

Prospective LDS Outreach Case Studies

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Opportunities for LDS Outreach Expansion in the Philippines

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Overview

The LDS Church in the Philippines ranks among the largest bodies of Latter-day Saints outside the United States. In 2014, the Church reported over 700,000 members, 93 stakes, 79 districts, 21 missions, and 1,180 official congregations (592 wards, 588 branches). Scores of member groups also operate throughout the country. Although the Church in the Philippines has maintained a presence for over 50 years and has constructed two temples and a missionary training center (MTC), there remain large areas of the country where no LDS presence operates. Today approximately half the Philippine population resides in locations where LDS congregations operate, suggesting good opportunities for outreach expansion efforts.

This case study reviews the history of the Church in the Philippines. Recent successes in the Church expanding into previously unreached areas are identified and opportunities and challenges for expanding outreach into currently unreached areas are analyzed and explored. The size and growth trends of other missionary-focused Christian groups that operate in the country are summarized. Limitations to this case study are identified and prospects for the Church to achieve future national outreach expansion are predicted.

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LDS Background

The Church in the Philippines began its initial missionary efforts during the early 1960s through the Southern Far East Mission (headquartered in Hong Kong). The Church organized a separate mission headquartered in the Philippines in 1967 (later renamed the Philippines Manila Mission). A second mission was organized in 1974 to service the central and southern Philippines. Additional missions were organized in Davao (1977), Quezon City (1979) [relocated to Baguio in 1981], Quezon City (1986), Cebu East (1987) [renamed Cebu in 1988], Cagayan de Oro (1988), Quezon City West (1988) [relocated to San Fernando in 1991 and later to Olongapo in 1994], Naga (1989), San Pablo (1990), Tacloban (1990), Ilagan (1990), Cabanatuan (1992) [relocated to Angeles], Laoag (2004), Butuan (2006), Iloilo (2010), Quezon City North (2011), Cavite (2013), Cebu East (2013), Legaspi (2013), and Urdaneta (2013). The number of missions increased from one in 1967 to two in 1974, six in 1987, 12 in 1990, 16 in 2010, and 21 in 2013.

The number of members increased from 11 in 1960 to 794 in 1965, 4,603 in 1970, 26,355 in 1977, 107,000 in 1985, 213,000 in 1989, 354,000 in 1995, 470,486 in 2000, 553,121 in 2005, 645,776 in 2010, and over 700,000 in 2014.

The number of congregations increased from 57 in 1975 to 497 (186 wards, 311 branches) in 1987, 995 (278 wards, 717 branches) in 1995, and 1,228 (520 wards, 708 branches) in 2002. The number of congregations declined to 1,075 (469 wards, 606 branches) in 2006 and increased to 1,181 (593 wards, 588 branches) as of late 2014.

The Church reported in 1983 that 82% of the 1,100 full-time missionaries assigned to the Philippines were native Filipinos.[1] The Church in 1992 reported that 60-70% of the approximately 2,000 full-time missionaries assigned to the Philippines were local members.[2] The number of full-time missionaries assigned to serve in the Philippines increased from 2,380 in August 2012 to 4,482 in June 2014.[3] In June 2014, 2,383 of the 4,482 full-time missionaries (53%) were Filipinos.

Areas in the Philippines Unreached by the LDS Church

Most of the population unreached by the Church resides in cities and towns in administrative municipalities where no LDS

congregations operate. Many of these unreached municipalities are located nearby "reached" municipalities where LDS congregations operate. Eight of the 10 most populous unreached cities in the Philippines are located in unreached municipalities in central Luzon that border reached municipalities. Examples of these unreached municipalities include Marilao, Calumpit, Tagaytay, and Pililla.

There are approximately two dozen "clusters" of unreached administrative municipalities in the Philippines located on islands where the Church operates at least one LDS congregation. Most of these unreached municipality clusters are located on Mindanao (8) and in the Visayas (8). Based on population data obtained from 2010, 11.35 million people (12.3% of the national population) reside in clusters of administrative municipalities where there is no LDS presence and where the population of the municipality cluster exceeds 100,000 people.

