

Case Studies on Recent LDS Missionary and Church Growth Successes

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Recent Church Growth and Missionary Successes in Haiti

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Overview

Inhabited by 10 million people, Haiti is the second most populous nation in the Caribbean after Cuba. The population is homogenously Haitian-Creole speaking. Within the past decade, the LDS Church has experienced more efficient growth as evidenced by congregational growth rates surpassing membership growth rates, the number of members increasing from 12,000 to 19,000, the number of congregations increased from 26 to 43, the number of stakes increasing from two to four, and the number of cities and towns with an LDS presence increasing from eight to 16.

This case study reviews the history of the Church in Haiti and identifies recent church growth and missionary successes. Opportunities and challenges for growth are analyzed. The size and growth trends of the Church in Haiti is compared to the status of the Church in other of the most populous countries in the Caribbean and contrasted to the growth and size of other missionary-focused Christian groups. Limitations to this case study are identified and prospects for future growth are predicted.

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LDS Background

In the late 1970s, the Church baptized the first Haitians in South Florida and Port-au-Prince. In 1980, the Church officially began missionary work in Haiti, organized the first branch in Port-au-Prince, and assigned the country to the West Indies Mission. In 1982, the Church organized its first member district headquartered in Port-au-Prince. In 1983, the Church dedicated Haiti for missionary work and the following year organized the new Haiti Port-au-Prince Mission. In 1984, there were 475 members and approximately a dozen branches. Rapid membership and congregational growth occurred during the 1980s. The Church organized its first branches in Cap-Haitien (1982), Gonaïves (1983), Saint Marc (1983), Jacmel (1984), Les Cayes (1984), Petit Goave (1984), Leogane (1985), Jeremie (1989), and Port-De-Paix (1989). At year-end 1989, membership reached 4,200 and the number of branches increased to 18. In 1990, a second member district began functioning in Les Cayes.

Membership growth significantly declined in the 1990s, rapidly accelerated in the late 1990s and early 2000s, decelerated in the mid to late 2000s, and remained stable in the early 2010s. The Church removed foreign missionaries for a five-year period in the 1990s due to political instability. This resulted in limited missionary manpower and a focus by church leaders to strengthen current membership to form a stake. In 1997, the Church in Haiti organized its first stake in Port-au-Prince. In 1999, a member district was organized in Gonaïves to service northern Haiti. Church membership reached 5,000 in 1993, 10,157 in 2001, 15,489 in 2008, and 19,216 in 2013. Slow congregational growth generally occurred from the early 1990s to the late 2000s as the number of congregations reached 20 in 2000, 25 in 2002, and 30 in 2008. Coincidentally, no additional cities or towns had a ward or branch organized for the first time between 1990 and 2006. Provided with the number of wards and branches in parentheses, the Church reported official congregations in 10 cities and towns during the early 2000s including Port-au-Prince (9), Gonaïves (2), Les Cayes (2), Saint Marc (2), Cap-Haitien (1), Jacmel (1), Jeremie (1), Leogane (1), Petit Goave (1), and Port-De-Paix (1). In 2003, the Chuch organized a second stake (Port-au-Prince North). In 2004, foreign missionaries were evacuated again due to political instability.

Accelerated congregational growth trends during the late 2000s and early 2010s coincided with the organization of the first branches in Deschapelles (2007), Tenier (2007), Cavaillon (2008), Fort Liberte (2011), Lascahobas (2011), and Limbe (2013). The total number of congregations increased from 31 at year-end 2009 to 43 by year-end 2013. The Church organized a total of 12 new congregations during this period, namely the Martissant Ward (2010), Lascahobas Branch (2011), Pivert Branch (2011),

Fort Liberte Branch (2011), Vertieres Branch (2011), Petionville 2nd Ward (2011), Marin Ward (2012), Bas Delmas Ward (2012), Petit Place Cazeau Ward (2012), Leogane 2nd Ward (2012), Croix-des-Bouquets 2nd Ward (2012), and the Limbe Branch (2013).

Provided with the number of wards and branches in parentheses, in mid-2014 the Church operated official congregations in 16 cities and towns including Port-au-Prince (19), Les Cayes (3), Saint Marc (3), Cap-Haitien (2), Gonaïves (2), Jacmel (2), Leogane (2), Cavaillon (1), Deschapelles (1), Fort Liberte (1), Jeremie (1), Lascahobas (1), Limbe (1), Petit Goave (1), Port-De-Paix (1), and Tenier (1). The Haiti Port-au-Prince Mission Branch also operated to service areas outside the boundaries of stakes, districts, and mission branches. The number of cities and towns with a ward or branch increased from

Additional stakes organized have included the Port-au-Prince Haiti North (2003), Carrefour Haiti (2012), and Croix-des-Missions Haiti (2012) Stakes. As of mid-2014, there were three member districts located in Les Cayes (1990), Gonaïves (1999), and Saint Marc (2012).

