

Case Studies on Analyzing Growth Trends by City or Administrative Division

>

Analysis of LDS Growth in San Jose, Costa Rica

Author: Matt Martinich

Posted: March 16th, 2015

Overview

San Jose is the national capital and most populous metropolitan area in Costa Rica. The estimated population of San Jose was 1.82 million as of early 2015.[1] Approximately 40% of the national population resides in the San Jose metropolitan area. The LDS Church has maintained a presence in San Jose since the establishment of the first branch in 1950.[2] Although several notable church growth developments have occurred within the past six decades, the Church in San Jose has a more limited presence than other major metropolitan areas in Central America.

This best replica watches case study reviews the history of the Church in San Jose. Church growth successes are discussed. Opportunities and challenges for future growth are analyzed. LDS growth in other major Central American metropolitan areas is compared to LDS growth in San Jose. The size and growth trends of other missionary-focused Christian groups that operate in San Jose are summarized. Limitations to this case study are identified and prospects for future growth are predicted.

NOTE: The use of "San Jose" in this case study refers to the entire San Jose metropolitan area unless otherwise specified.

LDS Background

Costa Rica was assigned to the Central American Mission in 1952. The headquarters of the Central American Mission were eventually relocated to San Jose and the mission was renamed the Costa Rica San Jose Mission. The Church organized its first stake in San Jose in 1977 (San Jose Los Yoses). Additional stakes located in the San Jose area were organized in 1978 (San Jose La Sabana), 1990 (Alajuela), 1991 (San Jose La Paz), 1999 (San Jose Toyopan), and 2013 (Heredia). The number of stakes increased from one in 1977 to two in 1980, three in 1990, five in 2000, and six in 2013.

The Church announced a temple in San Jose in 1999 and dedicated the temple in 2000. In 2015, the temple scheduled four endowment sessions on Wednesdays and Saturdays and two endowment sessions on Thursdays and Fridays. No endowment sessions were scheduled on Tuesdays.

//

The Church in San Jose reported 45 congregations (34 wards, 12 branches) in early 2002 and 43 congregations (37 wards, 6 branches) in 2014. Congregations discontinued during the early 2010s included the Bri-Bri Ward (2011), Los Lagos Ward (2011), Porvenir Ward (2012), Zapote Ward (2012), and La Aurora Ward (2012). New congregations organized during the early 2010s included the San Francisco Ward (2012) and San Diego Ward (2014). In January 2015, the Church announced the creation of a second mission in San Jose called the Costa Rica San Jose West Mission.[3] The average ward or branch included approximately 42,300 people in 2014. In 2014, approximately 17-20% of the national population appeared to regularly attend church.

A map displaying the location of LDS congregations in the San Jose metropolitan area can be found here.

Successes

The Church has maintained a presence in San José longer than most metropolitan areas in Latin America. Despite significant inactivity problems, the Church has a small core of active members capable of supporting a temple and six stakes. Dozens of meetinghouses operate throughout the city. The Church organized a new stake within the past decade despite stagnant congregational growth, suggesting some improvements with augmenting the number of active, full-tithe paying Melchizedek Priesthood holders. The organization of a new ward in 2014 may signal the beginning of a reversal to the trend of stagnant growth and congregational decline that has persisted for over a decade.

The geographic distribution of LDS congregations within the San Jose metropolitan area appears more equal than other metropolitan areas within Central America. Consequently the Church has established meetinghouses easily accessible to most of the population. The Church also operates congregations in many suburban areas of the metropolitan area whereas the Church in other metropolitan areas in Central America has often maintained a more limited presence in suburban areas than urban areas.

Opportunities

The organization of a second mission to service Costa Rica presents good opportunities for additional missionary manpower to be allocated to San Jose. The Costa Rica San Jose Mission has continued to report hundreds AWS Code Download of convert baptisms a year and missionaries indicate that receptivity remains good in many areas of San Jose. Many communities within the metropolitan area are lesser-reached by the Church. The organization of congregations in these communities appears an effective approach to reactive less-active members and spur greater leadership development. Coordination with stake leaders and mission leadership to identify communities most favorable for the establishment of member groups or branches and the assignment of a missionary companionship to help facilitate church planting efforts has good potential to achieve real growth. The organization of a second mission may also improve the efficiency of efforts to augment the number of active members in wards in order to organize additional congregations.

The Church has yet to organize congregations that conduct worship services in other languages. There is no English-speaking branch or ward in the San Jose metropolitan area despite a sizable number of foreigners from the United States. The establishment of an English-speak branch to service the entire metropolitan area may be effective to help better reach this subset of the population. The organization of member groups or English-speaking Sunday School classes in wards with multiple English-speaking members or investigators may also be an appropriate tactic to reach the population and conserve mission resources. Other languages that appear in need of LDS outreach include Costa Rican Sign Language and Mandarin Chinese.

