Case Studies on Recent LDS Missionary and Church Growth Successes

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A Geospatial Analysis of LDS Growth in Kiribati

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Overview

The only country to have a presence in all four hemispheres, Kiribati is a Micronesian nation inhabited by slightly more than 1000,000 people that consists of 21 inhabited islands divided into three island groups: the Gilbert Islands, the Line Islands, and the Phoenix Islands. The Audemars Piguet Replica Watches I-Kiribati language is spoken as the native language of essentially the entire indigenous population and English is the official language. Over nine-tenths of the population resides in the Gilbert Islands where the capital city of Tarawa is located. The LDS Church numbers among the largest religious groups in Kiribati despite no presence in the country until 1975, remote location, and a relatively small target population. Although significant LDS growth has occurred in the islands within the first 40 years of missionary activity, there have been serious challenges to growth due to convert attrition, member inactivity, and leadership development problems. Notwithstanding these challenges, there are good opportunities for future growth.

This case study provides a brief overview of religion in Kiribati. The history of the LDS Church in Kiribati is reviewed in regards to the establishment of the Church, membership growth, and congregational, stake, and district growth. Recent LDS growth developments are summarized regarding the number of missionaries assigned to the islands, rapid growth in the Line Islands, the expansion of missionary activity onto previously unreached islands, and preliminary plans by mission leaders to restructure LDS units on Tarawa Atoll sometime in the foreseeable future. Census data on religious affiliation is examined to determine how these numbers compare to official LDS-reported figures, and a geospatial analysis of the geographical distribution of self-identified Latter-day Saints is conducted utilizing 2010 census data. LDS growth successes in Kiribati are identified, and opportunities and challenges for future growth are examined. The growth of the Church in Kiribati is compared to other island nations in Oceania, and the size and growth trends of other nontraditional religious groups is summarized. Limitations to this case study are identified and prospects for future growth are predicted.

Religion in Kiribati

According to 2010 census data, the population is 96.7% Christian, 2.2% followers of the Baha'i Faith, and 1.1% followers of other religions or claim no religious affiliation. The Catholic Church is the largest denomination in Kiribati as self-affiliated Catholics constitute 55.8% of the population. The Kiribati Protestant Church (KPC) is the second largest denomination with self-identified members comprising 33.5% of the population. Catholics comprise higher percentages of the population in the northern Gilbert Islands and Banaba, whereas members of the KPC comprise higher percentages of the population in the southern Gilbert Islands. The percentage of Catholics and KPC members in population of the Line Islands nearly equal. Other prominent Christian denominations include the LDS Church and the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Most religious groups have a presence limited to Tarawa Atoll.[1]

LDS Background

Establishment of the Church

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The Fiji Suva Mission began missionary activity in Kiribati when several I-Kiribati natives joined the Church while attending the LDS-run Liahona High School in Tonga. In 1975, these students returned back to Kiribati as full-time missionaries and the first

branch was organized in Tarawa. In the late 1970s, the Church opened Moroni High School to meet educational needs. In 2006, the Church reassigned Kiribati to the Marshall Islands Majuro Mission.

Membership Growth

Membership rapidly increased from essentially just a handful of members in 1975 to 620 in 1985, 1,300 in 1989, 4,600 in 1993, 6,000 in 1997, 8,633 in 2000, 11,511 in 2005, 14,927 in 2010, and 16,659 in 2013. Within the past two decades, annual membership growth rates ranged from as low as 2.3% to as high as 16.4%, but have generally varied between 5-7%. Today, approximately one in seven people in Kiribati are nominally LDS.

