



Prospective LDS Outreach Case Studies

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Prospective LDS Outreach in the Lesser Sunda (Bali and Nusa Tenggara) Islands and the Maluku (Moluccas) Islands in Indonesia

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Overview

The Lesser Sunda Islands and the Maluku Islands are two island archipelagos located in central and eastern Indonesia. 15.6 million reside in the two archipelagos, comprising 6.6% of the national population according to the most recent population data available.^[1] The Lesser Sunda Islands are further divided into Bali and Nusa Tenggara. There are five administrative provinces within the two archipelagos including Bali, Maluku, North Maluku, East Nusa Tenggara, and West Nusa Tenggara. Thousands of islands pertain to these archipelagos and hundreds of these islands are currently inhabited. Extreme ethnolinguistic diversity exists in the Maluku Islands and Nusa Tenggara as hundreds of indigenous languages are spoken - nearly all of which have fewer than 100,000 speakers.

Austronesian peoples have populated the Lesser Sunda Islands and the Maluku Islands for millennia. These peoples originally followed indigenous beliefs until the arrival of Islam and Christianity. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch traded in the region, with the Portuguese and Dutch formally colonizing the region. By the early twentieth century, the Dutch controlled all areas of the Lesser Sunda Islands and the Maluku Islands with the exception of the eastern half of Timor (East Timor or Timor-Leste) that continued to fall under the jurisdiction of Portugal. The islands became incorporated into Indonesia upon independence from the Netherlands during the mid-twentieth century. The eastern half of Timor remained under Portuguese administration until 1975 when the territory was invaded by Indonesia. In 2002, Timor-Leste declared independence from Indonesia and became an independent, sovereign nation.

The Lesser Sunda Islands and the Maluku Islands have diverse religious demography. The vast majority of the population is Muslim or Christian according to recent census data. Maluku Province is 51% Muslim, 48% Christian (Protestant and Catholic), and 1% followers of other religions.^[2] North Maluku Province is 74% Muslim, 25% Christian, and 1% followers of other religions.^[3] East Nusa Tenggara Province is 89% Christian, 9% Muslim, and 2% followers of other religions.^[4] West Nusa Tenggara Province is 96% Muslim, 3% Hindu, and 1% followers of other religions.^[5] Bali is the only predominantly Hindu province in Indonesia and is 83% Hindu, 13% Muslim, 2% Christian, and 2% followers of other religions.^[6] As of early 2014, the LDS Church has never operated a presence in the Lesser Sunda Islands or the Maluku Islands with the exception of Bali.

This case study reviews the history of the Church in the Lesser Sunda Islands and Maluku Islands, and identifies past church growth accomplishments. Recommendations for expanding outreach and spurring church growth are provided. Challenges for missionary activity in these island archipelagos are identified and discussed. The growth and status of the Church on other major islands is reviewed and the size and growth trends of other missionary-focused Christian groups in the Lesser Sunda Islands and Maluku Islands is summarized. Limitations to this case study are identified and prospects for the establishment of an official missionary presence is predicted.

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LDS Background

The Church established a small member group in Denpasar, Bali sometime in the late 2000s or in 2010. In 2011, the group became an official branch. In late 2013, the branch had approximately 10 active members. As of April 2014, no full-time missionaries have ever served in the Bali Branch although senior missionary couples have occasionally visited from Java to provide leadership and ecclesiastical support. At the time, Bali and West Nusa Tenggara fell within the geographical boundaries of the Bali Branch, whereas Maluku, North Maluku, and East Nusa Tenggara fell within the boundaries of the Manado Branch headquartered on northern Sulawesi.

The Church has never appeared to maintain a presence in the Maluku Islands or Nusa Tenggara.

Successes

The establishment of the Bali Branch constitutes a significant success for the Church as it is the only official congregation operating in the Lesser Sunda Islands. This achievement is further attested by the Church establishing a presence despite less favorable conditions for missionary activity and church growth compared to many other areas of Indonesia due to few Christians, the prominence of Hinduism in Balinese society, and other missionary-focused groups reporting low receptivity and a tiny presence notwithstanding a presence maintained for many decades.

The Church has translated all LDS scriptures and many church materials into standard Indonesian, providing the opportunity to many to study and learn about the Church in this commonly spoken national language.

