



# Prospective LDS Outreach Case Studies

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## Opportunities for Establishing the LDS Church in Additional Cities in Spain

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Supporting a population of 47.7 million, Spain is the seventh most populous country in Europe. The LDS Church has experienced steady growth in Spain since the establishment of an official presence in the late 1960s. At year-end 2013, the Church reported 51,192 members, 140 official congregations (80 wards, 60 branches), 14 stakes, four districts, three missions, a temple, and a missionary training center (MTC). Notwithstanding this progress, there are currently 71 cities that support populations of 40,000 or more without an LDS presence. Many of these locations appear favorable for the establishment of congregations and the assignment of full-time missionaries within the foreseeable future due to widespread religious freedom, abundant Spanish-speaking missionary manpower in the worldwide Church, and the general population in Spain exhibiting moderate receptivity to LDS outreach within the past four decades.

This case study reviews the growth of the Church in Spain and trends in national outreach expansion since 2000. Opportunities and challenges for expanding national outreach are explored. National outreach expansion efforts in other countries in southwestern Europe are reviewed, and the size and growth of other missionary-focused, nontraditional Christian denominations is summarized. Limitations to this case study are identified and prospects for future growth are predicted.

NOTE: In this case study, Spain is used to refer only to continental Spain unless otherwise noted (i.e. "sovereign Spain"). Administrative regions not included in this case study include the Balearic Islands, the Canary Islands, Ceuta, and Melilla.

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### LDS Growth in Spain

In February 1968, the Church in Spain organized its first official branch in Madrid. The Church organized a separate mission for Spain in 1970 and established the mission headquarters in Madrid. Additional missions headquartered in continental Spain were organized in Barcelona (1976), Seville (1976) [relocated to Malaga in 1993], and Bilbao (1987). In 2010, the Church closed the Spain Bilbao Mission.

In 1993, the Church announced a temple for Madrid, Spain. In 1999, the Church dedicated the new temple and also completed construction of a MTC on the same complex.

Church membership reached 1,000 in the mid-1970s. Membership increased to 5,395 in 1979, 10,218 in 1983, 23,000 in 1991, 30,439 in 1999, 41,188 in 2006, and 50,049 in 2012.

There were 25 branches in 1975. The number of congregations in sovereign Spain totaled 107 (11 wards, 96 branches) in 1987, 144 (18 wards, 126 branches) in 1991, 140 (47 wards, 93 branches) in 2003, 133 (61 wards, 72 branches) in 2007, and 140 (80 wards, 60 branches) in 2013.

There were three districts in 1975. The number of districts in sovereign Spain totaled 11 in 1987, 18 in 1993, 16 in 1999, 14 in 2003, 11 in 2004, 10 in 2006, nine in 2007, six in 2009, five in 2011, and four in 2013. Provided with the year organized, the Church in late 2014 operated districts headquartered in Santiago (1980), León (1985), La Mancha (1991), and Balearas (1994).

The Church organized its first stake in Spain in 1982 (Madrid Spain West). Additional stakes in sovereign Spain were organized in Barcelona (1982), Seville (1988), Cadiz (1995), Hospitalet (1997), Elche (1997), Madrid East (1999), Valencia (2003), Granada (2004), Vitoria (2009), Lleida (2012), Cartagena (2012), Madrid Centro (2012), and Las Palmas (2013). The number of stakes reached three in 1988, six in 1997, nine in 2004, and 14 in 2013.

## Trends in LDS National Outreach Expansion

Although the number of members and stakes has noticeably increased since 2000, the Church has reported a slight decrease in the number of cities with a congregation during this 14-year period. Since 2001, the Church has closed its only branch in nine cities, including La Linea (Andalusia), Santa Fe (Andalusia), Huesca (Aragón), Palencia (Castilla y León), Mérida (Extremadura), Getafe (Madrid), Elda (Valencia), Orihuela (Valencia), and Torrent (Valencia). Most of these cities had their sole LDS branch closed during the 2000s. During this decade, the Church established wards or branches in two cities that previous had no ward or branch functioning, namely Torreveja (Valencia) and Martorell (Catalonia).

The Church in the 2010s has thus far achieved some minor progress reversing declining national outreach expansion experienced during the previous decade. Since 2010, the Church has opened wards or branches in five cities where it did not previously operate a ward or branch, including Huércal-Overa [Andalusia] (2011), Vic [Catalonia] (2011), Vilagarcía de Arousa [Galicia] (2011), Molina de Segura [Murcia] (2012), and Manresa [Catalonia] (2014) whereas no cities had the sole LDS ward or branch closed during this period. There have also been instances of mission and area leaders planning to open previously unreached cities to missionary activity. In 2014, missionaries serving in the Spain Barcelona Mission reported that the Europe Area presidency granted approval for the mission to open a member group and assign missionaries to Tortosa.

## Successes

The Church has started to reverse a nearly decade-long trend of contracting national outreach expansion as evidenced by the establishment of new wards, branches, and member groups in cities where no LDS units previous operated. Full-time missionaries have played a pivotal role in the establishment of additional congregations in previously unreached cities, and local church leaders have also participated in the facilitation of this process. Some of these efforts have yielded good success as evidenced by the advancement of member groups into branches. As additional cities have missionaries assigned and congregations established, the Church has increased the percentage of the population reached by LDS units and full-time missionaries.