Congregational and Stake/District Growth

Congregational growth rates have widely fluctuated over the years. In late 1982, there was only one branch in Kiribati. The number of branches increased to 12 in 1987 and 17 in 1989. In 1996, the Church organized its first stake in Kiribati on Tarawa with six wards and two branches.[2] By year-end 1997, there was one stake, one district, and 18 congregations (6 wards, 12 branches). The number of congregations increased to 23 (10 wards, 13 branches) in 1999, 27 (11 wards, 16 branches) in 2000, and 28 in 2003 (11 wards, 16 branches). The number of congregations totaled 27 in 2004, 28 in 2006, 26 in 2008, 25 in 2009, and 26 in 2012. In 2006, the Church discontinued its only district in the country, the Tarawa Gilbert Islands District, which previously administered 12 branches located on North Tarawa and outlying islands in the Gilbert Islands, as well as the sole branch in the country of Nauru. In 2007, the Church organized a second stake (Tarawa East) that also included branches that previously pertained to no stake or district. By mid-2014, there were five wards and four branches in the Tarawa Kiribati East Stake (Bikenibeu 1st, Bikenibeu 2nd, Eita 1st, Eita 2nd, and Moroni [Student Single] Wards, and the Abaokoro, Bonriki, Tearinibai, and Temaiku Branches), six wards and two branches in the Tarawa Kiribati West Stake (Bairiki, Betio 1st, Betio 2nd, Betio 3rd, Teaoraereke 1st, and Teaoraereke 2nd Wards, and the Tabontibike-Abaiang and Tuarabu Branches), and five branches in the Kiritimati Island Kiribati District (Banana, Fanning Island, London, Tabwakea 1st, and Tabwakea 2nd).

Since 2001, two branches have appeared to be discontinued, namely the Koinawa-Borotiau-Abaiang and the Tekarakan Marakei Branches; both of which previously operated in the northern Gilbert Islands. Five new branches have appeared to be organized since 2001; four of which were organized in the Line Islands - the Fanning Island (2006), Banana (2010), London (2014), and Tabwakea 2nd (2014) Branches - and one of which was organized in the Gilbert Islands: Nuka (2001).

As of mid-2014, the Church had at least one ward or branch functioning on 11 islands. Provided with the year the first ward or branch was organized, these islands included South Tarawa (1975), Betio (1982), Abaiang (1985), Aranuka (1985), Marakei (1985), North Tarawa (1988), North Tabiteuea (1998), Kiritimati [Christmas Island] (1999), Baretoa (2000), Beru (2001), and Tabuaeran (2006). Provided with the number of known member groups in parentheses, the Church appeared to operate member groups on at least five islands, namely Nonouti (3), Maiana (2), Butaritari (1), Makin (1), and Onotoa (1). A map displaying the location of LDS congregations and the number of self-identified members on the 2010 census can be found here.

A couple branches include additional islands within their geographical boundaries. In 2014, the North Tabiteuea-based Kabuna and Utiroa Branches also administered South Tabiteuea and Nonouti, respectively. As of mid-2014, 11 islands were not assigned to a ward or branch, including Arorae, Banaba, Butaritari, Kanton, Kuria, Maiana, Makin, Nikunau, Onotoa, Tamana, and Teraina (Washington Island).

In 2014, all wards and branches conducted church services in I-Kiribati except for the Moroni (Student Single) Ward which held services in English.

As of mid-2014, the Church operates two I-Kiribati-speaking branches outside of Kiribati located in Nuku, Rabi Island, Fiji (the location where thousands of resettled I-Kiribati from Banaba Island now reside) and Hastings, New Zealand.

Recent LDS Growth Developments

Increasing Numbers of Full-time Missionaries Assigned

In late 2011, senior missionaries reported that there were 34 young full-time missionaries serving in Kiribati that were assigned to Betio/South Tarawa (22), Abaiang (2), Butaritari (2), Kiritimati (2), Makin (2), North Tabiteuea (2), and North Tarawa (2). By spring 2012, the total number of missionaries (including senior couples) assigned to Kiribati jumped to 61 and young missionaries were assigned to Betio/South Tarawa (~40), Kiritimati (4), Abaiang (2), Aranuka (2), Butaritari (2), Makin (2), Marekei (2), North Tabiteuea (2), and North Tarawa (2). In mid-2014, senior missionaries reported that there were 46 young missionaries assigned to Kiribati and plans for an additional 26 missionaries to arrive by October 2014. Missionaries reported that the mission hoped to permanently increase the number of missionaries assigned to Kiribati to 90 sometime within the foreseeable future.