Recommendations

The introduction of LDS missionaries and the establishment of congregations has the greatest likelihood for success in locations with sizable numbers of Christians. Christians from traditional faiths such as Catholicism and Protestantism tend to have greater tolerance than Muslims and Hindus for the proselytism of nontraditional Christian groups like the LDS Church. Christians also share greater theological similarities with Latter-day Saints than other religious groups in the region, serving as a foundation of faith upon which LDS missionaries can build as they share the message of the restored gospel.

Maluku and East Nusa Tenggara Provinces present the greatest opportunities for an LDS establishment due to Christians comprising a strong majority in East Nusa Tenggara Province and essentially half of the population in Maluku Province. There are two cities with 100,000 or more inhabitants located in these two provinces, Kupang (East Nusa Tenggara) and Ambon (Maluku). These two cities number among the three cities in the Lesser Sunda Islands and the Maluku Islands with the best accessibility from outside of the region due to airports that provide frequent domestic flights from Jakarta where mission headquarters are located. Kupang and Ambon also rank as the second and third most populous cities in the Lesser Sunda Islands and the Maluku Islands, providing large populations concentrated in small geographical areas for missionaries to proselyte. Future LDS outreach in Ambon and Kupang will have critical importance in the establishment of the Church in the region, especially considering less populous cities and towns will likely only be accessible to mission leaders by first traveling to Ambon or Kupang.

Visits from the mission president or senior missionary couples to Kupang and Ambon in search of isolated members and investigators and to evaluate prospects for assigning full-time missionaries constitute the first step towards establishing an LDS presence in the Maluku Islands and East Nusa Tenggara. Mission leaders identifying individuals on branch membership rolls who may reside within or nearby these cities, attempting to make contact to these individuals prior to visiting to provide information on the time when mission personnel will visit, and planning cottage meetings for interested individuals and isolated members have the greatest potential for making mission leader visits successful. The use of Facebook and other social media sites to target Kupang and Ambon with advertisements for a free copy of the Book of Mormon, an audiovisual material, and meetings with missionaries has good potential to augment the number of individuals with whom mission leaders can meet. The permanent assignment of a senior missionary couple in each city to begin holding worship services and laying the groundwork for the arrival of full-time missionaries will be an essential component of opening these cities to missionary activity once mission and area leaders deem that conditions are sufficiently safe to commence proselytism.

The use of Indonesian full-time missionaries serving from wards and branches on Java to comprise the first missionaries assigned to Kupang and Ambon appears to have the best potential for success. Indonesian full-time missionaries are fluent in the Indonesian language and can immediately teach and proselyte without the months of language study required by foreign missionaries to proficiently learn the language. Foreign full-time missionaries are extremely limited in number due to government restrictions on the number of visas given to the Church. Although the size of the indigenous Indonesian full-time missionary force is tiny compared to the enormous population of Indonesia, small numbers of Indonesian missionaries can be assigned with few, if any, complications with government officials.

Mission and area leaders may find success establishing a permanent LDS presence in the Lesser Sunda Islands and the Maluku Islands by requesting some Indonesian families from Java to relocate to major cities in these archipelagos. This tactic has not been utilized by mission and area leaders around the world for many years due to concern over active families becoming inactive if they relocate to cities where there is no previous church presence. Difficulty assimilating into a new city, finding employment, distance from friends and family, and safety concerns are potential problems that have dissuaded church leaders from implementing this tactic in Indonesia. There are few approaches that offer as much potential for church growth and permanent outreach expansion as active Latter-day Saint families moving to locations without a preexisting church presence due to member-missionary opportunities for family members to find and teach new friends and acquaintances. This approach must be carefully evaluated by church leaders, specifically in the process of selecting "planter families" who are requested to move to a new city in order to ensure that these families would be appropriate for this assignment. The Church has experienced some of its greatest growth through member families moving to previously unreached locations, starting small congregations, and reaching out to the local population. Coordination from mission leaders to purposefully and tactfully select planter families and identify locations for establishing congregations could yield good results in an era of stagnant outreach expansion for the

The assignment of one or two young, full-time missionary companionships to the Bali Branch will be necessary to jumpstart member-missionary work and find additional converts to support the fledgling branch. Close proximity to Java presents mission leaders with easier accessibility than many other islands in Indonesia. Assigning missionaries and later withdrawing them if few results are achieved and greater needs are presented elsewhere in the country will be necessary to conserve the extremely limited number of full-time missionaries available, and to avoid full-time missionaries eroding the self-sufficiency of the branch.