## Opportunities

With the worldwide full-time missionary force mushrooming from 58,990 at year-end 2012 to more than 88,000 in October 2014, the Church has abundant manpower to utilize in expanding missionary work in Spain. Aside from English, no other language has as many members who speak Spanish in the Church due to millions of Spanish-speaking members in the Americas.

With over 50,000 nominal members on church records in Spain, there are many Latter-day Saints who have joined the Church and moved to locations where no nearby ward, branch, or member group operates. Local church leaders and full-time missionaries identifying urban areas where members have relocated to and visiting isolated members in these locations present good opportunities for assessing the opening of additional cities to missionary work and the establishment of member groups and branches in these locations. This strategy permits the Church to open smaller cities and towns that have never received an LDS gospel witness.

The most populous unreached cities provide good opportunities for national outreach expansion due to higher population densities requiring fewer congregations to adequately reach the population in comparison to small cities and rural areas. In 2013, there were 158 cities in Spain with 40,000 or more inhabitants. As of late 2014, 87 of these 158 cities (55%) had a ward or branch that met within the city, whereas 71 did not have a ward or branch that assembled within the city. Of the 71 lesser-reached or unreached cities, five had 100,000 or more inhabitants including Getafe (172,526), Marbella (142,018), Santa Coloma de Gramanet (120,029), Reus (106,790), and Barakaldo (100,502). Mission, stake, and district leadership identifying which cities have the most Latter-day Saints and assigning missionaries to these locations to prepare the groundwork for the establishment of a member group or branch constitutes a thrifty and effective strategy to maximize growth, reactive less-active members, and expand the Church's national outreach capabilities. A map displaying the location of all cities in Spain with 40,000 inhabitants or more and the status of LDS outreach can be found [here](#).

The highest concentrations of unreached cities in Spain with 40,000 or more inhabitants are located in the Madrid area and the Barcelona area. Coordination from stake and mission leaders to identify locations best suited for the establishment of branches that assemble in these locations presents good prospects to accelerate growth. The organization of branches has been the primary method the Church has achieved growth in Spain as nearly all wards previously operated as branches. A church-planting approach to growth appears more appropriate in Spain compared to the church-splitting approach widely implemented by the Church in North America. Church-splitting approaches require congregations to reach an arbitrary number of active members to organize another congregation. As growth has been slow in many areas and receptivity has been modest, church planting reduces travel times to church, spurs local leadership development, and fosters a sense of LDS community as new converts remain active and fill local church callings and responsibilities.

## Challenges

The Church in Spain has experienced a net decline in the number of cities with a ward or branch between 2000 and late 2014

notwithstanding membership increasing from 31,695 to 51,192 during this period; an increase of nearly 20,000. If commensurate membership and national outreach expansion occurred during this 14-year period, the number of cities with an LDS ward or branch would have increased by several dozen. The slight contraction in the number of cities with an LDS congregation suggests that the Church in Spain was not only unable to steadily open additional cities to proselytism and establish new congregations, but that the Church faced challenges maintaining its presence in previously opened cities and congregations. Difficulties maintaining branches in some locations has been primarily attributed to few convert baptisms, local leadership development problems, and modest to low member activity rates.

Although the population in Spain has exhibited higher receptivity to LDS outreach than most other European nations, the Church has nonetheless struggled to achieve greater growth. The greatest proselytism and church growth frustrations rest with native Spaniards. Spaniards comprise the majority of the population and are nominally Catholic, but have become secularized like other Western European populations. Missionaries and members report that convert baptisms among Latin Americans and other foreigner groups have driven the bulk of the Church's growth in Spain within the past several decades. The Church has experienced challenges in local leadership development as these populations are less established in Spain than their indigenous Spaniard counterparts. Additionally, cultural and societal influences in Latin America pose challenges for convert attrition and mediocre member participation. These difficulties have also emerged within the Church in Spain among Latin Americans. The large Latin American and foreigner presence in LDS congregations has also posed ethnic integration challenges for native Spaniards as LDS demographics do not reflect the demographics of the Spanish population.

Focus from mission and area leaders to establish additional stakes has also appeared to contribute to the contraction in LDS national outreach capabilities within the past 15 years. The number of missions based within continental Spain declined from four to three during this period due to the consolidation of the Spain Bilbao Mission with the Spain Barcelona Mission and Spain Madrid Mission. Mission presidents reported that this decision was initiated, in part, due to fewer member districts requiring mission president oversight and improved local leadership development. In 2000, the Church reported seven stakes and 16 districts in Spain (including the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands), whereas in 2014 the Church reported 14 stakes and four districts within sovereign Spain. Although the number of active members per congregation has appeared to substantially increased within the past two decades, there has been little vision to expand national outreach and proclaim the Latter-day Saint gospel witness into lesser-reached and unreached areas.