Growth in the Line Island

In May 1999, the Church organized its first branch on Kiritimati with 117 members.[3] In 2006, the Church organized a branch on nearby Tabuaeran (Fanning) Island. That same year, the Church completed its first church-built meetinghouse on Kiritimati. At the time there were 280 members on Kiritimati Island.[4] In 2010, the Church organized a second branch on Kiritimati (Banana). In June 2014, the Church organized a district in Kiritimati Island and created two new branches. At the time the Church reported approximately 1,200 members in the new district.[5]

Islands Opening for Missionary Work

Makin (2010)

In 2010, missionaries opened Makin to missionary work. It is unclear whether a member group previously functioned on the island prior to the arrival of missionaries. In 2011, there were approximately 80 members in the member group that met on the island.

Maiana (2013)

In October 2013, missionaries reported opening Maiana Island for missionary work. Missionaries reported that Maiana once had missionaries briefly assigned in the 1980s. Missionaries reported teaching over 10 lessons a day and had dozens of investigators attending church for the remainder of the year. By December 2013, missionaries reported that 35-40 members attended the main member group and that a second member group also operated on the island. At the time, member groups met in members' homes.

Nonouti (2013)

In October 2013, the Church opened Nonouti to missionary work and held sacrament meeting services in three locations on the island. Missionaries reported that there were over 200 members on church records who presumably resided on Nonouti prior to the assignment of missionaries. By March 2014, sacrament meeting attendance for the island reached an all-time high of 77.

Onotoa (2013/2014)

Sometime in late 2013 or early 2014, missionaries opened Onotoa to proselytism and organized a member group.

South Tabiteuea (2014)

In March 2014, missionaries reported conducting investigatory visits to locate suitable missionary housing in order to open the island to missionary activity.

Preliminary Plans for Membership Redistricting on Tarawa Atoll

In-mid-2014, missionaries reported preliminary plans to create a couple new member districts on Tarawa Atoll to help accelerate growth. Missionaries indicated that these plans would place returned missionaries in most leadership positions. At the time senior missionaries reported that there were at least 13 converts baptized each Sunday throughout the country.

Census Data

In 2005, the census reported 2,910 self-identified Latter-day Saints, constituting 3.14% of the national population.[6] At the time, the Church reported 11,511 nominal members (12.4% of the national population), indicating that only 25.3% of nominal members self-affiliated on the 2005 census. The 2010 census counted 4,802 self-identified Latter-day Saints, comprising 4.66% of the national population.[7] This indicated a 65% increase in the number of census-reported Latter-day Saints within a mere five-year period. In 2010, there were 14,927 members on church records (14.5% of the national population), indicating that 32.3% of nominal members self-affiliated on the 2010 census. Consequently the average number of self-identified members per LDS ward or branch increased during this five-year period from 116 to 185.

According to 2010 census data, there was a higher percentage of self-identified Latter-day Saints than the national average on four islands, namely South Tarawa (7.07%), Kiritimati (7.00%), North Tabiteuea (5.48%), and North Tarawa (4.77%). Self-identified Latter-day Saints comprised less than one percent of the population on nine islands, including Nonouti (0.63%), Kuria (0.61%), Teraina (0.47%), South Tabiteuea (0.47%), Tamana (0.32%), Arorae (0.23%), Nikunau (0.21%), Maiana (0.20%), and Onotoa (0.07%). Provided with the island population in parentheses, six islands have at least 1,000 people but fewer than 10 self-identified Latter-day Saints, including Maiana (2,027), Nikunau (1,907), Teraina (1,690), Onotoa (1,519),

South Tabiteuea (1,290), and Arorae (1,279). The populations on Maiana, Nikunau, South Tabiteuea, and Teraina and somewhat evenly divided between the Roman Catholic Church and the Kiribati Protestant Church (KPC), whereas the population on Onotoa is predominantly (72%) followers of the KPC, and the population on Arorae is homogenously (99%) followers of the KPC.

