


# Case Studies on Recent LDS Missionary and Church Growth Successes

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**Recent Congregational Growth Trends in Nigeria**

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**Overview**

In the late 1970s, the LDS Church established its initial presence in West Africa in Nigeria and Ghana. Initial growth occurred as LDS missionaries taught and baptized self-identified members who waited years for missionaries to visit and establish an official church presence. The Church in Nigeria experienced rapid growth in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s as membership increased from 1,000 to 100,000, the first temple was constructed and dedicated in 2005, and the total number of officially-reported wards and branches increased from a couple dozen to more than 300. In late 2012, no other African country has as many congregations and members as Nigeria. Membership growth rates have subsided within the past decade although congregational growth rates accelerated in 2009 and 2012.

This case study reviews and analyzes congregational growth in Nigeria between year-end 2010 and year-end 2012. Trends in congregational growth since 1987 are examined followed by a detailed breakdown of congregational growth by stake and district in 2011 and 2012. Successes in achieving rapid congregational growth are discussed followed by an analysis of locations that did not achieve congregational growth during this period. A comparative growth section compares and contrasts LDS congregational growth in Nigeria with other Sub-Saharan African countries. Limitations of this case study are discussed. Lastly, a future prospects section provides an outlook for congregational growth for the foreseeable future.

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**Trends in LDS Congregational Growth**

The Church does not publish congregation statistics for Nigeria prior to 1987. There were 56 congregations in 1987. The number of wards and branches totaled 72 in 1989, 86 in 1991, 126 in 1993, 128 in 1995, 148 in 1997, 185 in 1999, and 194 in 2000. In the 2000s, the number of wards and branches reached 220 in 2002, 237 in 2004, 254 in 2006, 260 in 2008, and 306 in 2010. At year-end 2011, there were 315 wards and branches in Nigeria. In late 2012, the total number of congregations reached 347. Annual unit growth rates have undergone several cycles of rapid and extremely slow or stagnant growth. Annual unit growth rates eight percent or higher occurred in1987-1993, 1996-1999, 2002, 2009, and 2012 whereas annual unit growth rates less than two percent occurred in 1994-1995, 2005, and 2007-2008.

Congregational growth trends have differed by the type of congregation. The creation of new wards from dividing large wards and the maturation of branches into wards when districts advance to stake status have primarily driven ward growth. The number of wards totaled six in 1987 and 1989, 13 in 1991, 17 in 1993, 19 in 1995, 54 in 1997, 73 in 1999, 79 in 2000, 107 in 2002, 112 in 2004, 116 in 2006, 124 in 2008, 139 in 2010, and 154 in late 2012. Annual ward growth rates were higher than eight percent for 1990-1993, 1996-2002, 2010, and 2012 and less than two percent for 2003, 2005, and 2011.

The Church has consistently created new branches from dividing congregations and dependent units reaching independent branch status. The primary reasons for why some years experience higher rates of branch growth than others centers on whether many districts matured into stakes that year (resulting in little increase in the number of branches) and whether mission leaders and local church leaders have advocated for opening new branches in lesser-reached areas. The number of branches totaled 50 in 1987, 66 in 1989, 73 in 1991, 109 in 1993, 109 in 1995, 94 in 1997, 112 in 1999, 115 in 2000, 113 in 2002, 125 in 2004, 138 in 2006, 136 in 2008, 167 in 2010, and 193 in late 2012. Annual branch growth rates were higher than eight percent for 1987-1988, 1992-1993, 1999, 2009, and 2012.

**Congregational Growth by Location (2011-2012)**

The Church created new units in both stakes and districts in 2011 and 2012. Of the 47 new units organized in this two-year period, 25 were in stakes, 19 were in districts, and three were in locations without a stake or district (mission branches). Stakes that had new units organized included Owerri (six branches), Uyo (six branches), Aba (four wards), Abuja (one ward, two branches), Port Harcourt (three branches), Lagos South (one ward), Lagos (one branch), and Lagos West (one branch). Districts that had a new branch organized included Asaba (three branches), Ekpoma (three branches), Akamkpa (two branches), Onitsha (two branches), Oron (two branches), Umuahia (two branches), Warri (two branches), Ibiono (one branch), Ikot Ekpene (one branch), and Okrika (one branch). There were three mission branches organized - all in the Nigeria Port Harcourt Mission in the city of Yenagoa (Iboghene, Onopa-Ovum, and Opolo).

