbane Mission has appeared to facilitate proselytism

efforts. In mid-2012, missionaries reported that only about 10% of the missionary force were Americans whereas other missionaries originated from elsewhere in Oceania and Asia. The lack of North American missionaries in Brisbane moderates public perception that the Church is an American institution principally staffed by American full-time missionaries notwithstanding the worldwide missionary force is predominantly North American.

Opportunities

The greatest opportunities for future growth exist in the most populous cities, namely the three cities in South East Australia with 100,000 or more inhabitants (Brisbane - 1.87 million, Gold Coast - 533,700, and Sunshine Coast - 209,300). The average ward within the Brisbane city limits services approximately 46,900 inhabitants whereas the average ward in Gold Coast services 66,700 inhabitants and the average ward in Sunshine Coast services 69,800 inhabitants. Maps displaying the ratio of LDS units to LGA population are available for 2002 and 2012.

There are comparatively few opportunities for growth in the 10 most populous unreached urban centers due to few inhabitants in these locations. Bongaree - Woorim is the most populous urban center without its own LDS congregation with 17,041 inhabitants but its population accounts for only one-third the population serviced by the average ward in Brisbane. Most of the remaining 10 most populous unreached cities support populations between 4,000 and 6,000 whereas lesser-reached communities within the city limits of Brisbane, Gold Coast, and Sunshine Coast may have as many as 50,000 inhabitants and no nearby LDS meetinghouse and no separate congregation that specifically services these locations. A map of the most populous unreached cities and towns can be found here.

Church planting in the lesser-reached communities of major cities provides excellent opportunities for achieving ongoing congregational growth and saturation of LDS outreach, especially if the Church creates groups and branches in these locations rather than waiting until there is a sufficient number of active members to organize a ward. Organizing small units can capitalize on the general population exhibiting good receptivity to the LDS Church, steady numbers of new move-ins, and recent reactivation successes through focus on building a ward rather than splitting a ward, which carries with it a variety of social and administrative issues.

There are good opportunities for expanding ethnic-specific outreach to additional ethnicities. The 2011 census reported that the languages with the most native speakers were English (3.68 million), Mandarin Chinese (38,118), Cantonese Chinese (22,259), Vietnamese (21,852), Italian (21,712), German (16,353), Spanish (15,601), Hindi (13,188), Japanese (13,086), and Samoan (12,809). Approximately a quarter of a million people speak other languages at home.[6] The Church recently initiated Chinese-specific outreach as Chinese speakers constitute the largest linguistic minority in South East Queensland. The Church may experience success with specialized outreach among other ethnolinguistic minority groups such as Vietnamese, Latinos and Spaniards, Indians, Samoans, and Tongans.

South Brisbane provides the greatest opportunities for reaching ethnolinguistic minority groups as it has the lowest percentage of individuals who speak English at home (69%) among the 20 census areas in Queensland. There is considerable linguistic diversity in southern Brisbane as indicated by 14% of the population speaking languages in the home other than the 10 most commonly spoken languages in Queensland.[7] LDS ethnic-specific outreach appears most favorable in locations where ethnolinguistic groups comprise the greatest percentages. For example, LDS outreach targeting Chinese speakers would appear most successful in southern Brisbane where Chinese comprise the largest percentage of the 20 census areas in Queensland (8%). Provided with the percentage of the population that speaks the language in the home, Vietnamese speakers are most concentrated in Ipswich (3.6%), Samoan speakers are most concentrated in Ipswich (1.6%), Italian speakers are most concentrated in northern Brisbane (1.3%), Hindi speakers are most concentrated in southern Brisbane (1.0%), Spanish speakers are most concentrated in the Brisbane inner city (0.9%), Japanese speakers are most concentrated in Gold Coast (0.9%), and German speakers are most concentrated in Sunshine Coast (0.6%).[8]

Challenges

Cultural and society conditions in Australia pose the greatest challenges for LDS growth in South East Queensland. Over the past century, secularism from Western Europe has spread to Australia resulting in the percentage of Australians who identify as Christian declining from 91% in 1911 to 64% in 2006.[9] Most self-identified Christians exhibit low levels of religiosity and disinterest in actively participating in a religious group. Full-time missionaries report challenges with morality as many young adults cohabitate and have children together but ultimately do not stay together and never marry. The majority of new converts in South East Queensland appear to originate from ethnolinguistic minority groups rather than from the white, native English-speaking majority.

The percentage of the population nominally affiliated with the LDS Church varies significantly by ethnicity. There is a major overrepresentation of Samoans in LDS congregations as they comprise a tiny percentage of the Queensland population (0.3%) but account for a sizable number of active members in the state perhaps as high as 10%. Ipswich is the LGA in South East Queensland with the greatest penetration of LDS outreach (one LDS unit per 19,100 inhabitants) and the LGA with the highest percentage of individuals who speak Samoan in the home (1.6%). The prominence of the LDS Church among Samoans has been a significant success for the Church in the region as Samoa is the country with the second highest percentage of nominal members in the world after Tonga. However, the disproportionate number of Samoans in LDS congregations creates ethnic integration challenges considering 99.7% of the state population is not Samoan. New Zealanders also appear significantly

overrepresented in LDS membership in Queensland. With individuals of Maori ancestry comprising the majority of Latter-day Saints in New Zealand,[10] the Church in South East Queensland has increasingly become a "Polynesian Church" rather than an "Australian Church," creating potential difficulties attracting non-Polynesians to investigate the Church and integrating native Australians into some congregations that are predominantly Polynesian.