In early 2010, there were 74 missionaries serving in the Haiti Port-au-Prince Mission.[1]

Successes

The Church in Haiti has been totally self-sufficient in meeting its missionary needs since political instability warranted the evacuation of all 56 foreign missionaries in February 2004.[2] The removal of foreign missionaries has also coincided with reversing the more than 20-year trend of incommensurate membership and congregational growth rates incurred by membership growth rates surpassing congregational growth rates. This finding is indicative of convert retention and member inactivity problems that prevent the creation of additional congregations due to a lack of a proportional increase in active membership necessary to organize additional congregations. Consequently the average number of members per congregation soared from 147 in 1987 to a high of 523 in 2006. The members-to-units ratio has declined most years since the mid-2000s and reached a low of 433 in 2012, suggesting some improvement in convert retention and member activity as demonstrated by congregational growth rates slightly surpassing membership growth rates during this period.

Port-au-Prince has become an important center of strength for the Church in Haiti and the Caribbean region. In mid-2014, Port-au-Prince had the second largest numbers of stakes of any metropolitan area in the Caribbean after Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. Congregational and stake growth trends have also numbered among the most rapid in the Americas since 1997 as no other metropolitan area with one million or more inhabitants has gone from no stakes to four stakes during this period. Seven new wards have been organized in the Port-au-Prince area since 2010, suggesting real growth in the number of active members and priesthood holders.

National outreach expansion has occurred in recent years as the number of cities and towns with an official ward or branch has increased within the past decade from 10 to 16. The Church has recently made progress reaching less-populated areas of the country outside of cities. Of the six locations where the Church established its first branch since 2007, four of these locations (Deschapelles, Tenier, Cavaillon, and Lascahobas) are towns or rural communities with less than 10,000 inhabitants. To contrast, the Church had no wards or branches that operated in less populated areas prior to 2007. The establishment of branches in multiple towns and rural communities within the past seven years signifies an important transition of improved self-sufficiency and strength in Haitian church leadership to permit the organization of these congregations and the Church becoming more widespread in the country.

The Church has translated many church materials and all LDS scriptures into Haitian Creole. Examples of some materials available in Haitian Creole include the official missionary guide Preach My Gospel, Our Heritage, various church proclamations, Book of Mormon Stories, Gospel Principles, General Conference addresses, priesthood handbooks, Relief Society materials, youth materials, and monthly First Presidency messages. These materials present investigators with a wealth of study material when contemplating membership and provide necessary resources for testimony development and gospel scholarship.

Opportunities

The Church continues to maintain a limited presence in Haiti as evidenced by only 43 congregations servicing 10 million people and only 32.6% of the national population residing in locations where there is a ward or branch present. Approximately eight percent of the population resides in cities with over 10,000 inhabitants where no ward or branch operates. Targeting these locations appears most effective to quickly increase the percentage of the national population reached by LDS missionary efforts. A map displaying cities with at least 10,000 inhabitants and no wards or branches can be found here. Many of these cities are located in northern Haiti where the Church has historically experienced limited growth due, in part, to few mission resources allocated to these areas.

Reaching populations residing in towns and rural communities will be crucial towards the LDS Church establishing a widespread presence in Haiti. In 2009, 60% of the population resided in towns with less than 10,000 inhabitants or in rural communities.[3] The establishment of additional member groups and branches in rural areas will require judicious planning in identifying suitable locations to target for formal missionary efforts due to smaller populations spread over large geographic areas. Generally traditional LDS proselytism approaches where full-time missionaries are assigned to a single congregation do not fare well in

these rural settings as a result of remote location, transportation challenges, comparatively fewer people to contact and teach than urban areas, and lower standards of living. Adopting innovative proselytism approaches where a single missionary companionship is assigned to a particular rural area may be best suited for making frugal use of limited missionary resources, instilling self-sufficiency in fledgling congregations, and assessing conditions for growth in previously unreached areas. Successes for reaching rural populations will require active participation and planning from local church leaders and careful coordination with the mission president in order to identify isolated members and investigators, hold cottage meetings and firesides to lay the groundwork for establishing a more permanent LDS presence, and ensure that the Church can properly administer these remote areas.