2010 census data reported that Kanton was the only island with no reported self-identified Latter-day Saints. Kanton is the least-populated island in Kiribati, with a mere 31 inhabitants.

Successes

Kiribati is one of the countries that has one of the highest percentages of Latter-day Saints in the entire world notwithstanding the Church initially establishing a presence just 40 years ago. Like many Pacific Islanders, I-Kiribati have exhibited high receptivity to LDS outreach and the Church has allocated significant mission resources to the islands for many years despite the population numbering only 100,000. Within the past few years, the Church has maintained a ratio of one full-time missionary per approximately 2,000 people. The Marshall Islands Majuro Mission has one of the smallest populations among the Church's 406 missions as less than 200,000 people reside within the mission boundaries. The percentage of nominal members who self-identified as Latter-day Saint significantly increased between the 2005 and 2010 censuses, suggesting improvements in member activity and convert retention.

The operation of the Church's Moroni High School has played a significant role in the growth of the Church in Kiribati. The Church opened the high school in the late 1970s only a couple years after the arrival of the first proselytizing missionaries. In 2013, the high school had a capacity of 476 students and provided education to both boarding and day students.[8] The school has provided a sense of LDS community for the Church in Kiribati and a passive proselytism approach that meets educational needs. The good reputation of the school among I-Kiribati has also enhanced the Church's image in society, likely facilitating the establishment of the Church on additional islands. The success of Moroni High School with the growth of the Church in Kiribati illustrates the importance of the Church in meeting educational needs through establishing its own institutions as the operation of these institutions correlates with establishing a sense of LDS community, thereby helping to reduce the immigration of members to the United States or other countries with a larger LDS membership base.

Mission leadership and local church leaders have recently revamped their efforts to expand LDS outreach to islands and locations where the Church did not previously have a proselytizing presence. These efforts began in the early 2010s and have yielded impressive results in regards to the productivity of proselytism areas on many of these islands. The last time the Church in Kiribati expanded national outreach this aggressively efforts was during the 1980s. Continued focus on opening additional islands to missionary work has good potential to accelerate growth nationwide and to totally saturate the country with LDS outreach.

The Church has translated all LDS scriptures and many gospel study and missionary materials into the I-Kiribati language, including quarterly issues of the Liahona and General Conference addresses. The abundance of I-Kiribati materials provides excellent resources for member and investigator testimony development and gospel study.

Opportunities

There are good opportunities to expand LDS outreach on islands that currently have no ward, branch, or group present. Four islands (Banaba, Kuria, South Tabiteuea, and Teraina) have no known ward, branch, or member group and had six or more self-identified Latter-day Saints on the 2010 census. This suggests that these islands contain a handful of members from which to build a future member group. Mission leaders visiting these islands, meeting with isolated members and investigators, and assessing conditions for the assignment of full-time missionaries presents the most likely scenario for the Church to successfully establish a permanent presence on these islands. The organization a mission branch that services islands not currently assigned to a ward or branch has good potential to keep track of isolated members and initiate the establishment of member groups and official branches on these islands. Islands that may be best administered by a mission branch include Arorae, Banaba, Butaritari, Kanton, Kuria, Makin, Nikunau, Nonouti, Onotoa, and Tamana. One of the stakes on Tarawa may be best at administering the fledging member group on Maiana due to close proximity, whereas one of the branches in the Kiritimati Islands Kiribati District may be better equipped to administer Teraina due to close proximity to Tabuaeran.

Greater focus on local leadership development may present improved opportunities for the Church to organize official branches from member groups. Some member groups have many self-identified members or members who attend church, but have been unable to become branches because of a shortage of qualified priesthood holders. Butaritari, for example, is the island with the largest number of self-reported members (127) without a ward or branch, although a member group has appeared to operate for many years. Focus from mission leaders to identify active priesthood holders to serve in branch leadership positions and to properly train these individuals in order for a branch to properly function deserves serious attention by mission leadership in order to improve the self-sufficiency of the Church and ultimately refocus mission resources from supporting members and local leadership to engaging in proselytism.