Comparative Growth

No other administrative divisions in Australia have experienced steady congregational and stake growth other than South East Australia. Most locations have experienced a mixture of unit consolidations, branches maturing into wards, and the creation of a handful of new wards and branches resulting in no net increase in congregations. Most missions in Australia baptize less than half the number of converts baptized in the Australia Brisbane Mission. With 10 stakes, South East Queensland has more stakes than any other region in Australia. Melbourne has eight stakes whereas the Sydney conurbation has seven stakes, Perth has four stakes, and Adelaide has three stakes.

The growth of the LDS Church in South East Queensland is comparable to other outreach-oriented groups. The Seventh Day Adventist Church in southern Queensland reported approximately 11,500 members and 78 congregations at year-end 2011.[11] Adventists in southern Queensland generally baptize between 200 and 400 baptisms a year and organize one or two new congregations a year.[12] Witnesses currently operate over 200 congregations in Queensland. Witnesses operate specialized language units that service 15 languages including Mandarin Chinese (three congregations), Tagalog (one congregation, one group), Australian Sign Language (one congregation), Croatian (one congregation), Korean (one congregation), Samoan (one congregation), Spanish (one congregation), Vietnamese (one congregation), Cambodian (one group), Cantonese Chinese (one group), Fijian (one group), Greek (one group), Italian (one group), Japanese (one group), and Swahili (one group).

Limitations

Most limitations to these findings center on the lack of official LDS statistical data available for public consumption. The Church does not publish membership and congregational data on a state or territory level in Australia resulting in no official figures for membership growth in Queensland. The Church does not publish official member activity rates or sacrament attendance figures. Member activity rates and the number of convert baptisms per year were retrieved from dozens of member and returned missionary reports from the area. The Church does not publish a breakdown of language use among LDS membership for Australia. Population data and LDS congregational data do not perfectly correlate to precise dates, resulting in some error in calculating the ratio of LDS congregations to the general population. Congregational data from the early 2000s was retrieved from Marc Schindler's online atlas[13] and was not officially provided by the Church.

Future Prospects

The ongoing stream of new-move-ins originating from elsewhere in Australia, steady immigration from Polynesia and New Zealand, and sizable numbers of convert baptisms in the Australia Brisbane Mission year to year generate a favorable outlook for future LDS growth for the foreseeable future. Additional stakes may be organized once additional wards are organized. The Brisbane Australia Centenary Stake appears closest to dividing, with eight wards and steady congregational growth over the past decade. Maintaining long-term growth in Queensland will require the Church to consistently involve local members in missionary work and reactivation efforts. The diversification of proselytism efforts to specific ethnolinguistic minority groups has good potential for the Church to retain stable growth in the coming decades.

[1] "Queensland," Australia Bureau of Statistics, retrieved 12 December 2012. http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/3218.0Main%20Features62010-11?opendocument&tabname=Summa

[2] "Queensland," Australia Bureau of Statistics, retrieved 12 December 2012. http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/3218.0Main%20Features62010-11?opendocument&tabname=Summar

[3] "AUSTRALIA: Agglomerations (census population)," www.citypopulation.de, retrieved 14 December 2012. http://www.citypopulation.de/Australia-Agglo.html

[4] "Unprecedented Growth of Mormon Membership in South-East Queensland," www.mormonnewsroom.org.au, 21 November 2012. http://www.mormonnewsroom.org.au/article/unprecedented-growth-south-east-Queensland

[5] "Unprecedented Growth of Mormon Membership in South-East Queensland," www.mormonnewsroom.org.au, 21 November 2012. http://www.mormonnewsroom.org.au/article/unprecedented-growth-south-east-Queensland

[6] "Language spoken at home (a) by statistical area level 4 (SA4), Queensland, 2011," www.oest.qld.gov.au, retrieved 15 December 2012. http://www.oesr.qld.gov.au/products/tables/language-spoken-home-sa4-qld/index.php

[7] "Language spoken at home (a) by statistical area level 4 (SA4), Queensland, 2011," www.oest.qld.gov.au, retrieved 15

December 2012. http://www.oesr.qld.gov.au/products/tables/language-spoken-home-sa4-qld/index.php

[8] "Language spoken at home (a) by statistical area level 4 (SA4), Queensland, 2011," www.oest.qld.gov.au, retrieved 15 December 2012. http://www.oesr.qld.gov.au/products/tables/language-spoken-home-sa4-qld/index.php

[9] "Australia," International Religious Freedom Report 2010, 17 November 2010. http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148857.htm

[10] Britsch, R. Lanier. "Roots of Faith," Ensign, Sep 1989, 44

[11] "South Queensland Conference," www.adventistyearbook.org, retrieved 12 December 2012. http://www.adventistyearbook.org/default.aspx?page=ViewAdmField&Year=9999&AdmFieldID=SQUC

[12] "South Queensland Conference (2001-Present)," www.adventiststatistics.org, retrieved 12 December 2012. http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldID=C10445

[13] https://cumorah.com/atlas/