Translating the Hastening the Work of Salvation website and broadcast has good potential to provide additional resources and direction to members, church leaders, and full-time missionaries in improving the efficiency of missionary work. Currently Haitian Creole is one of the languages spoken by the most Latter-day Saints without a translation of the Hastening of the Work of Salvation website and broadcast. Although this decision may have been made due to Haiti's population having limited access to the internet (only 10% in 2010),[4] the principles and resources provided by the website and broadcast are greatly needed to promote greater member-missionary participation and to help transition the role of full-time missionaries from finding and fellowshipping new converts to teaching and preparing investigators for baptism. Providing these resources in a DVD or paper format may be the most effective means to distribute and promote the usage of the Hastening the Work of Salvation initiative.

As current societal and political conditions prevent the assignment of foreign missionaries, the Church totally relies on Haitian natives to augment the size of the full-time missionary force. Greater emphasis on mission preparation among youth and young single adults will be warranted to achieve steady gains in the number of Haitians serving full-time missions and provide the needed missionary manpower to expand national outreach.

Challenges

Although Haiti became the second independent nation in the Americas in 1804, little progress has been made improving societal and economic conditions. Illiteracy, rampant poverty, low living standards, corruption, and high rates unemployment and underemployment all pose serious challenges for achieving growth. Half the population is illiterate and 80% are estimated to live below the poverty line. Haiti numbers among the most corrupt countries in the world. In 2013, Transparency International ranked Haiti as 163rd out of 177 countries analyzed on its Corruption Perception Index, scoring 19 out of 100, indicating that corruption perceptions in Haiti were nearly equal with nations such as Chad, Guinea-Bissau, and Yemen.[5] Haiti is regarded by the international community as the most corrupt nation in the Americas. Haiti also numbers among the nations with the greatest inequality in family income,[6] indicative of economic and political problems that place the majority of the nation's wealth within a small subset of the population. Coincidentally, Haiti is also the poorest nation in the Americas with a GDP per capita of $1,300; comparable to the least-developed nations in Sub-Saharan Africa.[7] Meager incomes and a lack of employment pose challenges for church members to be financially stable, pay tithing, and help the Church in Haiti become more financially self-sufficient. Low literacy rates pose difficulties for personal testimony development among illiterate members who cannot read the scriptures and church materials. Temporal needs outweigh spiritual needs among many, prompting the Church to concentrate on humanitarian and development projects rather than conducting proselytism.

The Church experienced significant convert retention and member inactivity problems during the years when foreign missionaries served in the country. Many Haitian converts who joined the Church during these years were rushed into baptism with minimal prebaptismal preparation and post-baptismal fellowship, resulting in high convert attrition. The repeated removal of foreign missionaries has disrupted missionary work, which has also impacted activity and retention rates. Although convert retention and member activity rates have substantially improved within the past decade, the Church in Haiti continues to struggle with reactivation efforts among those baptized many years ago who experienced limited meaningful church activity.

The Church in Haiti has experienced limited growth in comparison to other nations in the region that have had an LDS presence for as long as Haiti. The Church in the Dominican Republic established its first branch in 1978 and assigned the first proselytizing missionaries in 1979, whereas the Church in Haiti established its first branch and assigned the first missionaries in 1980. Despite an LDS presence established at essentially the same time and national populations both numbering at approximately 10 million, the Dominican Republic and Haiti have experienced significantly differing LDS growth trends. In 2013, the Church in the Dominican Republic reported more than six times as many members, nearly five times as many stakes, and three times as many districts, and operated three missions, a missionary training center, and a temple.

Although Christians constitute 96% of the population, many practices and beliefs inherent in the African Voodoo (Vodoun) religion are followed by half of the national population. Latter-day Saints often experience opposition and ostracism from their family and communities when they join the Church and discontinue or abandon Voodoo beliefs and practices. Many other Christian groups permit greater syncretism of Voodoo and Christianity than the LDS Church, which may have contributed to reduced growth rates for the Church in Haiti compared to some of these other denominations.

Comparative Growth

The Church in Haiti has the third most members and third most stakes among Caribbean nations, although the percentage of members in the population is lower than most countries and dependencies in the region. In 2013, LDS membership constituted 1.22% in the Dominican Republic, 0.58% in Puerto Rico, 0.24% in Trinidad and Tobago, 0.21% in Jamaica, and 0.19% in Haiti.