Redistricting membership on Tarawa Atoll to form additional congregations that assemble closer to members' homes and communities targeted by missionary work presents good opportunities for accelerating growth. The Church on Tarawa has not organized a new congregation since 2000 despite thousands of new converts joining the Church within the past 14 years. The

organization of new branches in other areas of the world where stagnant growth has occurred has frequently contributed to the acceleration of "real growth" as measured by increasing sacrament meeting attendance, augmentation of leadership manpower, and enhanced efficiency in missionary work. Although it is unclear whether preliminary plans to reconfigure the two Tarawa stakes will result in the organization of new congregations, mission leadership has appeared concerned with the lack of growth on Tarawa within the past 14 years and committed to make changes to promote a more nurturing environment to spur greater growth. Implementing a church-planting as opposed to a church-splitting approach to growth on Tarawa may result in impressive gains in the number of active members, greater numbers of retained new converts, and local leadership development.

The translation of the Church's Hastening the Work of Salvation broadcast and website into I-Kiribati could have enormous benefits to revitalizing member-missionary activity and local leadership involvement in missionary work. However, extremely limited internet usage by most I-Kiribati suggests that having translations of these resources on an internet platform would be ineffective. Distributing a I-Kiribati broadcast on a DVD and providing printed materials with details from the website may be appropriate measures to educate church leaders and members.

Challenges

The Church in Kiribati experiences low member activity rates and problems with local leadership development. Most wards on Tarawa Atoll appear to have hundreds of inactive members. In 2014, missionaries reported that one ward had over 1,100 members on its records and that local church leaders could not identify who most of these individuals were. No other country in Oceania has as many members per congregation (members-to-units ratio) as Kiribati. The members-to-units ratio has steadily increased within the past 25 years from 76 in 1989 to 346 in 1999, 567 in 2009, and 641 in 2013. Incommensurate membership and congregational growth rates have occurred as a result of steady membership growth between 2003 and 2013 but no increase in the number of congregations during this 10-year period. This finding is consistent with countries where the Church experiences poor convert retention and low member activity rates as there has likely been no noticeable increase in the number of active members, thereby preventing the creation of additional congregations to reduce overcrowding. Several member groups such as on Butaritari and Makin have operated for several years and have a large enough number of self-identified members to easily staff an official branch, but shortages in qualified priesthood leaders appears to have continued to delay the organization of official branches in these locations. The Church has not only experienced no net increase in the number of congregations between 2003 and mid-2014, but no branches within the two Tarawa stakes reached ward status during this period, indicating a serious challenge with augmenting the number of active priesthood holders capable and willing to hold local leadership positions in order to create additional congregations and advanced branches into wards. Low member activity and poor convert retention rates within the past two decades has appeared attributed to rushed prebaptismal preparation, youth converts joining the Church for secondary gain to attend Moroni High School, and competition for converts among several fervent proselytizing faiths.

The Church has heavily relied on church employees to staff local leadership positions, specifically those who work for the Church's Moroni High School. There have been instances when an entire stake presidency has worked for the Church, signifying serious challenges in developing a sufficient quality and quantity of local priesthood holders who maintain employment outside of the Church. Members and investigators may become resentful of church leaders who also work for the Church as these leaders become somewhat reminiscent of paid clergy in other faiths. Experience in many areas of the world where an disproportionate number of church employees serve in local leadership positions has demonstrated that these conditions can foster conflict between leadership and ordinary members, and impede growth.

