



Case Studies on Analyzing Growth Trends by City or Administrative Division

>

Analysis of LDS Growth in Accra, Ghana

Author: Matt Martinich

Posted: August 13th, 2014

Overview

With approximately 4.4 million people, Accra the third most populous metropolitan area in West Africa after Lagos, Nigeria and Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire.^[1] The Church has maintained a presence in Accra for approximately 35 years and has experienced rapid growth within the past decade as evidenced by the number of stakes increasing from two to six, the number of congregations tripling, the organization of a second mission headquartered in the city, and tens of thousands of new converts baptized.

This case study reviews the history of the Church in Accra and summarizes congregational, stake, and mission growth. Congregational growth trends are analyzed by administrative district. Recent church growth and missionary successes are noted and opportunities and challenges for future growth are discussed. The growth of the Church in other major West African cities is compared to the Church in Accra. The size and growth trends of other missionary-focused Christian groups is reviewed. Limitations to this case study are identified and prospects for future growth are predicted.

NOTE: In this case study, Accra is defined as consisting of all eight municipal districts of the Greater Accra Region (Accra, Adenta, Ashaiman, Ga East, Ga West, Ledzekuku-Krowor, and Tema) and two adjacent districts in the Central Region (Awutu Senya and Gomoe East). The combined population of these 10 districts was 4.41 million according to 2010 census data.^[2]

LDS Background

Congregations

The first branches were organized in the late 1970s. In 1991, there were eight congregations in the Accra area, including five wards (Lartebiokorshie, New Town, Tema, Tesano, and Teshie) and three branches (Christiansborg, Dansoman, and Madina).^[3] At the time, the average congregation appeared to include approximately 270,000 people within its geographical boundaries. In mid-2001, there were 16 congregations that were all wards. At the time, the average congregation included approximately 180,000 people within its geographical boundaries.

//

Since year-end 2011, the Church has organized 12 new congregations in the Accra area, including the Kpone Branch (2012), Ashtown Ward (2013), Klagon Branch (2013), Trade Fair Ward (2013), Zenu Branch (2013), Amasaman Ward (2014), Anyaa Branch (2014), Buduburam 2nd Ward (2014), Gbawe Branch (2014), New Gbawe Branch (2014), New Town Branch (2014), and Sun City Ward (2014). In mid-2014, there were 54 congregations (46 wards, eight branches) in the Accra area. A map of LDS congregations in the Accra area as of late 2011 can be found [here](#), whereas a current map of LDS congregations in the Accra area can be found [here](#). In mid-2014, the average congregation included 81,700 people.

The number of congregations in the Accra area increased from eight in 1991 to 16 in 2001, 42 in 2011, and 54 in mid-2014.

Stakes

In 1991, the Church organized its first stake - today known as the Accra Ghana Adenta Stake. Additional stakes were organized

in Accra Christianborg (1997), Tema (2006), Accra Kasoa (2007), Accra Kaneshie (2012), and Accra Tesano (2012).

The number of stakes in the Accra area increased from one in 1991 to two in 1997, three in 2006, four in 2007, and six in 2012.

Missions

In 1985, the Church organized the Ghana Accra Mission from the West Africa Mission (headquartered in Lagos, Nigeria). The Ghana Accra Mission once administered all of Ghana and several additional countries, including Liberia and Sierra Leone. The geographic size of the mission has steadily shrunk as a result of the creation of additional missions in Ghana and nearby West African nations. In 2013, the Church organized a second mission in Accra (Ghana Accra West) and the two Accra missions only administered the Greater Accra and Volta Regions, and portions of the Central and Eastern Regions. In early 2014, the Ghana Accra Mission had just under 150 missionaries assigned and the Ghana Accra West Mission had 130 missionaries; 82 of whom were non-African (63%).^[4]

Temple

In 1998, the Church announced a temple for Accra. The temple was dedicated in 2004 and became the first operating temple in West Africa. In 2014, the temple appeared moderately utilized as evidenced by six endowment sessions scheduled on Tuesdays through Fridays and three endowment sessions scheduled on Saturdays.^[5]

Missionary Training Center

In 2002, the Church dedicated a missionary training center (MTC) in Accra.^[6] At the time the MTC could accommodate 104 missionaries.^[7]

Member Activity

Missionaries serving in most wards and branches report that approximately 40-60% of members on church records regularly attend church. In mid-2013, missionaries serving in the Tema Ghana Stake reported that approximately 45% of members within the stake were considered active and in some congregation this percentage was as high as 75%. Missionaries report that stake conferences and member firesides with General Authorities have been well attended.