Most branches that became wards during this two-year period were in the Abuja Nigeria Stake in 2012 when it was organized from the Abuja Nigeria District with eight wards and three branches. There appeared to be only two branches that reached ward status during 2011 and 2012 outside of the Abuja Nigeria Stake in the Lagos Nigeria Stake (Ikorodu) and the Lagos Nigeria South Stake (Ikoyi).

In 2011 and 2012, the Church closed four congregations in Nigeria in the Akamkpa Nigeria District (two branches - Akamkpa 2nd and Uyanga 2nd), Abuja Nigeria Stake (one branch - Abuja Nigeria District), and the Ikot Ekpene Nigeria District (one branch - Aba Road) Districts. The closure of the district branch in Abuja coincided with the organization of the stake as district branches do longer function when a district reaches stakehood. The Church reported no net increase or decrease in the number of branches in the Akamkpa Nigeria and Ikot Ekpene Nigeria Districts as the number of closed units equaled the number of created units.

A map displaying stakes and districts in Nigeria and congregational growth trends in 2011 and 2012 can be found here.

**Successes**

The number of congregations in Nigeria increased by 41 between year-end 2010 and year-end 2012, accounting for approximately 12% of the worldwide increase of LDS wards and branches for this two-year period. In 2012, the Church in Nigeria experienced the largest increase in the number of wards and branches of any country in the world with the exception of the United States. Church leaders have willingly opened new units in lesser-reached locations or due to active membership growth warranting the division of large wards into more manageably-sized congregations. Steady congregational growth since year-end 2008 has necessitated the organization of five new stakes and seven new districts over the past four years, amounting to percentage increases in the number of stakes and districts of 31% and 47%, respectively. Local members report that church leaders have desired to reduce travel times for members and spur greater growth due to high receptivity in most areas of the country.

Recent congregational growth has been widespread in locations with an LDS presence. In 2011 and 2012, 18 of the 41 stakes and districts in Nigeria (44%) had at least one new ward or branch created. Provided with the percentage increase in the number of congregations between year-end 2010 and year-end 2012, the most rapid growth occurred in mission branches of the Nigeria Port Harcourt Mission (300%), the Owerri Nigeria Stake (75%), the Uyo Nigeria Stake (67%), the Ekpoma Nigeria District (60%), Port Harcourt Nigeria East Stake (50%), and the Aba Nigeria Stake (40%). This stands as a major achievement for the Church as less than 10% of stakes and districts in countries with over 100,000 members have a new unit organized every two years.

The Church has readily organized new branches in Nigeria. The organization of new branches has been a key influence on recent church growth trends. 87% of new units organized within the past two years were branches. Branches require few active priesthood holders and can met in locations closer to the homes of members and investigators in smaller facilities. The Church has effectively expanded outreach into lesser-reached semi-urban areas and rural locations by opening small branches. Approximately half of new units organized in 2011 and 2012 were located on the outskirts of large cities or in small towns or villages. The strength of stake and district leadership appears a significant determinant in the acceleration of branch growth in recent years as local church leadership can administer and head outreach expansion efforts instead of mission presidents and full-time missionaries.

**Analysis on Locations Where No New Units Were Created (2011-2012)**

Certain geographic areas did not experience congregational growth in the past two years including western Nigeria outside of Lagos, central Nigeria outside of the Abuja Nigeria Stake, Benin City, Enugu city and mission branches in the Nigeria Enugu Mission, most stakes and districts in southeastern Nigeria, and locations outside the boundaries of stakes and districts. Reasons for no recent congregational growth in these locations vary by location.

