

Case Studies on Recent LDS Missionary and Church Growth Successes

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LDS Outreach among Christians in Pakistan

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Overview

The LDS Church in Pakistan has extended passive missionary outreach among Christians for at least two decades notwithstanding Christians comprising less than two percent of the national population and significant restrictions on religious freedom. During this period the Church has achieved steady growth and improved self-sufficiency in meeting its missionary and leadership needs. Notwithstanding this progress, there remain many more opportunities for growth among the Pakistani Christian population.

This case study provides a brief history of the Church in Pakistan and a summary of Pakistani Christian population characteristics. Past church growth and missionary successes are identified and opportunities and challenges for future growth are analyzed. The growth of the Church in other South Asian countries is compared to Pakistan and the size and growth of other missionary-minded Christian groups that operate in Pakistan is summarized. Limitations to this case study are identified and prospects for future growth are predicted.

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LDS Background

In 1993, the Church reported 130 members and three branches in Pakistan. The Church organized a district in Islamabad sometime during the mid to late 1990s. Membership reached 786 in 2000 and 957 in 2001. In 2001, there were six branches in the country. The Church organized a second district in Karachi in 2008 and a third district in Lahore in the early 2010s. In late 2007, 475 attended a weekday fireside with Elder Dallin K. Oaks.[1] In late 2008, over 200 young single adults met for a nationwide conference. By the early 2010s, the India New Delhi Mission reported that some branches baptized new converts on a monthly basis.

In early 2014, there appeared to be 12 or 13 branches and as many as 3,500 members nationwide. Three of the six administrative divisions had a known LDS presence including Punjab (seven branches), Sindh (three branches), and the Islamabad Capital Territory (two branches).

In the early 2010s, the Church introduced the Perpetual Education Fund (PEF) to Pakistan.

Pakistani Christian Population Characteristics

Census data obtained in 1998 indicate that Christians accounted for 1.59% of the national population at the time, or 2.09 million people.[2] The number of Christians in Pakistan may have totaled as many as 3.07 million as of mid-2013 assuming that Christians continue to constitute 1.59% of the population. 1998 census data indicate that Christians comprise the highest percentages of the population in Islamabad Capital Territory (4.07%), Punjab (2.31%), and Sindh (0.97%) and the lowest percentages of the population in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (0.07%), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa [North-West Frontier] (0.21%), and Baluchistan (0.40%).[3] At the time 53% of Christians nationwide resided in urban areas.

Christians are more likely to reside in urban areas than the general population. Provided with the percentage of the general

population residing in urban areas in parentheses, the percentage of Christians residing in urban areas was 93% in Sindh (versus 49%), 92% in Islamabad Capital Territory (versus 66%), 88% in Baluchistan (versus 24%), 87% in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (versus 17%), 44% in Punjab (versus 31%), and 43% in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (versus 3%).

Successes

The establishment of the Church among Pakistani Christians and its subsequent growth constitutes one of the greatest and most surprising LDS growth developments achieved within the past two decades. The Church does not assign young, proselytizing missionaries to any other countries with as high of a percentage of Muslims in the population as Pakistan with the exception of Turkey. Five of the nine metropolitan areas with one million or more inhabitants currently have a branch operating and the Church has experienced steady increases on all indicators of growth within the past decade. This growth has occurred notwithstanding societal and governmental abuses of religious freedom and the Church only assigning native Pakistani full-time missionaries to Pakistan.[4] Pakistani Christians have exhibited stronger receptivity to LDS outreach than Christians in other countries where Muslims constitute 95% or more of the population.

For many years, the Church has maintained a self-sufficient full-time missionary force in Pakistan entirely comprised of Pakistani natives. The Church appears to have surplus numbers of Pakistani members serving full-time missions as evidenced by the number of members serving missions from Pakistan exceeding the number of missionaries currently assigned to Pakistan under the India New Delhi Mission. Pakistani members have served full-time missions in the United States, New Zealand, the Philippines, and many other countries. Members who serve missions outside of their home country can gain experience observing how the Church functions in locations where stakes operate and can contribute their experience to building up the Church in their homeland upon their return to Pakistan.

The translation of the entire Book of Mormon and several gospel study and missionary materials into Urdu constitutes a major success for the Church due to the relatively few Urdu-speaking Latter-day Saints worldwide. The Church translated select passages of the Book of Mormon into Urdu in 1988[5] and the entire book in 2007. The Church has the entire translation of the Book of Mormon into Urdu available online for download.[6] As of early 2014, the Church listed nearly 20 materials with Urdu translations on its official website for ordering church materials including Book of Mormon Stories, Fulfilling My Duty to God: For Aaronic Priesthood Holders, Our Heritage, The Restoration DVD, Young Women Personal Progress Book, manuals for several church organizations, and the Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith pamphlet and a couple missionary teaching resources. The Church currently produces an Urdu translation of the Liahona magazine three times a year.[7] Most General Conference addresses are translated into Urdu.[8] The Church translates the First Presidency Message into Urdu every month. Additional materials with Urdu translations that are free for download include booklets that accompany the missionary lessons, the Preparing to Enter the Holy Temple booklet, Gospel Fundamentals, a family guidebook, a welfare and self-reliance guide, and administrative materials for Relief Society, Priesthood, and branch and member group leadership.[9]

The introduction of PEF to Pakistan provides returned missionaries with the opportunity to obtain low-interest loans for higher education in order to improve employment opportunities. Utilization of the program by returned missionaries may reduce the likelihood of members emigrating elsewhere in search of better paying employment and strengthen the economic self-sufficiency of the Church in Pakistan.