Congregational Growth Trends by Administrative District

The Church extends its most penetrating outreach in eastern districts of the city as evidenced by congregations in these districts administering the smallest average populations within the Accra area. Adenta is the best-reached administrative district as the average congregation includes only 26,100 people. The degree of LDS outreach in Adenta is comparable to some of the better-reached Latin American and North American metropolitan areas such as Guatemala City, Guatemala; Mérida, Mexico; and Denver, Colorado. Tema ranks as the second best-reached administrative district considering the average congregation includes 40,300 people, whereas Ashaiman ranks as the third best-reached administrative district as the average congregation services 47,700 people.

Central and western districts rank among the least-reached administrative districts in the Ghana area. Accra District is the least-reached district as the average congregation includes 123,200 people within its boundaries. Awutu Senya appears the second least-reached district as only one congregation solely services this administrative district of 195,306 people, although two additional congregations include urban portions of Awutu Senya District. Neighboring Gomoa East District is the third-least reached district in the Accra area as the average congregation includes 103,500 people. However, most of the geographical area covered by Awutu Senya and Gomoa East comprises rural areas, small cities, and towns located outside of the urban agglomeration of Accra, suggesting that the average congregation likely serves a population smaller than 100,000. Nonetheless, these two districts still number among the least-reached in the metropolitan area even if populations in rural areas and cities and towns outside the urban agglomeration are omitted from the analysis.

Successes

Accra is the strongest center of strength for the LDS Church in West Africa as evidenced by the operation of one of the only two temples in the region, the number of stakes exceeding all other metropolitan areas in the region with the exception of Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire where there are the same number of stakes as in Accra, the operation of the sole MTC in the region and the Africa West Area headquarters, and a longer LDS presence than all other major West African metropolitan areas with the exception of Lagos, Nigeria. The Church in Accra has achieved this growth due to greater political stability than in most other nations in the region, a long-term missionary presence lasting for over three decades, and the city's good accessibility from outside West Africa. Accra's role as a center of strength has played a significant role in the Church's expansion and growth both within Ghana and in nearby countries, especially Liberia and Sierra Leone.

The Church has significantly increased its mission resource allocation to the Accra area within the past decade. In 2004, the Ghana Accra Mission was the sole mission that administered at least three countries (Ghana, Liberia, and Sierra Leone) with a combined population of 29 million people, whereas in 2014 there were two missions headquartered in Accra that only serviced the Accra area, the Volta Region, and portions of the Central and Eastern Regions. Currently the two Accra missions service a combined population of less than nine million. Consequently the number of full-time missionaries assigned to the Accra metropolitan area has mushroomed from what was probably as few as 20 to 30 in 2004 to likely as many as 150 to 200 by mid-2014. This major increase in mission resources and personnel allocated to the Accra has provided needed manpower for opening additional congregations and more thoroughly saturating the population with the Latter-day Saint gospel witness.

The Church in Accra has experienced strong congregational growth rates in many areas of the city, indicating increasing numbers of active members and priesthood holders capable of properly filling local leadership positions. Congregational growth has been made possible through two simultaneously occurring processes, namely congregation-splitting and congregation-planting. Stake and mission leaders have recently advocated for a congregation-planting approach to growth resulting in the creation of many new branches in lesser-reached areas. These new branches have generally begun meeting in a rented building within the geographic boundaries of the congregation. This approach to growth has been attested by branches comprising seven of the 12 new units organized in the Accra area since year-end 2011. Stake leaders have also been successful in utilizing a congregation-splitting approach to growth that organizes additional wards once the number of active members grows too large to be adequately accommodated by a single congregation. However, a congregation-splitting approach to growth is a slower process due to challenges for wards to reach the required threshold of active members and priesthood holders in order to organize an additional ward, and the lengthy approval process to split a ward into two wards that often takes many months or even years to complete.

Opportunities

There are additional opportunities for the Church to accelerate growth in many areas of Accra. Missionaries report that distance to the nearest meetinghouse is one of the greatest challenges to baptize and retain larger numbers of new converts, and to reactive less-active and inactive members. The establishment of additional congregations that meet in rented spaces or retrofitted buildings purchased by the Church has enormous potential to improve the accessibility of the Church to the population. This meetinghouse approach is more dynamic than constructing church-built meetinghouses and may be a more culturally appropriate solution to meeting local growth needs in a timely and frugal fashion. Districts that appear most favorable for future church planting efforts include Accra and Ga West according to reports from full-time missionaries regarding population receptivity and accessibility to meetinghouses.

Full-time missionary preparation for youth and mission-aged young single adults has good potential to augment the number of local members serving full-time missions. Stake and local church leaders taking the forefront in organizing missionary preparation classes and coordinating with full-time missionaries to provide youth with opportunities to accompany full-time missionaries to teaching appointments and proselytism activities will be instrumental in achieving a more self-sufficient and resource-endowed church in Accra. Missionary preparation classes have many potential benefits, including enhanced member-missionary participation among youth and young single adults, better convert retention and member activity rates, and larger numbers of potential church leaders to serve in the long-term.