The Church has never operated a mission headquartered in Kiribati. Isolation from mission headquarters in Fiji between 1975 and 2006 and the Marshall Islands since 2006 has likely played a role in reduced missionary accountability for new converts and historically few missionaries assigned to the islands. Although the number of I-Kiribati serving full-time missions appears close to or exceeds the number of missionaries assigned to Kiribati, the Church has assigned many foreign missionaries to the islands. The assignment of foreign missionaries often coincides with reduced convert retention due to sensationalized and careless quick-baptism approaches that sacrifice the generation of high-quality converts that provide long-term strength and resources into their respective congregations in order to reach arbitrary baptismal goals. These missionary practices, combined with the less-developed nature of local leadership, has yielded the most catastrophic inactivity problems the Church has experienced in Oceania to date.

Double affiliation is a significant problem as the majority of nominal Latter-day Saints self-identify as members of another faith, namely as Catholics or members of the KPC. Most nominal Latter-day Saints who do not identify as members on the census appeared to experience a short period of church activity immediately before and after baptism, only to renounce their conversation and return to their former faith. The Church in many countries in Oceania has struggled with the challenges of double affiliation due to high competition between multiple proselytism-oriented faiths for converts in a small target population, and many inactive Latter-day Saints either returning to their former church or joining another proselytizing group.

There are many economic problems in Kiribati that pose challenges for developing more viable, self-sufficient local leadership. The economy is poorly developed due to the country's isolation from international markets and comparatively tiny national population. Additionally, the country's low elevation make it sensitive to changes in sea level, which has made some to speculate that evacuation of the country may become warranted one day if sea levels substantially rise and inundate the country.

Some islands have likely been unable to open to missionaries due to challenges with obtaining government registration. When

the Church prepared to organize its first branch in Kiritimati Island, LDS leaders reported that government representatives indicated that religious groups generally needed to have at least 100 members in order to officially establish a new congregation.[9]

There are many challenges for LDS missionary activity in Kiribati due to geography as tiny populations are spread over enormous expanses of the Pacific Ocean. The Line Islands, for example, have a combined population of less than 10,000 and are located approximately 2,000 miles (3,000 kilometers) away from Tarawa. Access to many islands is difficult, resulting in isolation from the outside world and challenges for effective church administration and supervision of full-time missionaries.

Comparative Growth

No other country in the world has had as recent of an LDS establishment and has as high a percentage of nominal members in the population as Kiribati. Only two other sovereign countries have a higher percentage of nominal Latter-day Saints in the population, namely Tonga and Samoa. Within the past decade, the Church in Kiribati has experienced membership growth rates comparable to other countries in Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia, although congregational growth rates were dramatically lower than most countries in the Oceania region. The Church in Kiribati experiences some of the greatest challenges with local leadership development among countries in Oceania with at least 1,000 members as indicated by persistent problems with organizing additional congregations, reliance on church employees to staff lay leadership positions, and the inability of multiple member groups to become official branches despite sizable numbers of members who attend church. Despite the discouraging progress with the Church in achieving real growth, the Church in Kiribati has experienced some encouraging developments within the past decade. The percentage of nominal members who self-identified as Latter-day Saints on the 2010 Kiribati census, for example, was representative of recent census data for other Pacific Island nations who collect and report religious data. The percentage of nominal members who self-identified as Latter-day Saints ranged from 30-40% for Kiribati, Fiji, Samoa, and Tonga. The number of self-identified members on the census increased by 65% between 2005 and 2010, suggesting a substantial improvement in member activity and church attendance during this period. The Church in Kiribati has also experienced some of the most aggressive national outreach expansion in Oceania within the past two decades as the Marshall Islands Majuro Mission has opened several additional islands to missionary work within the past four years, and has plans to reconfigure stakes on Tarawa to jumpstart growth on this the most populous atoll in the country.