There is a sizable number of the unreached Philippine population that resides on islands where there is no LDS presence. There are at least 3.07 million people (3.3% of the national population) who reside on islands in the Philippines where no LDS congregations operate. Most of the population who reside on unreached islands are located in the Sulu Archipelago and the Visayas.

A map displaying the location of unreached administrative municipalities with at least 100,000 people and unreached islands in the Philippines can be found here.

Successes

The Church in the Philippines has readily opened member groups and branches in lesser-reached or unreached cities, towns, and villages since 2010. The Church has opened its first ward, branch, or group in approximately 40 previously unreached municipalities including Ajuy (Iloilo), Argao (Cebu), Baao (Camarines Sur), Bamban (Tarlac), Basud (Camarines Norte), Buena Vista (Guimaras), Burgos (Ilocos Sur), Coron (Palawan), Culasi (Antique), Del Gallego (Camarines Sur), Enrile (Cagayan), Gandara (Western Samar), Ibajay (Aklan), Indang (Cavite), Inopacan (Leyte), Ipil (Zamboanga del Sur), Labrador (Pangasinan), Mabini (Pangasinan), Malinao (Albay), Miagao (Iloilo), Murcia (Negros Occidental), Nabua (Camarines Sur), Nueva Valencia (Guimaras), Oras (Eastern Samar), Panglao (Bohol), Pavia (Iloilo), Pilar (Capiz), Ragay (Camarines Sur), Rizal (Palawan), Sablayan (Occidental Mindoro), San Pablo (Zamboanga del Sur), Santa (Ilocos Sur), Sibunag (Guimaras), Sigma (Capiz), Siquijor (Siquijor), Sison (Pangasinan), Soccoro (Oriental Mindoro), Taytay (Palawan), Tayum (Abra), Tibiao (Antique), Ubay (Bohol), and Vintar (Ilocos Norte). No municipalities have had the sole LDS unit close since 2010. Within the past five years, the Church has organized its first congregations in 2.7% of the Philippines' nearly 1,500 administrative municipalities.

The Church has significantly augmented the number of full-time missionaries assigned to the Philippines as a result of the worldwide surge in the number of members serving full-time missions. Full-time missionaries have played a critical role in the establishment of the Church in previously unreached locations. The organization of several new missions within the past five years has contributed to national outreach expansion efforts due to greater mission president oversight, larger numbers of full-time missionaries assigned, and efforts to reduce travel times for members and investigators to reach the nearest meetinghouse.

Opportunities

The Church has nearly doubled the size of its full-time missionary force in the Philippines within the past couple years. The Philippines Area Presidency noted that the number of full-time missionaries assigned to serve in the Philippines increased from 2,380 in August 2012 to 4,482 in June 2014.[4] The self-sufficiency of the Philippine full-time missionary force has also noticeably improved as evidenced by 2,383 Filipino members serving full-time missionaries within the Philippines as of June 2014.[5] A significant surge in the number of full-time missionaries assigned to the Philippines indicates an unprecedented opportunity for the Church to utilize surplus missionary manpower to open additional areas to proselytism. The average Philippine mission included 140 missionaries as of 2012. If the Church were to maintain this average with the number of missionaries serving as of mid-2014, the Church would need to operate 11 additional missions. There appear good opportunities to organize additional missions that could potentially administer areas with clusters of unreached municipalities. Additional missions appear most likely to be headquartered in locations such as Lucena, Ormoc City, Pagadian City, and Tagum City. The organization of missions on additional islands where no LDS missions are currently headquartered also present good opportunities for growth but appear less likely than the organization of additional missions on islands where at least one LDS Mission operates based on past trends in mission growth. Islands that present the greatest opportunities to have a mission organized include Bohol, Mindoro, Palawan, and Samar.