Opportunities

Some of the greatest opportunities for future LDS growth in Pakistan exist in locations where LDS congregations currently operate. Most cities with a known LDS congregation have populations totaling several million but only one or two branches that operate. In Karachi, the average branch includes over seven million people within its boundaries, including more than 100,000 Christians. In Lahore, the average branch includes over four million people within its boundaries and likely as many as 200,000 Christians. The operation of multiple LDS congregations in both of these cities combined with sizable numbers of Christian populations suggest that church planting efforts may be successful in order to improve the penetration of LDS outreach, reduce travel times from Christian communities, and spur greater growth. Holding family home evening (FHE) and cottage meetings in additional locations presents good opportunities for growth as these approaches emphasize the instruction of basic gospel doctrines, the development of LDS community, and member-missionary work among less-active members and nonmember friends, family members, and associates. Districts operate in both Lahore and Karachi providing additional leadership manpower, resources, and experience to orchestrate more aggressive church planting campaigns within communities with sizable numbers of Christians.

There remain dozens of cities with sizable Christian communities without an LDS presence. Many of these cities have less than one million people and are located in Punjab Province where Christians account for the second highest percentage of the population among the six administrative divisions of the Pakistan. Currently unreached cities in Punjab Province that may be favorable for LDS outreach due to population size and proximity to locations with LDS congregations include Multan, Bahawalpur, Sargodha, Sheikhupura, Hafizabad, and Daska. Mission, district, and branch leadership visiting these and other cities with known Latter-day Saints and investigators present good opportunities for expanding outreach, conserving limited resources, and assessing safety for future church planting efforts.

Internet outreach and online proselytism has no geographical boundaries and restrictions, thereby providing the Church with good opportunities to find interested individuals and prepare these individuals to receive the missionary lessons. In late 2013

and early 2014, the Church began instituting online proselytism efforts through full-time missionaries in many missions around the world. Utilizing Pakistani natives who speak Urdu within the India New Delhi Mission and in other missions to engage in online proselytism that targets Pakistanis has potential to make greater inroads and accelerate growth. Social media also presents good opportunities for finding investigators such as utilizing advertisements on Facebook to offer a free copy of the Book of Mormon for individuals who reside in Pakistan and who state their religious affiliation as Christian or non-Muslim.

Missionary activity in other countries has good opportunities to convert sizable numbers of Pakistanis who temporarily reside abroad for educational or employment purposes. The Church may benefit from creating a website for Pakistani members to find the Church in Pakistan in a similar fashion to the Church's website it launched in March 2013 for its operations in mainland China. In the early 2010s, missionaries reported teaching Pakistanis in many countries in Europe, Southeast Asia, and North America. It is unclear whether many of these investigators and converts baptized abroad who return to Pakistan can easily locate the Church and remain active as no information is published online regarding the location of meetinghouses and contact information for local church leadership.

Challenges

Formal missionary efforts extended to Pakistani Christians remain limited due to religious freedom restrictions, the tiny size of the LDS Church in the country, and only a couple dozen full-time missionaries serving in the country at a time due to limited numbers of members serving full-time missions and only a dozen or so branches where missionaries may serve. Radical Islamist groups have attacked Christian individuals, communities, and churches in many areas of the country and government officials in many locations have done little to investigate these incidents and prosecute the perpetrators. These conditions appear responsible for the Church not assigning native sister missionaries or foreign missionaries to Pakistan. The Church remains limited to only eight cities in a country of nearly 200 million people and each individual city has a tiny LDS presence. It is unclear why the Church does not assign larger numbers of Pakistani members serving full-time missions to Pakistan as the number of Pakistani full-time missionaries exceeds the number of missionaries serving within Pakistan. The Church's restriction on no sister missionaries serving within Pakistan, spiritual promptings to church leaders to assign some members to other countries as part of the revelatory process of mission call issuance, the benefits of assigning some Pakistani natives to countries with stakes in order for these members to observe and gain experience with church administration that they can apply to their home units in Pakistan, and limited numbers of proselytism areas within Pakistan may be potential reasons for why additional Pakistani missionaries are not assigned to serve within their home country.

The Church does not publish its presence in Pakistan online. The lack of information about the Church in Pakistan creates challenges for foreign and native members to locate the Church and for self-referred investigators who reside within Pakistan to locate the Church and meet full-time missionaries. Ignorance among church members, missionaries, and church leaders regarding the existence of several million Christian Pakistanis within Pakistan and an established LDS presence in multiple major cities may have dissuaded missionary efforts targeting this population in other countries. Some mission leaders and full-time missionaries may have avoided the teaching and baptism of Pakistani Christians due to the assumption that these individuals would experience additional safety concerns should they return to their home country. The Church has appeared to not publish the number, names, and locations of its congregations in Pakistan due to security and safety concerns and the lack of official government recognition.