Cuba is the only nation in the Caribbean with more than one million inhabitants that has a lower percentage of Latter-day Saints in the population than Haiti (0.00039%, or one LDS per 256,000). The Church in Haiti has experienced the most rapid congregational growth rates within the past five years among Caribbean nations.

Other missionary-focused Christian groups have more active members and a significantly more widespread presence in Haiti than the LDS Church. Many of these groups have operated in Haiti for decades longer than the LDS Church. Evangelicals claim 16% of the population and experience slow growth as evidenced by an annual membership growth rate of only 2.2%. Evangelicals report the highest receptivity in rural areas and cite limited church leadership training as one of the greatest barriers for growth.[8] The Seventh Day Adventist Church numbers among the largest and fastest growing nontraditional Christian denominations in Haiti, comprising four percent of the national population in 2013. Adventists established a formal presence in 1905.[9] Within the past decade, the number of churches (large congregations) has increased by over 100 and between 9,000 and 21,000 new members have been baptized a year during this period.[10] In mid-2013, Adventists reported 401,334 members, 534 churches (large congregations),[11] and approximately 500 companies (small congregations).[12] Jehovah's Witnesses maintain a widespread presence in Haiti, but compared to Adventist have few members. In 2013, Witnesses reported an average of 18,236 publishers (active members who regularly participate in proselytism), 1,462 baptisms, and 248 congregations.[13] The Church of the Nazarene reports a pervasive presence in Haiti and experiences steady growth. In 2013, Nazarenes reported 85,973 full members (gain of 7,183 from 2012), 31,003 associate members (decline of 7,313 from 2012), 8,107 new Nazarenes, an average weekly worship attendance of 66,720 (gain of 598 from 2012), 577 organized churches [well-established congregations] (gain of 11 from 2012), and 33 churches not get organized (recently organized, less-established congregations).[14]

Limitations

The Church does not publish statistical data pertaining to member activity rates, the number of convert baptisms per country, the number of members serving full-time missions from each country, the number of full-time missionaries assigned to each country, and a breakdown of its membership by administrative divisions within Haiti. No recent reports from Haitian church leaders or missionaries were available during the writing of this case study due to the isolation of the LDS Church in Haiti from worldwide membership largely incurred by church-imposed restrictions on foreign missionaries serving within the country. The Church does not publish information in the number and location of member groups. It is unclear whether many of these semi-official congregations operate in Haiti at present.

Future Prospects

The outlook for future LDS growth in Haiti appears optimistic for the foreseeable future due to the recent introduction of the Church into several towns and rural communities, the organization of two new stakes in Port-au-Prince in 2012, the recent acceleration in congregational growth, and the ongoing self-sufficiency of the Haitian full-time missionary force. The Church will likely established its first branches in several additional cities and towns within the foreseeable future, and additional wards and branches will likely be organized in Port-au-Prince within the next several years. The Church may announce a temple for Port-au-Prince one day once member activity and the Church's self-sufficiency can support a temple, and if political conditions become sufficiently stable to ensure the safety of such a structure.

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[4] "Haiti," Haiti Internet Usage, retrieved 10 June 2014. http://www.internetworldstats.com/car/ht.htm

[5] "Corruption Perceptions Index: 2013," Transparency International, retrieved 9 June 2014. http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2013/results/#myAnchor1

[6] "COUNTRY COMPARISON:: DISTRIBUTION OF FAMILY INCOME - GINI INDEX," CIA World Factbook, retrieved 10 June 2014. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2172rank.html?countryname=Haiti&countrycode=ha&regionCo

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[8] "Haiti," Operation World, retrieved 9 June 2014. http://www.operationworld.org/country/hait/owtext.html

[9] Land, Gary. 2005. Historical Dictionary of Seventh-Day Adventists, Scarecrow Press, Inc.: Lanham, Maryland.

[10] "Haitian Union Mission (1989-Present)," www.adventiststatistics.org, retrieved 9 June 2014. http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldID=U10053

[11] "Haitian Union Mission," www.adventistyearbook.org, retrieved 9 June 2014. http://www.adventistyearbook.org/default.aspx?page=ViewAdmField&AdmFieldID=HAUM

[12] "Haitian Union Mission (1989-Present)," www.adventiststatistics.org, retrieved 9 June 2014. http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldID=U10053

[13] “2014 Yearbook of Jehovah’s Witnesses,” jw.org, retrieved 12 April 2014. http://www.jw.org/en/publications/books/2014-yearbook/

[14] "Church of the Nazarene Growth, 2003-2013," nazarene.org, retrieved 9 June 2014. http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CCwQFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fna