In western and central Nigeria, the Church currently operates five districts (Abeokuta, Ibadan, Ijebu-Ode, Ile-Ife, and Jos) but has experienced no increase in the number of congregations in these districts within the past two years and generally stagnant growth trends over the past decade. Four of these districts operate in a culturally-designated region of Nigeria called

"Yorubaland" where the Yoruba people traditionally reside. Between 2001 and late 2012, two districts (Abeokuta and Jos) and the Nigeria Lagos Mission reported no increase in number of assigned branches. Two districts (Ibadan and Ile-Ife) reported congregational growth during this period although the number of branches increased by only one in the Ibadan Nigeria District. The number of branches in the Ile-Ife Nigeria District increased from three to eight due to the organization of four new branches and the incorporation of the Osogbo Branch into the district. One district (Ijebu-Ode) reported congregational decline as the number of branches decreased from seven to five. The Church once operated a district headquartered in the city of Akure that comprised four branches (two in Akure and two in Ondo). In 2009, the Church closed the Akure Nigeria District and in late 2012 reported only one branch each in the cities of Akure and Ondo. The reason for a lack of congregational growth in districts operating within Yorubaland is unclear but appears linked to the decision to close the Nigeria Ibadan Mission, safety concerns proselytizing areas with large numbers of co-residing Christians and Muslims, limited missionary manpower in the region, and lower receptivity than other areas of Nigeria and West Africa. The recent completion of a Yoruba translation of the entire Book of Mormon has not appeared to improve church growth in the region, possibly for the reasons identified above.

In Benin City, the Church experienced rapid congregational growth in the late 2000s resulting in the number of wards in one stake - the Benin City Nigeria New Benin State - increasing from six in late 2007 to 15 by mid-2010. Other stakes in the city experienced rapid congregational growth during the same period, resulting in the creation of two new stakes in early 2012. The Church has likely not organized additional congregations in Benin City in 2011 and 2012 due to preparations for the organization of two new stakes in the city and the large number of new units recently organized within a relatively short period of time. The Church in Benin City has also not organized a single new branch within the past five years but has rather focused on splitting wards when active membership can be no longer effectively administered by currently operating wards. This has resulted in the Church creating a large number of new units within short periods of times every three to five years rather than organizing a small but steady number of new units. A shortage of adequately prepared Melchizedek Priesthood holders incurred from rapid congregational growth and the simultaneous creation of two new stakes may have dissuaded the organization of additional units within the past two years until surplus manpower can be reestablished.

In Enugu city and mission branches of the Nigeria Enugu Mission, the Church reported no new units organized within the past two years but did experience growth in the number of mission branches over the past 13 years. In the Enugu Nigeria District, the Church organized one new branch within Enugu city, closed one branch in Nsukka, and organized a district branch resulting in the number of branches increasing from six to seven between late 1999 and late 2012. The Church appeared to create its first branches in Abakaliki, Afikpo, and Okposi sometime in the early or mid 2000s and today these units remain under the jurisdiction of the Nigeria Enugu Mission. It is unclear why the Church has not experienced noticeable congregational growth in the Enugu Nigeria District as a mission is based within the city and other cities in the region have experienced rapid congregational growth. Local leadership sustainability problems and the large administrative burden on the Nigeria Enugu Mission to service Benin City, Abjua, Jos, Asaba, and Onitsha have likely curtailed growth in Enugu and locations with mission branches.

In southeastern Nigeria, 12 of the 21 stakes and districts (57%) did not experience congregational growth in 2011 and 2012. Many of these stakes and districts operate in small cities, towns, and villages where some of the first Nigerians joined the LDS Church in their homeland. Most stakes and districts in the region service populations between 100,000 and 200,000; less than most stakes and districts elsewhere in Nigeria. The comparatively small populations serviced by these stakes and districts and the long-term duration of an LDS presence has likely led to the social entrenchment of LDS populations resulting in less interaction with the nonmember population such as in stakes headquartered in Ikot Akpaden, Eket, Etinan, and Nsit Ubium. Most stakes and districts in the region that did not report congregational growth in 2011 and 2012 have experienced congregational growth over the past decade, but growth has been slower than most other areas of the country resulting in the creation of no new stakes outside of Aba and Port Harcourt since 2002. The creation of two new districts in the region from stakes in 2010 (Abak and Ibesikpo) may be due to administrative challenges for local leaders to administer densely populated rural areas outside of the major cities.