The Church in Pakistan is isolated from mission headquarters. The Church supervises its formal missionary efforts from mission headquarters in New Delhi, India. The organization of the India New Delhi Mission in 2007 appears partly attributed to the burgeoning Church in Pakistan during this period. There are very few local members who have had leadership experience due to most members joining the Church within the past decade and membership and local leadership receiving limited contact and training from mission leadership.

The Church has yet to translate all LDS scriptures into Urdu. The translation of the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price will be necessary for greater testimony development and gospel scholarship to occur among Urdu-speaking members who have limited proficiency in English.

Comparative Growth

No other country with as high of a percentage of Muslims in the national population has as many Latter-day Saints as Pakistan. The Church in Pakistan maintains the largest full-time missionary force of any country in the world where Muslims constitute over 95% of the population. No other country with a sensitive LDS presence has as many local members serving full-time missions within their home country. The Church in Pakistan maintains the highest percentage of members in the population of any country in South Asia with the exception of Sri Lanka.

Other missionary-focused Christian groups with a worldwide presence report a small but sizable presence in Pakistan. The Seventh Day Adventist Church reports a widespread presence in Pakistan. In 2012, Adventists reported 91 churches, 139 companies, and 10,825 members in Punjab and the Northwest Frontier[10] and 31 churches, 48 companies, and 4,214 members in Sindh and Baluchistan.[11] Within the past decade, Adventist have generally baptized between 400 and 1,000 new members a year and the number of congregations has more than doubled since 1998. In 2012, Jehovah's Witnesses reported a limited presence in Pakistan with 880 active members and 18 congregations. Only 42 baptisms occurred during the year.[12] The Church of the Nazarene also reports a widespread presence. In 2012, Nazarenes reported 22,000 members, an average

weekly worship of 15,086, and 745 congregations (450 organized churches, 295 churches not yet organized).[13]

Limitations

No recent reports regarding the Church in Pakistan were available from mission leaders, full-time missionaries, or local members. The Church does not publish information regarding the number of members or congregations in Pakistan due to the sensitive nature of the Church in the country. All data on membership and congregations were estimates based on mission president and missionary reports. It is unclear whether member groups function in additional locations. The most recent census data providing information on religious affiliation was collected in 1998. There are no reliable data available regarding convert retention and member activity rates although both of these rates appear significantly higher than in most countries in the world. There are no data available providing the number of Christians per city in Pakistan.

Future Prospects

The outlook for LDS outreach among Christians in Pakistan appears favorable within the foreseeable future due to ongoing membership and congregational growth within the past decade and increasing numbers of Pakistanis serving full-time missions. However, the lack of additional cities opening to missionary work and slow progress opening additional congregations in major cities may result in missed opportunities for greater growth. Strong receptivity among Pakistani Christians combined with the growth of the Church in Pakistan may warrant the organization of a separate mission headquartered in Pakistan if the Church is able to provide sufficient leadership manpower to staff a mission presidency exclusively consisting of Pakistani natives. The recent introduction of online missionary work through full-time missionaries and efforts to utilize social media may result in enhanced growth and outreach among Pakistani Christians worldwide due to this approach bridging geographical distances.

[1] Stahle, Shaun. “Few, but faithful,” LDS Church News, 22 September 2007. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/51061/Few-but-faithful.html

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[3] "Pakistan Statistical Yearbook 2012," www.pbs.gov.pk, retrieved 4 January 2014. http://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/pakistan-statistical-year-book-2012

[4] "Pakistan," International Religious Freedom Report 2012," retrieved January 4th, 2014. http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2012&dlid=208438

[5] "Book of Mormon Editions," Deseret News 2003 Church Almanac, p. 635

[6] "Urdu," lds.org, retrieved 4 January 2014. http://www.lds.org/bc/content/shared/content/urdu/pdf/language-materials/34406_urd.pdf?lang=eng&clang=urd

[7] store.lds.org, retrieved 4 January 2014.

[8] "October 2013," General Conference, retrieved 4 January 2014. http://www.lds.org/general-conference/sessions/2013/10?lang=eng&clang=urd

[9] "Urdu," lds.org, retrieved 4 January 2014. http://www.lds.org/bc/content/shared/content/urdu/pdf/language-materials/34406_urd.pdf?lang=eng&clang=urd

[10] "Northern Section," www.adventiststatistics.org, retrieved 4 January 2014. http://www.adventistyearbook.org/default.aspx?page=ViewAdmField&Year=9999&AdmFieldID=PKNS

[11] "Southern Section," www.adventiststatistics.org, retrieved 4 January 2014. http://www.adventistyearbook.org/default.aspx?page=ViewAdmField&Year=9999&AdmFieldID=PKSS

[12] "2012 Service Year Report of Jehovah's Witnesses Worldwide," jw.org

[13] "Church of the Nazarene Growth, 2002-2012," nazarene.org, retrieved 19 November 2013. http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&ved=0CDwQFjAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fnazarene.org%2Ff