Unreached municipalities in south-interior Panay Island present the greatest opportunities for opening additional areas to missionary work and establishing congregations within the immediate future. This cluster of unreached municipalities has a combined population of nearly half a million and is easily accessible from mission headquarters in Iloilo City. The Philippines Iloilo Mission ranks among the five Philippine missions with the fewest stakes and districts and appears one of the best equipped missions in the Philippines to allocate mission resources to open previously unreached areas to proselytism. Recent trends in national outreach expansion within the mission also suggest good prospects for outreach within the approximately one dozen unreached municipalities in south-interior Panay Island. The mission has opened member groups in at least eight locations where no LDS units previously operated since the mission was organized in 2010 including Ajuy, Comian, Culasi, Ibajay, Miag-ao, Pilar, Sibunag, Sigma, and Tibiao. Cities and towns in sout- interior Panay Island that appear most favorable for

prospective missionary activity and the establishment of member groups or branches include Alimodian, Cabatuan, Dueñas, Janiuay, Lambunao, Leon, Maasin, Mina, Santa Barbara, San Miguel, and Tubungan.

The highlands of northern Luzon also present good opportunities for the Church to open additional cities and towns to proselytism. Over one million people reside in the cluster of several dozen unreached administrative divisions within Abra, Apayao, Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga, Mountain, and Nueva Vizcaya Provinces. The Philippines Baguio Mission administers many of the most populous unreached municipalities and some these municipalities are located close to mission headquarters in Baguio City such as Itogon and Tuba. Mission, stake, and district leaders visiting the most populous unreached locations in these unreached municipalities and assessing conditions for assigning full-time missionaries will be an important step in making greater progress reaching this large, rugged geographical area.

Challenges

The Church in the Philippines has historically experienced problems with member inactivity and convert attrition. Only 20% of nominal Latter-day Saints on church records appear to regularly attend church. Many mission resources continue to be channeled into reactivation efforts and strengthening branches and districts to become wards and stakes one day. Many missions with clusters of unreached municipalities have a larger number of districts than stakes or an equal number of stakes and districts within their jurisdictions such as missions headquartered in Baguio, Butuan, Cayagan de Oro, Cebu East, Laoag, Legaspi, and Tacloban. Districts require significant mission president oversight and siphon mission resources to meet administrative needs and help districts become stakes. The Church has also placed many of its surplus missionary manpower into well-established wards and stakes to revitalize reactivation efforts and organize additional wards. Most districts have experienced significant delays in reaching the minimum qualifications to operate as stakes primarily due to problems with inadequate numbers of full-tithe-paying Melchizedek Priesthood holders and inactivity problems within general church membership. Several districts in the Philippines once operated as stakes but were downgraded to district status due to problems maintaining the standards for stakes to operate. Examples of districts that once operated as stakes include districts headquartered in Agoo, Bauang, Burgos, Camiling (2), Guimba (Munoz), Kidapawan, La Carlota, Mangaldan, Olongapo, and Ozamiz. These conditions have historically slowed progress for the Church to open additional areas to proselytism as problems in church leadership and administration have taken greater precedence than opening unreached municipalities and populated places to missionary activity.

Many Philippine missions cover large geographical areas and multiple islands. These conditions pose major challenges for effective church administration due to poorly developed transportation and limited infrastructure in many areas of the country. Most islands administered by missions headquartered on other islands have experienced little to no expansion of LDS outreach within the past five years such as Bohol, Marinduque, Masbate, and Mindoro. The opening of additional islands to missionary work poses the greatest challenges for expanding LDS outreach in the Philippines due to geographic separation and distance from mission headquarters. Mission leadership visits to unreached islands require significant resources of time and money to assess conditions, contact isolated members and investigators, and lay the groundwork for full-time missionaries to be permanently assigned. Distance poses concerns with the proper supervision of full-time missionaries and the administration of fledgling congregations. These difficulties have resulted in the Church opening only two additional islands to missionary work within the past five years (Coron and Siquijor) notwithstanding approximately 50 unreached islands that support populations of 10,000 or more.

Areas with sizable Muslim populations or where Muslims constitute the majority pose challenges for LDS proselytism. The Church has avoided expanding outreach into most areas where there is a sizable number of Muslims among the indigenous population such as in western Mindanao. These locations have experienced challenges with insurgencies and political conflict as Muslims in the region have strived for greater autonomy from the Philippine government. The Church has only assigned Philippine full-time missionaries to serve in Mindanao for over a decade due to safety concerns for North Americans to serve in the region. Although conflict in the region has substantially subsided in recent years, caution should be exercised to respect cultural norms and to mitigate safety concerns. There are good opportunities to expand missionary activity among Christians within traditionally Muslim areas and other missionary-focused groups have maintained a more widespread presence in these locations than the LDS Church. The Church has yet to develop Muslim-specific proselytism and teaching approaches that tailor the Latter-day Saint gospel message to those without a Christian background. The Sulu Archipelago supports a population of over one million people and remains totally unreached by the LDS Church due to remote location and Muslims comprising a strong majority of the population.