The Church's Hastening the Work of Salvation website and broadcast provides additional resources and direction to members, church leaders, and full-time missionaries in improving the efficiency of missionary work. Stake, ward, and branch leaders regularly reviewing the site, implementing its principles in their congregations, and educating members on the importance of the initiative can lead to greater member-missionary zeal and productivity within the area.

Conducting specialized language outreach in indigenous African languages may be warranted to improve the compatibility of the Church with Ghanaian culture and accelerate growth. The Church does not operate language-specific congregations in the Accra area for speakers of commonly spoken African languages, namely Twi, Ga, Ewe, or Dangme. Stake leaders identifying language needs within their jurisdictions and initially organizing Sunday School classes or member groups that conduct church services in these languages appears a low-cost, effective means to assess whether there is a need for organizing language-specific congregations.

Challenges

The lack of a commensurate increase in the number of Ghanaian members serving full-time missions with the increase in the number of full-time missionaries assigned to Ghana constitutes the greatest challenge for growth. The Church has had to rely on foreign full-time missionaries to make significant gains in the number of missionaries assigned to the Accra area and today black African members constitute the minority in at least one of the Accra missions. Past experience has frequently demonstrated that full-time missionaries assigned to missions outside their world region often exhibit less concern for convert retention and the ramifications of how unretained converts become a burden on limited local church leadership and resources. A lack of convert accountability results in rushed prebaptismal preparation for the sake of meeting arbitrary baptismal goals that are more reminiscent of business quotas, and the worsening convert retention and member activity rates. The large and growing foreign missionary force currently proselytizing in Accra nonetheless demonstrates improvements in the Church redistributing missionary manpower from less-productive areas like Western Europe and eastern North America to more productive ones in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, long-term dependence on non-African missionaries to meet local missionary needs can create

self-sufficiency problems for the Church, especially if mission-aged Ghanaians do not serve missions in increasing numbers once greater numbers of youth and families join the Church. Full-time missionary service provides many benefits for local leadership development once missionaries return from their missions and continue to remain active in the Church. Continued incommensurate increases in the number of non-African full-time missionaries assigned to Accra missions versus the number of African full-time missionaries assigned to these missions will have many negative consequences for long-term growth pertaining to leadership development, self-sufficiency, member activity and convert retention rates, and member-missionary participation.

The Church experiences moderate to low member activity rates in many areas of the city. Distance to the nearest meetinghouse, rushed prebaptismal preparation, and a disconnect between the finding and retention efforts of full-time missionaries and local church leaders has contributed to activity challenges. The continued process of opening additional congregations that assemble closer to targeted populations has potential to improve member activity and convert retention rates. However, little progress will occur for the long-term if mission leaders do not maintain acceptably high convert baptismal standards and if there is not greater member-missionary participation in the investigator finding and conversion processes.

Although the Church in Accra has experienced rapid congregational and stake growth within the past decade, modest growth occurred during the first quarter century of proselytism. The amount of time that transpired from when the first branch was organized to when the Church had 16 wards in the city (~22 years) was nearly twice the amount of time it took for the number of congregations to increase from 16 in 2001 to 54 in mid-2014. Historically few mission resources allocated to the Accra area, relatively few Ghanaian members serving full-time missionaries, and reliance on full-time missionaries to bring in new converts into the Church in appreciable numbers appear responsible for slower growth during the last quarter of the twentieth century.

Comparative Growth

The Church in Accra has had a longer presence than all other major metropolitan areas in West Africa with one million or more inhabitants, and subsequently has experienced greater growth than many other locations. Accra ties with Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire as the best-reached metropolitan area in Sub-Saharan Africa with two million or more inhabitants as both cities have one LDS congregation per approximately 82-84 thousand inhabitants. However, the Church in Abidjan has experienced significantly more rapid growth than in Accra since year-end 2011 as the number of congregations in Abidjan has increased from 34 to 57; a 68% increase within less than three years, whereas the number of congregations in Accra increased from 42 to 54; a mere 29% increase. The Church in Accra has experienced significantly greater growth than in Kumasi - the second most populous metropolitan area in Ghana as the average congregation in Kumasi services a population twice the size of the average congregation in Accra. Only one stake operated in Kumasi until a second stake was created in 2013. Only four metropolitan areas in Sub-Saharan Africa with one million or more inhabitants have a more widespread LDS presence than Accra as evidenced by the average population serviced per congregation, namely Freetown, Sierra Leone (one LDS unit per 76,100), Monrovia, Liberia (one LDS unit per 66,800), Port Harcourt, Nigeria (one LDS unit per 62,300), and Benin City, Nigeria (one LDS unit per 34,900). Accra has numbered among only three metropolitan areas in Sub-Saharan Africa where the Church has had two missions headquartered in the same city. Lagos, Nigeria had two missions from 2007 to 2009 and Abidjan had a second mission organized in 2014.

