

Case Studies on Analyzing Growth Trends by City or Administrative Division

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Analysis of LDS Growth in Ceara State, Brazil

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Overview

Located in northeastern Brazil, Ceará State has approximately 8.5 million inhabitants who Richard Mille Replica Watches primarily reside in urban areas. Plains and hilly terrain occupy most areas and are subject to tropical climate. Fortaleza serves as a regional center of commerce and industry and is the largest city and state capital of Ceará with 2.45 million inhabitants. Other major cities include Caucaia, Juazeiro do Norte, Maracanaú, Sobral, and Crato. Within recent years, tourism has become an increasingly important industry. Multiracial Brazilians comprise the majority (63.4%) and whites constitute a large minority (33.1%).[1] Ceará ranks among the bottom quarter of Brazilian states by GDP per capita. In 2008, the GDP per capita was R$ 7,112.[2] The population is predominantly Catholic. Evangelicals comprise the largest minority.

LDS Background

In 1938, the first LDS branch in Ceará was organized in Fortaleza.[3] 43 years later, the first LDS stake was organized in Fortaleza. Seven additional stakes were organized in Ceará before 2000 in Fortaleza Montese (1983), Fortaleza West (1985), Fortaleza Bom Sucesso (1991), Fortaleza Ceará (1993), Maracanaú (1995), Fortaleza Litoral (1997), and Fortaleza South (1997). The Church organized the Brazil Fortaleza Mission in 1987. Between 2000 and 2010 eight additional stakes were organized in Fortaleza East (2005), Sobral (2006), Fortaleza Bom Jardim (2006), Caucaia (2007), Fortaleza Messejana (2008), Fortaleza Castelão (2009), Fortaleza Benfica (2010), and Pacajus (2010). The Church created a district in Aracati in 2003 with three branches but consolidated the district with the Fortaleza Brazil East Stake in 2009. The steady organization of new stakes in the late 2000s, the sizable number of stakes within the Fortaleza area, and distance from the Recife Brazil Temple appeared major factors which prompted the Church's decision to announce a temple in Fortaleza in 2009. In 2009, the Church organized the Brazil Teresina Mission from missions based in Belem and Fortaleza. In 2011, northeastern Ceará pertained to the Brazil Teresina Mission and the Brazil Fortaleza Mission comprised of the remainder of Ceará and extreme northwestern Pernambuco.

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The LDS Church in Ceará experienced rapid growth during the 2000s which surpassed nearly all other countries and Brazilian states. Between 2001 and 2011, the number of wards increased from 56 to 98 and the number of branches declined from 14 to 10. Rapid growth in the number of congregations and stakes in Ceará was limited to the Fortaleza area. Only a handful of additional cities opened to proselytism and had congregations established between 2001 and 2011 such as Baturité, Camocim, Eusebio, Pindoretama, and Russas.

Successes

The prolific congregational growth in the city of Fortaleza constitutes the greatest achievement for the LDS Church over the past decade in Ceará. Significant congregational growth occurred throughout almost the entire city. Between 2001 and 2011, only one neighborhood had its sole LDS congregation closed (Novo Maranguape); a significant achievement considering most major Brazilian cities experienced a noticeable contraction of congregations during this period. The most rapid congregational growth occurred in eastern Fortaleza where several areas originally had only one or a few congregations in 2001 but in 2011 had their own stakes with five or more wards. In 2011, the Fortaleza Brazil East Stake had five wards (Alvorada, Cidade dos Funcionarios, Eusebio, Lagoa Redonda, and Pindoretama), only one of which functioned in 2001 (Alvorada). In 2001, there were only two wards in the Messejana area (Messejana and Palmeiras) but in 2011 there were six wards which together

comprised the Fortaleza Brazil Messejana Stake (Barroso, Castelo, Fortaleza, Messejana, Palmeiras, and Sitio São João). In 2001, there were two wards and one branch in the Castelão area (Castelão, Itaperi, and Veneza). By 2011 there were seven wards in this area (Castelão, Itaperi, Jardim Castelão, Jardim União, Passaré, Serrinha, and Veneza) that were organized into their own stake. The most rapid congregational growth on the outskirts of Fortaleza and in nearby cities occurred in the present-day boundaries of the Pacajus Brazil Stake. In 2001, there were only two branches functioning in the area (Pacajus and Aracati) and by 2011 there were five wards and one branch within the boundaries of the stake (Pacajus 1st, Pacajus 2nd, Pedras, Russas, Tabajaras, and Aracati).