Although the LDS Church claims the third-largest membership of any religious group in Kiribati, self-identified membership on the census and the number of active members is dramatically lower and comparable to other of the largest nontraditional proselytism groups. Evangelicals have experienced limited growth and claim approximately 7,200 adherents (7.0% of the national population); many of whom are Pentecostals.[10] Seventh Day Adventists have maintained a continuous presence in Kiribati since as early as the mid-twentieth century. In 1976, Adventists reported 517 members and five churches (large congregations). Adventists have generally baptized between 80 and 100 new members a year since the mid-1970s.[11] In 2012, Adventists reported 2,311 members, 14 churches, and 15 companies (small congregations).[12] In the 2010 census, self-identified Adventists numbered 2,085 nationwide (2.02% of the national population). Most Adventists reside on Tarawa Atoll. Some islands are approximately 10% Adventist, such as Kuria and Banaba. The Baha'i Faith has maintained a presence in Kiribati since 1954 when the first proselytism began. In 2004, the Baha'i Faith reported a presence in 115 localities and operated 38 Local Spiritual Assemblies in the country.[13] In the 2010 census, self-identified Baha'i followers numbered 2,322 nationwide (2.25%). Most Baha'is reside on Tarawa Atoll. The scope of national outreach for the LDS Church, the Baha'i Faith, and the Seventh Day Adventist Church is comparable for all three denominations. According to 2010 census data, Latter-day Saints numbered 20 or more on 12 islands, Baha'is numbered 20 or more on 15 islands, and Adventists numbered 20 or more on 17 islands.

Some proselytism-focused faiths with a worldwide presence report a minimal presence or no presence at all on Kiribati. Jehovah's Witnesses have maintained a minimal presence in Kiribati for many years. Witness numbers were not published in the 2010 census, and were likely included in the "other" religions category. Self-identified Witnesses appeared to number more than 20 only on South Tarawa as South Tarawa was the only island where the number of people who endorsed other religions was greater than 30 for the 2010 census. In 2013, Witnesses reported two congregations, four baptisms, and an average of 134 publishers (active members who regularly engage in proselytism) in Kiribati.[14] The Church of the Nazarene reports no presence in Kiribati.

Limitations

The Church does not publish official membership numbers for individual islands in Kiribati. All data regarding the operation of member groups and the timing of when missionaries opened islands to missionary work were retrieved from missionary reports. The Church does not publish a listing of the names, locations, and numbers of member groups that operate in Kiribati, other countries, or for the entire Church. Consequently some member groups reported in this case study may no longer operate and some member groups may function that were not identified in this case study. No official LDS data is released to the public on an annual basis regarding the number of members serving full-time missions from Kiribati, the number of full-time missionaries assigned to Kiribati, the number of converts baptized, and various statistics regarding member activity and convert retention such as sacrament meeting attendance, the number of active priesthood holders, and the number of temple recommend holders. Data on the recent opening of previously unreached islands to missionary work were obtained from full-time missionary reports. These data were extremely limited for some islands, resulting in few details described in this case study for these locations.

Kiribati census data for 2005 and 2010 described LDS members as "Mormon" instead of Latter-day Saint. This may result in the

inclusion of non-LDS individuals who adhere to other Restorationist movements. However, the Community of Christ and other denominations appear to have only a few, if any, members in Kiribati, suggesting that essentially all who endorsed "Mormon" as their religion likely claimed membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Future Prospects

The outlook for future growth in Kiribati appears highly favorable within the foreseeable future as the Marshall Islands Majuro Mission is actively redistributing its missionary resources to enable the opening of additional islands to missionary activity and there are preliminary plans to redistrict congregations on Tarawa to jumpstart growth after more than a decade of stagnant congregational growth. Receptivity remains high in most areas and opportunities for growth appear favorable throughout the islands. Prospects appear favorable for the opening of all remaining islands with 1,000 or more inhabitants to missionary activity and the establishment of member groups in these locations once there is a sufficient number of full-time missionaries to mobilize additional national outreach expansion efforts. Success in the recent opening of additional islands to missionary activity will be best measured by member groups meeting and sustaining the qualifications to operate as official branches and local members becoming self-sufficient in meeting local leadership needs. The greatest progress in ameliorating member inactivity and convert attrition will be evidenced by the organization of additional congregations on Tarawa Atoll, reduced reliance on church employees to staff leadership positions, and continued increases in the number of nominal members self-identifying as Latter-day Saints on future censuses.

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