Although the Church has recently allocated hundreds more missionaries into its three European Spanish missions due to the worldwide surge in the number of members serving full-time missions, this unprecedented resource has not been harnessed to initiate more systematic and penetrating national outreach expansion. Mission leaders continue to advocate for assigning multiple missionary companionships to each ward or branch, resulting in diminished productivity and, at times, oversaturation of congregations with full-time missionaries. This policy reflects a conservative interpretation of the Church's "centers of strength" policy that posits the concentration of resources to select locations where most members reside and where the most developed church infrastructure exists. As the LDS Church traditionally relies on full-time missionaries to open additional cities to proselytism and lay the groundwork to establish congregations in unreached locations, failure to capitalize on surplus missionary manpower to orchestrate national outreach expansion could result in the Church missing its window of opportunity to make headway reaching millions, especially if populations become less receptive to LDS proselytism and fewer full-time missionaries serve in Spain in the coming years and decades.

## **Comparative Growth**

Since 2010, the Church in Europe has not regularly opened new wards, branches, or member groups in previously unreached cities and towns with the exception of Spain, Portugal, and Italy. In Portugal, the Church has opened many cities and towns and has established member groups and branches in several of these locations such as Bragança, Chaves, Lagos, Mirandela, and Peniche. In Italy, the Church opened member groups in several cities where no ward or branch previously operated such as Brixen, Caltanissetta, Enna, and Morbegno. However, since 2010 no wards or branches have been organized in cities and towns where the Church in Italy did not previously operate an official congregation. With perhaps only a couple exceptions, the Church in France, Germany, Scandinavia, the United Kingdom, and other Central European countries has not appeared for many years to open more than a couple urban locations to missionary activity and establish new congregations. The Church has achieved some progress opening the previously unreached former Yugoslav republics to missionary activity and establishing member groups in these locations, albeit progress has been slow and has yielded few results thus far.

Some missionary-focused Christian groups report a significantly more widespread presence in Spain than the LDS Church, whereas others report a presence comparable in size to the LDS Church. Evangelicals report approximately 462,000 members in Spain, accounting for one percent of the national population. Most Evangelicals are Latin Americans or foreigners from other areas of the world. Evangelicals report challenges establishing a more pervasive presence in Spain as there are an estimated 345 cities with 5,000 or more inhabitants without an Evangelical church.<sup>[1]</sup> In 2013, Jehovah's Witnesses reported an average of 108,254 publishers (active members who regularly proselyte), 2,329 baptisms, and 1,541 congregations. Witnesses operate more congregations in Spain than the number of wards and branches operated by the LDS Church in all of Europe. Witnesses also maintain language-specific congregations that hold worship services in many languages such as Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, Tagalog, French, Romanian, Spanish Sign Language, Russian, and Bulgarian. The Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Spain maintains a presence comparable in size to the LDS Church. In 2013, Adventists reported 16,526 members, 107 churches (large or well-established congregations), 41 companies (small or newly-established congregations), and 453 baptisms. Adventists have experienced slow but steady growth within the past decade as in 2003 there were 10,402 members, 83 churches, 28 companies, and 415 baptisms. The Church of the Nazarene reports a minimal presence in Spain. In 2013, Nazarenes reported 440 full members, 134 associate members, an average weekly worship of 404, and 10 congregations (eight organized churches, two not-yet-organized churches).<sup>[2]</sup>

## Limitations

The Church does not publish the number and location of its member groups. It is unclear how many member groups operate in Spain. The Church does not publish data regarding the year individual congregations were organized and where former congregations once operated. Information in this case study regarding the location of former congregations was retrieved through Marc Schindler's Worldwide Atlas of LDS Stakes, Missions and Temples from 2001;<sup>[3]</sup> a resource that is not an official LDS source. The Church does not publish data regarding member activity rates, sacrament meeting attendance, the number of full-time missionaries assigned to a country, and the number of members serving full-time missions from a country.

## Future Prospects

The outlook for the Church in Spain to establish a presence in additional cities and towns appears favorable within the foreseeable future due to increasing numbers of full-time missionaries assigned to European Spanish missions, the general population historically exhibiting moderate receptivity to LDS outreach, sizable numbers of unreached cities, and a need for the Church to establish a presence closer to the homes of some members. However, recent trends suggest that the Church will likely only open small numbers of additional cities to missionary work due to continued emphasis on assigning multiple missionary companionships to a single congregation. The Church will likely need to establish an additional mission or two in Spain if it initiates a widespread national outreach expansion campaign due to limited mission infrastructure in the country and the significantly large number of unreached cities.

<sup>[1]</sup> "Spain," Operation World, retrieved 18 October 2014. <http://www.operationworld.org/spai>

<sup>[2]</sup> "Church of the Nazarene Growth, 2003-2013," nazarene.org, retrieved 18 October 2014. <http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&ved=0CDwQFjAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fnazarene.org%2F>

<sup>[3]</sup> "Worldwide Atlas of LDS Stakes, Missions and Temples - 5th edition," www.gatheringofisrael.com, retrieved 24 October 2014. [http://www.gatheringofisrael.com/atlas/latin\\_america/atlas/intro.gif](http://www.gatheringofisrael.com/atlas/latin_america/atlas/intro.gif)