High receptivity, large numbers of convert baptisms, efficient use of missionary resources within Fortaleza and select cities, and vision by local and mission leaders to expand outreach within Fortaleza appear to have strongly influenced congregational growth trends over the past decade. It is unclear why congregational growth in the eastern half of Fortaleza outpaced congregational growth in western half of Fortaleza during the 2000s. Member-missionary work efforts and local leader involvement in finding, teaching, and retaining converts may have been more effective in eastern Fortaleza during this period. LDS congregations were less densely concentrated in eastern portions of the city than in the western portions in 2001 and 2011. This suggests that LDS outreach has historically been less penetrating in eastern Fortaleza and that recent growth has occurred as a result of resources allocated to capitalize on these lesser-reached populations. Increasing numbers of new member move-ins to eastern Fortaleza may also explain the disproportionate congregational growth rates between eastern and western Fortaleza, although it is unclear whether there has been any difference in the number of new move-ins between the two halves of the city. The organization of new congregations perpetuates growth as newer congregations are more likely than older congregations to baptize new converts and divide to create additional units. Disproportionate growth may be attributed to this phenomenon.

The doubling of the number of stakes from eight to 16 is a major success which illustrates that significant progress has occurred retaining male converts as a stake requires a certain number of active Melchizedek Priesthood holders to operate. Prolific congregational growth also indicates progress retaining male members as additional congregations necessitate larger priesthood leadership manpower. Leadership among Latter-day Saint women also appears to have rapidly grown and progressed during the last decade.

Opportunities

Rapid congregational growth in Fortaleza, the number of stakes in Ceará doubling within the past decade, and continued large numbers of converts joining the Church suggest that excellent opportunities await future outreach expansion into unreached cities and towns throughout the state and in lesser-reached communities and neighborhoods within and surrounding Fortaleza. The organization of the Brazil Teresina Mission in 2009 significantly reduced the geographical area previously covered by the Brazil Fortaleza Mission which also included Piaui State. A smaller geographical area reduces travel costs and times for mission leadership and if the number of missionaries assigned to the Brazil Fortaleza Mission remains constant or increases, additional cities may open for proselytism and have congregations established. There is a significant need for outreach expansion into currently unreached cities. In 2011, there were over two dozen cities in Ceará with over 20,000 inhabitants without an LDS congregation.

The development of a self-sufficient body of priesthood leadership in Fortaleza over the past decade provides unique opportunities for the Church to expand into communities without LDS congregations within and nearby Fortaleza utilizing local member and leadership resources. Communities within or nearby Fortaleza without LDS congregations which appear the most favorable for future church planting and concentrated outreach include Aquiraz Municipality (Aquiraz, Camará, Prainha), Barrocão, lesser-reached communities in Caucaia Municipality (Barra Nova, Emboaca, Pacheco, Parque Estela), Cascavel, Guaiuba, Horizonte, Itaitinga, Jabuti, the Lagoa Redonda area, Monguba, Pacatuba, Pajuçara, the Praia do Futuro area, and Sabiaguaba. Many of these communities number among the most populous locations without an LDS congregation in the Fortaleza area or are located nearby areas which have experienced rapid congregational growth since 2000. Opportunities to establish LDS congregations in the most populous unreached cities in Ceará are also favorable, including Iguatu, Itapipoca, Quixadá, Crateús, Canindé, and Quixeramobim as these cities are not too remote to assign missionaries and organize groups and branches if active members and trained priesthood holders relocate to these cities. Most of the state population resides within urban areas, reducing the need for rural outreach and providing opportunities to reach more individuals with fewer outreach centers.

The homogenous Portuguese-speaking population of Ceará simplifies missionary activity as no other language materials or language resources are needed to effectively extend outreach. The LDS Church has translated a large body of materials and all LDS scriptures into Portuguese which promotes personal testimony building, efficient church administration, and gospel scholarship. Most the population has a Christian background, making the use of developed LDS proselytism materials and approaches practical and appropriate as these resources have been developed primarily for Christian populations. The decline of the Catholic Church in Brazil facilitates growth for the LDS Church as ethno-religious ties to Catholicism have weakened yet many retain core Christian beliefs, practices, and values.

Recent increases in the number of active priesthood holders permits greater utilization of local membership for missionary activity, specifically young men. Significant opportunities exist for local leaders to organize missionary preparation classes to take advantage of large numbers of mission-aged converts who in the long run can provide additional expertise and resources for future church leadership.

Challenges

Limited numbers of full-time missionaries assigned to the Brazil Fortaleza Mission and a lack of LDS congregations in cities outside of Fortaleza are major challenges to sustaining rapid growth in Ceará. Excellent member resources are not fully utilized for church planting and outreach expansion as these tasks are traditionally assigned to full-time missionaries and mission leaders which are fewer in number and do not generate self-sufficiency. A "centers of strength" paradigm appears to be the primary cause for the absence of LDS congregations in many other cities as mission leadership have capitalized on excellent church growth conditions in Fortaleza and a few select nearby cities such as Pacajus. However this leaves the LDS Church with no infrastructure outside of Fortaleza, Juaziero do Norte, Sobral, and a few medium-sized cities. In late 2011, no LDS congregations operated between Baturité and Juaziero do Norte notwithstanding several medium-sized cities possessing populations of over 40,000 and frequent travel through the area by missionaries providing training and transferring between Fortaleza and Juaziero do Norte. In addition to following a centers-of-strength approach to church growth, an inadequate number of priesthood holders in lesser-reached and unreached cities and communities further compounds the challenge of expanding outreach and leds mission leaders to rely on full-time missionary manpower for opening additional cities.