The LDS Church has numbered among the more rapidly growing proselytism-focused Christian denominations in the Accra area within the past decade, although other outreach-oriented faiths have achieved significantly greater growth over the long term that totally dwarfs the LDS Church. Evangelicals number among the largest denominations and have achieved steady growth within the past century. The Seventh Day Adventist Church has maintained a continuous presence in the Accra area since the late nineteenth century and its membership constitutes approximately 1.5% of the population in southeastern Ghana.^[8] Adventists' South Ghana Conference comprises the Greater Accra and Central Regions, and a portion of the Volta Region. In 2013, Adventists reported 74,902 members, 216 churches,^[9] and approximately 300 companies (small congregations) in the South Ghana Conference.^[10] Adventists generally baptize approximately 4,000 new members and create between six and 30 new congregations a year in the South Ghana Conference.^[11] Jehovah's Witnesses appear to operate as many as 400 congregations in the Accra area^[12] and have experienced rapid growth for many years.

Limitations

The geographic boundaries of LDS congregations and administrative districts generally do not neatly overlap, resulting in challenges for accurately assessing the average number of people per ward or branch by administrative division. The Church does not publish annual, country-by-country data on the number of convert baptisms, the number of members serving full-time missions, the number of full-time missionaries assigned, or the increase of children of record. No data is available to the public regarding official LDS statistics on member activity and convert retention rates. The Church does not report an official list of its member groups by country or for the entire world. Consequently member groups may operate in Accra that are not reported in this case study. The Church in Ghana does not publish a breakdown of its membership by administrative division.

Future Prospects

The outlook for future growth in Accra appears positive as the Church has significantly increased its missionary manpower and mission resources allocated to the city, stake and mission leaders have implemented a combination of a congregation-planting and congregation-splitting approach to growth, and the population continues to exhibit good receptivity to LDS outreach. Additional wards and branches will likely continue to be organized on a regular basis, and the creation of more stakes appears

favorable within the next five years. Long-term success in maintaining rapid congregational growth will require mission and stake leaders to continue congregation-planting tactics, larger numbers of Ghanaian members serving full-time missions, greater member-missionary participation, and the consistent maintenance of acceptably high convert baptismal standards between successive mission presidents. Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire may overshadow Accra as the largest center of strength in West Africa in regards to the size of the Church, self-sufficiency, and resource availability due to more rapid growth on essentially all church growth indicators.

[1] "MAJOR AGGLOMERATIONS OF THE WORLD," [www.citypopulation.de](http://www.citypopulation.de/world/Agglomerations.html), retrieved 5 June 2014.
<http://www.citypopulation.de/world/Agglomerations.html>

[2] "GHANA: Administrative Division," [www.citypopulation.de](http://www.citypopulation.de/php/ghana-admin.php), retrieved 6 June 2014.
<http://www.citypopulation.de/php/ghana-admin.php>

[3] "New stake presidencies," LDS Church News, 24 August 1991.
<http://www.ldschurchnewsarchive.com/articles/20885/New-stake-presidencies.html>

[4] Stack, Peggy Fletcher. "Why Mormonism, U.S.-born faiths are growing in Ghana," The Salt Lake Tribune, 30 May 2014.
<http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/news/58004010-78/ghana-church-says-lds.html.csp>

[5] "Accra Ghana," Temples - Lds.org, retrieved 6 June 2014. <https://www.lds.org/church/temples/accra-ghana>

[6] "Ghana MTC: About," Missionary Training Centers - Lds.org, retrieved 6 June 2014.
<https://www.lds.org/callings/missionary/missionary-training-centers/ghana/about?lang=eng>

[7] Stahle, Shaun D. "First 54 missionaries enter first training center in Africa," LDS Church News, 25 May 2002.
<http://www.ldschurchnewsarchive.com/articles/41860/First-54-missionaries-enter-first-training-center-in-Africa.html>

[8] "South Ghana Conference," www.adventistyearbook.org, retrieved 6 June 2014.
<http://www.adventistyearbook.org/default.aspx?page=ViewAdmField&Year=9999&AdmFieldID=SGHC>

[9] "South Ghana Conference," www.adventistyearbook.org, retrieved 6 June 2014.
<http://www.adventistyearbook.org/default.aspx?page=ViewAdmField&Year=9999&AdmFieldID=SGHC>

[10] "South Ghana Conference (2000-Present)," www.adventiststatistics.org, retrieved 6 June 2014.
http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldID=C10423

[11] "South Ghana Conference (2000-Present)," www.adventiststatistics.org, retrieved 6 June 2014.
http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldID=C10423

[12] "Finding a Meeting of Jehovah's Witnesses," [jw.org](http://www.jw.org), retrieved 6 June 2014. http://www.jw.org/apps/E_FRNsPnPBrTZGT