Challenges

The Church has experienced virtually no change in the number of congregations within San José during the past 12 years notwithstanding steady increases in the number of members on church records. The metropolitan area population appeared to increase by as many as 100,000 people during this period, suggesting that the Church has experienced a slight decrease in the scope of its outreach within the city during this period. Rushed prebaptismal preparation, poor coordination between full-time missionaries and local church leaders, and casual societal and cultural attitudes regarding church attendance and participation appear responsible for the lack of progress within the past decade. Four-fifths of Latter-day Saints who reside in San Jose appear to be less-active or inactive, creating challenges for local members to effectively reactive such a large number of members. Most inactive members likely experienced little or no meaningful Church attendance. Consequently reactivation efforts experience limited success. Church leaders have appeared focused on a church-splitting approach rather than a church-planting approach to growth within the past decade. This has resulted in many congregations being unable to reach the arbitrary number of active members needed to split large wards to organize additional congregations.

The San Jose Costa Rica Temple has appeared one of the least utilized temples constructed by the Church in Latin America. The temple has typically been open four days a week whereas most temples in major metropolitan areas are open five days a week. The number of sessions scheduled a day has also been significantly less than other temples in the region as the busiest days have only four sessions scheduled. To contrast, the Panama City Panama Temple was open five days a week and scheduled four endowment sessions on four of these days, the Tegucigalpa Honduras Temple scheduled six endowment sessions five days a week, the San Salvador El Salvador Temple scheduled eight endowment sessions five days a week, the Quetzaltenango Guatemala Temple scheduled at least six endowment sessions a day five days a week, and the Guatemala City Guatemala Temple scheduled eight endowment sessions a day Tuesdays through Fridays and 13 endowment sessions on Saturdays.[4] Poor utilization of the San Jose Costa Rica Temple indicates problems with member activity, convert retention, and the self-sufficiency of the overall church in the area.

Comparative Growth

San Jose has the smallest LDS presence among Central American metropolitan areas with one million or more inhabitants notwithstanding the establishment of an LDS presence in all the most populous Central American metropolitan areas during the 1940s and 1950s. The average ward or branch in San Jose includes over 42,000 people within its boundaries whereas the average ward or branch services 35,500 in San Salvador, 34,600 in Panama City, 32,800 in Managua, 23,600 in Guatemala City, and 16,700 in Tegucigalpa. The percentage of Latter-day Saints in the city population (~1.2%) appears to be half the percentage of Latter-day Saints in the Central American city with the second lowest percentage of members in the population (Panama City and San Salvador; ~2.0%). Congregational growth trends in San Jose have been similar to most major Central

American cities within the past 15 years.

Most missionary-focused Christian groups with a worldwide presence maintain a more widespread presence in San Jose than the LDS Church. The Seventh-Day Adventist Church operates a pervasive presence in San Jose. In 2014, Adventists appeared to operate as many as 100 congregations within the San Jose metropolitan area.[5] Jehovah's Witnesses maintain a pervasive presence in San Jose and operate congregations to service many different people groups. Witnesses report approximately 140 congregations in San Jose that hold worship services in Spanish, English, Costa Rican Sign Language, German, and Mandarin Chinese.[6] The Church of the Nazarene operates a limited presence in San Jose. There appeared to be approximately a dozen congregations in the San Jose area as of early 2015.[7]

Limitations

Many reports from mission presidents, senior missionary couples, and young, full-time missionaries were utilized during the writing of this case study. However, no reports were available from local members or church leaders. The Church does not publish a breakdown of its membership by major city or administrative division for Costa Rica. Consequently official statistics on the number of members currently residing in the San Jose area and trends in membership growth within the city are unavailable. Stake-by-stake or country-by-country data on the number of members serving full-time missions, the number of full-time missionaries assigned, or the number of converts baptized were unavailable. No statistics on member activity or convert retention rates are published for worldwide church membership or individual countries. No geospatial analysis that examined city district population figures was conducted. Details regarding reasons for the closure of specific wards or branches within San Jose were unavailable during the writing of this case study.

Future Prospects

The outlook for LDS growth in San Jose appears mixed within the foreseeable future. The organization of a second mission in 2015, the creation of a new ward in 2014, and the population exhibiting good receptivity to LDS outreach indicate that there are ongoing opportunities for growth. However, inactivity problems, rushed prebaptismal preparation, a church-splitting approach to growth, and coordination problems between mission and stake leadership continue to pose challenges for greater growth. The Church may organized additional stakes within the San Jose area if additional congregations are organized due to multiple stakes approaching the needed number of congregation to divide stakes.

[1] "Major Agglomerations of the World," www.citypopulation.de, retrieved 20 January 2015. http://www.citypopulation.de/world/Agglomerations.html

[2] "Costa Rica," www.mormonnewsroom.org, retrieved 20 January 2015. http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/facts-and-statistics/country/costa-rica/

[3] Lloyd, Scott R. "LDS Church announces 11 new missions , 2015 mission president assignments," LDS Church News, 9 January 2015. http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865619186/Creation-of-11-new-missions-indicates-the-work-continues-apace.html?pg=all

[4] https://www.lds.org/church/temples, retrieved 20 January 2015. NFPA Standards For Sale

[5] "South Central American Union Mission (2003-Present)," adventiststatistics.org, retrieved 20 January 2015. http://adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldInstID=2553511

[6] "Find a Meeting of Jehovah's Witnesses," jw.org, retrieved 20 January 2015. http://www.jw.org/apps/E_YBBXHC

[7] "Nazarene Church Data Search," nazarene.org, retrieved 20 January 2015. http://app.nazarene.org/FindAChurch/results.jsp?y=CS&p=2