Locating municipalities with the highest percentages of Christians in North Maluku and West Nusa Tenggara has the greatest potential for successfully establishing a permanent LDS presence in these provinces. In West Nusa Tenggara, Kota Mataram is the municipality with the highest percentage of Christians (2.2%)^[7] and includes Mataram; the most populous city in the province and the most populous city in the Lesser Sunda Islands.^[8] Good accessibility to Mataram via airplane combined with the highest percentage of Christians in West Nusa Tenggara Province suggest that this city may be a favorable location for establishing an LDS presence. In North Maluku, Christians comprise a majority in two municipalities: North Halmahera (60%) and West Halmahera (59%).^[9] Remote location, poor accessibility, and no major cities in these municipalities suggest that there are no realistic prospects for LDS outreach within the foreseeable future.

Challenges

Extremely limited missionary manpower in the Indonesia Jakarta Mission poses the greatest barrier to establishing an official missionary presence in the Lesser Sunda Islands and the Maluku Islands. The number of missionaries in the mission is finite as very few foreign missionary visas have been issued to the Church for many years and no increase in the number of Indonesian members serving full-time missions has occurred within the past couple decades. The mission has maintained an official missionary presence in only a handful of cities on Java, and in one city each on Sulawesi (Manado) and Sumatra (Medan). Within the last decade, the mission has focused on helping districts reach the qualifications to become stakes resulting in few resources dedicated to expanding outreach elsewhere. In the early 2010s, mission leaders refocused mission efforts to opening additional cities on Java to missionary work and assigning additional missionary companionships to Manado, Sulawesi and Medan, Sumatra as a result of two of the three member districts becoming stakes. Greater attention and resources could consequently be shifted elsewhere as stakes operate without any direct supervision from the mission president and operate largely independently from the mission as a self-sufficient administrative unit. The added number of mission resources to Manado and Medan may result in a reduced likelihood for mission leaders to open the Lesser Sunda Islands and the Maluku Islands to formal missionary efforts as resources are channeled into forming centers of strength in Manado and Medan.

Very few Latter-day Saints reside in Bali and only a handful, if any, members appear to reside in the Maluku Islands and Nusa Tenggara. The lack of Latter-day Saints and formal missionary efforts on Bali make the sole branch vulnerable to closure and the disappearance of an LDS presence from the island altogether. The Church largely avoids opening locations where there are no known members due to concern of missionaries having no members to provide for the fellowshiping of new converts and no established local leadership base. These concerns - coupled with the geographic isolation of the Lesser Sunda Islands and the Maluku Islands from mission headquarters in Jakarta - suggest that any LDS establishment in the Lesser Sunda Islands and the Maluku Islands will not occur within the foreseeable future.

Christian-Muslim violence has occurred in some areas of the Lesser Sunda Islands and the Maluku Islands within the past 15 years. Some of the most severe violence occurred in Ambon during the mid-2000s as a result of Christian separatist groups clashing with residents in Muslim neighborhoods. Some of these clashes have left dozens dead and hundreds injured.^[10] There have been recent, minor conflicts between Christians and Muslims in Kupang involving matters such as the halting of mosque construction because of Christian leaders alleging that the construction permit was not appropriately obtained.^[11] However, within the past few years there have been no reports of violence or significant conflict between Muslims and Christians within the Lesser Sunda Islands and the Maluku Islands.