With only a few exceptions, there have been no new cities that have had their first LDS congregation organized within the past four years. Consequently, three of the four Nigerian missions (Nigeria Calabar, Nigeria Enugu, and Nigeria Lagos) have had no new mission branches organized during this period. The centers of strength policy for church growth that directs mission and area presidents to build up a church presence in cities that already have a church presence rather than expand into new areas appears a major determinant in the lack of outreach expansion into unreached administrative divisions of Nigeria and cities with over 100,000 inhabitants without an LDS congregation.

**Comparative Growth**

Several Sub-Saharan African countries experienced a slight acceleration in congregational growth between 2010 and 2012. All African countries that had more than 10 units at year-end 2012 reported congregational growth between year-end 2010 and year-end 2012. During this two-year period the number of units increased by 26 in Ghana, 20 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 12 in Zimbabwe, 10 in Cote d'Ivoire, eight in Madagascar, seven in Uganda, six in Liberia, five in Cape Verde, Kenya, and South Africa, four in Sierra Leone, three in Mozambique and the Republic of the Congo, and two in Zambia. The Church experienced its highest percentage growth in Liberia (46%), Uganda (39%), Madagascar (29%), Cape Verde (28%), and Zimbabwe (25%) and its lowest percentage growth in South Africa (3%), Nigeria (13%), Kenya (14%), Mozambique (17%), and Sierra Leone (17%). During the two-year period between year-end 2009 and year-end 2010, the number of units increased by 46 in Nigeria, 25 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 22 in Ghana, 11 in Madagascar, 10 in Cote d'Ivoire, six in South Africa, five in Sierra Leone, four in Zimbabwe and Kenya, and two in Uganda and Liberia. There was no increase in the number of units in Cape Verde, Mozambique, and the Republic of the Congo and the number of units declined by one in Zambia. The Church experienced its highest percentage growth in Madagascar (65%), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (36%), Cote

d'Ivoire (31%), Sierra Leone (28%), and Ghana (22%) and its lowest percentage growth in Zambia (-9%), Cape Verde, Mozambique, and the Republic of the Congo (0%), and South Africa (3%). These statistics indicate that countries in the region that have the most units have generally experienced a slowdown in the rate of congregational growth whereas countries that have few units have generally experienced accelerated congregational growth.

**Limitations**

Safety concerns prevent the assignment of non-African missionaries to Nigerian missions. Consequently, there are few returned missionary reports accessible to researchers outside of Africa as African missionaries appear to utilize the internet significantly less than their non-African counterparts. There are also fewer self-reports available from Nigerian church leaders and members compared to countries outside of Africa. The Church does not publish official totals for the number of dependent branches and groups operating in Nigeria, reducing the number of total LDS congregations that function in the country to include only independent branches and wards. It is unclear how many dependent units operate in the country and how the organization of these units influences officially-reported congregational figures.

**Future Prospects**

Steady numbers of new units organized over the past few years, the expected surge in the full-time missionary force of West African Missions by 30% in 2013, consistent high receptivity to the LDS Church in most locations with a church presence, and steady numbers of convert baptisms suggest that the Church will continue to experience strong congregational growth rates in Nigeria. The Church will likely continue to primarily organize new branches instead of new wards in lesser-reached areas on the outskirts of major cities and in locations with a recently established LDS presence such as in southeastern Nigeria and Lagos. The Church may begin opening unreached cities and towns in southeast Nigeria to missionary work and organized congregations as a result of larger amounts of mission resources allocated to the Africa West Area.