Rapid congregational growth has occurred in many areas of Fortaleza but no increase in the number of congregations occurred in a handful of areas, notably Bom Jardim, Conjunto Ceara, Caucaia, Jose Walter, Maranguape, and Monte Castelo. Low convert retention, active members moving away from these locations, few convert baptisms, and reliance on full-time missionaries for finding, teaching, and retention may be responsible for stagnant growth in these locations. Organizing dependent branches and groups within or nearby these communities offers opportunities to start afresh notwithstanding these issues as these congregations require few leaders and resources to operate.

Significant church growth evidenced by increases in the number of wards and stakes does not paint a perfect picture for the LDS Church in Ceará. Convert retention and member activity rates present as low. Nominalism in the Catholic Church appears to have carried over to many Latter-day Saint converts who fail to develop habitual church attendance and adherence to basic LDS teachings. Rushed baptismal preparation, inconsistent baptismal standards, dependence on full-time missionaries for fellowshipping new converts, and low levels of member-missionary activity have also compromised member activity and convert retention rates in many locations. Poverty and low living standards present financial and economic self-reliance challenges for the Church to address. Low member activity rates and meager family incomes reduce the self-sufficiency of local church funds to meet financial needs for meetinghouse construction and maintenance, welfare, and missionary activity.

Comparative Growth

The growth of the LDS Church in Ceará has been unparalleled with any other Brazilian state in the 2000s as no other state experienced both a significant percentage increase and a large numerical increase in the number stakes and congregations. The Church in Rio Grande do Norte State came closest to duplicating results in Ceará State by achieving the greatest percentage growth rates for the number of stakes and congregations any Brazilian state. The number of stakes increased from two to six as two new stakes were organized in Natal, two mission branches in the Caico area were organized into a district which later matured into a stake, and the Mossoro Brazil District became a stake. The number of congregations increased by 20 from 21 to 41 between 2001 and 2011 in Rio Grande do Norte compared to the increase 36 in Ceará of during this period. Between 2001 and 2011, only São Paulo had more new stakes organized than Ceará (17); an approximately 30% increase. Fortaleza appeared to have one of the highest percentages of Latter-day Saints among Brazilian cities with over one million inhabitants. The LDS Church does not publish state or city membership numbers, but the percentage of Latter-day Saints can be ascertained by taking the ratio of stakes to city population as stakes require a certain number of members in order to function. In 2010, there was one LDS stake for approximately 189,000 inhabitants of Fortaleza. Only Curitiba appeared to have a higher percentage of members at the time as there was one LDS stake per 175,000 inhabitants. Both of these ratios are one-third of the ratio for the Church in São Paulo where average LDS stake within the city limits has approximately 560,000 inhabitants within its geographical boundaries. Most other Brazilian states possess a greater LDS presence outside their largest city than Ceará, particularly those with as high of a percentage Latter-day Saints in the population as Ceará.

Other Christian groups report impressive growth in northeastern Brazil and most appear to operate more congregations, possess a presence in more cities, and claim more active members than the LDS Church. These denominations are highly proactive in establishing congregations in additional locations and generally follow higher baptismal standards resulting in lower convert attrition rates than the LDS Church.

Future Prospects

The outlook for church growth in Ceará is favorable due to the reduction of the geographic size of the Brazil Fortaleza Mission in 2009, the ongoing organization of congregations in Fortaleza in 2011, and sustained levels of high receptivity among the general population. Prospects for growth appear most promising in Fortaleza due to its large population, sustained congregational growth, and assignment of most resources in the Brazil Fortaleza Mission. Decreasing birth rates and increasing secularism in Brazilian culture will likely reduce receptivity within the next couple decades, increasing the urgency for the LDS Church to expand into currently unreached locations to take advantage of excellent church growth conditions while they last. However due to limited numbers of Brazilian and North American members serving missions, reliance on full-time missionaries to open additional cities and towns to proselytism, and a centers-of-strength approach to missionary work, the Church will likely miss most opportunities for growth in currently unreached locations. This outlook may change if church leaders and local members initiate systematic expansion of outreach into the dozens of unreached cities in Ceará with over 10,000 inhabitants. Two stakes in Fortaleza (Fortaleza and Fortaleza Litoral) appear close to splitting in the near future.

[1] "Ceara," en.wikipedia.org, retrieved 26 October 2011. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceara

[2] "List of Brazilian states by gross domestic product," en.wikipedia.org, retrieved 26 October 2011. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Brazilian_states_by_gross_domestic_product

[3] "Brazilian 'folk hero' elected to high post," LDS Church News, 16 March 1991. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/21169/Brazilian-folk-hero-elected-to-high-post.html