Comparative Growth

Other missionary-focused Christian groups maintain a more widespread presence in the Philippines than the LDS Church. Jehovah's Witnesses maintain a widespread presence throughout the Philippines and operate multiple congregations in most municipalities and islands where the LDS Church reports no presence. For example, Witnesses operate approximately two dozen congregations on the Zamboanga Peninsula in administrative municipalities where the LDS Church does not operate congregations. In 2014, Witnesses reported an average of 190,930 publishers (active members who regularly engage in proselytism), 3,186 congregations, and 9,069 baptisms.[6] Witnesses operate nearly three times as many congregations in the Philippines as Latter-day Saints. In 2013, Adventists reported 872,267 members, 4,566 churches (large or well-established congregations), 2,109 companies (small or recently-established congregations), and 63,929 baptisms.[7] Adventist membership grew by 5.3% during 2013. The Church of the Nazarene reports a more limited presence in the Philippines than the LDS Church. In 2014, Nazarenes reported approximately 25,000 full members, 2,603 fellowship members, an average weekly worship of 16,077 people, 317 organized churches (larger or well-established congregations), and 47 churches not yet

organized (small or recently-established congregations).[8]

Limitations

The Church in the Philippines does not publish membership figures by administrative province or city. There are no official statistics that provide the number of members who reside in locations without a branch. The Church does not publish the location, names, and numbers of member groups. The Church does not annually publish data on the number of missionaries serving per country or the number of missionaries assigned per country or mission. No official statistics on member activity or convert retention rates are available to the public.

Future Prospects

The outlook for the Church to continue national outreach expansion appears highly favorable within the foreseeable future due to the doubling of the size of the full-time missionary force in the Philippines within the past two years, mission and area leaders experiencing good results opening previously unreached administrative municipalities to missionary activity, and the Philippine population continuing to exhibit good receptivity to LDS outreach. Prospects appear most favorable for national outreach expansion in Luzon and islands in the Visayas with an LDS presence (e.g. Cebu, Leyte, Negros, and Panay) due to good accessibility to lesser-reached and unreached municipalities, the opening of many new missions within these regions, the predominantly Christian population, and developed LDS infrastructure in many areas. Recent growth trends suggest that little progress will occur within the foreseeable future expanding missionary outreach on Mindanao, islands with no LDS mission headquartered on the island (e.g. Bohol, Masbate, Palawan, and Samar), and the most populous islands with no current LDS presence (e.g. Basilan, Burias, Dinagat, Romblon, Sulu, and Tablas). The Church may organized several new missions in the Philippines within the foreseeable future to reduce the number of missionaries assigned to individual missions and to orchestrate greater national outreach expansion.

[1] "Growth 'just amazing'," LDS Church News, 14 May 1988.
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[2] Lim, Augusto A. "Missionary Work in the Philippines," Ensign, Nov 1992, 82

[3] "October Philippines Area Presidency Message," Liahona, retrieved 26 December 2014.
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[4] "October Philippines Area Presidency Message," Liahona, retrieved 26 December 2014.
http://lds.org.ph/bc/content/Philippines/Dateline%20Philippines/2014/Dateline%20October%202014-English.pdf

[5] "October Philippines Area Presidency Message," Liahona, retrieved 26 December 2014.
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[6] "2014 Service Year Report of Jehovah's Witnesses Worldwide," 2015 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses, retrieved 3 January 2015.
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[7] "Southern Asia-Pacific Division (1997-Present)," adventiststatistics.org, retrieved 3 January 2015.
http://adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldID=D_SSD

[8] "Church of the Nazarene Growth, 2004-2014," nazarene.org, retrieved 1 January 2015.