Many ethnolinguistic groups native to Bali, the Maluku islands, and West Nusa Tenggara exhibit strong ties to Islam or Hinduism. In Bali, the Balinese number 3.63 million and are 80% Hindu, 18.5% followers of indigenous religions, and 1.5% Christian.^[12] In the Maluku Islands, the most populous homogenous Muslim or predominantly Muslim peoples include the North Moluccan Malay (122,000 people; 99% Muslim, 1% Christian),^[13] Ternate (62,000 people; 100% Muslim),^[14] and the Fordate (60,900 people; 85% Muslim, 15% Christian).^[15] In West Nusa Tenggara, the three most populous ethnolinguistic peoples are homogeneously Muslim or predominantly Muslim, including the Sasak (2.79 million people, 100% Muslim),^[16] Mbojo (754,000 people; 99.99% Muslim),^[17] and Sumbawa (413,000 people; 82% Muslim, 18% indigenous religion).^[18] Challenges in reaching these peoples include strong ethnoreligious ties to Islam likely reducing receptivity to LDS outreach, intolerance of conversion to Christianity, remote location, and the lack of LDS teaching materials or resources for missionary work and gospel study among those with a Hindu or Muslim background.

The high degree of ethnolinguistic diversity in the region and a lack of translations of LDS materials in indigenous languages may pose challenges for future missionary activity. No languages native to the Lesser Sunda Islands and the Maluku Islands have translations of LDS materials or scriptures. Extreme ethnic diversity on some islands may create challenges for integrating ethnic groups into the same congregations, especially if there are significant difference in language, culture, and religious background.

Comparative Growth

The Church has essentially experienced no progress expanding outreach to additional islands in Indonesia during the twenty-first century. All but three LDS branches operate on Java and no new wards or branches have been organized on Java for many years with the exception of a few member groups. The Church has operated its sole branch on Sulawesi (Manado) for nearly three decades with little progress augmenting the number of active members until recently. In Sumatra, the Church has maintained its sole branch in Medan for nearly two decades and has experienced extremely slow growth. In Papua, the Church briefly operated a small branch in the mid-2000s but closed the branch due to active members relocating elsewhere. In Batam, a member group began meeting during the early 2010s but no formal missionary activity has occurred. No LDS presence has ever appeared to operate in Kalimantan.

Some missionary-focused Christian groups have maintained a presence in Bali, the Maluku Islands, and Nusa Tenggara for a half a century or longer. Evangelicals report a strong presence in Maluku and East Nusa Tenggara but only a small presence in Bali and West Nusa Tenggara. The Seventh Day Adventist Church maintains a widespread presence in Bali, the Maluku Islands, and East Nusa Tenggara. In 2012, Adventists reported 7,904 members, 80 churches, 31 companies, and 357 baptisms in East Nusa Tenggara;^[19] 6,160 members, 44 churches, 26 companies, and 114 baptisms in the Maluku Islands;^[20] and 8,102 members, 68 churches, 30 companies, and 344 baptisms in West Nusa Tenggara, Bali, and East Java.^[21] Adventists have experienced slow but steady growth in the Maluku Islands and East Nusa Tenggara, but have maintained a presence since as early as 1929 in the Maluku Islands^[22] and 1956 in Nusa Tenggara.^[23] Jehovah's Witnesses appear to maintain a presence in Bali, the Maluku Islands, and Nusa Tenggara but only published information on congregation locations for Bali in early 2014.^[24] The Church of the Nazarene reports no presence in the Lesser Sunda Islands and the Maluku Islands with the exception of Bali.

Limitations

The Church does not publish official membership figures for Indonesia by major island group or administrative division. It is unclear whether any member groups operate in the Maluku Islands or Nusa Tenggara and whether there are any isolated members who reside in these archipelagos. It is unclear how local populations would respond to LDS missionary activity as the Church has never established an official presence in the Maluku Islands or Nusa Tenggara.

Future Prospects

Conditions for missionary activity appear favorable in the cities of Kupang and Ambon due to their large populations, good accessibility from mission headquarters in Jakarta, and predominantly Christian populations. However, the extremely limited number of full-time missionaries assigned to Indonesia, distance from mission headquarters, the lack of known Latter-day Saints in the Lesser Sunda Islands and the Maluku Islands, and reluctance by mission and area leaders to open additional island groups to missionary work within the past two decades suggest that the establishment of an LDS presence in the Maluku Islands and Nusa Tenggara appears unlikely for many more years to come. The assignment of a missionary companionship to the Bali Branch appears the most likely development to occur in the Lesser Sunda Islands within the foreseeable future. Progress organizing member groups in the region will likely hinge on Indonesian members relocating to easily accessible locations such as Kupang and Ambon, these members requesting mission leaders to organize a congregation, and mission and area leaders approving the operation of member groups in these locations.

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