



Prospective LDS Outreach Case Studies

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Prospective LDS Outreach in Greenland and the Faroe Islands

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Overview

Denmark administers Greenland and the Faroe Islands although each of these self-governing overseas administrative divisions exhibits a significant degree of autonomy. Approximately 58,000 inhabit Greenland whereas 50,000 inhabit the Faroe Islands. Greenlandic-speaking Inuit peoples constitute nearly nine-tenths of the population in Greenland. The majority of the population follows Lutheranism and/or indigenous beliefs. Faroese-speaking Scandinavians with Old Norse ancestry constitute the majority of the population of the Faroe Islands. Most in the Faroe Islands adhere to Lutheranism. Although widespread religious freedom exists in both Greenland and the Faroe Islands, no official LDS proselytism efforts have occurred in either location. Today there is no LDS presence in neither Greenland nor the Faroe Islands.

This case study reviews the history of the Church's administration of Greenland and the Faroe Islands. Opportunities and challenges for future growth are analyzed. The growth of other missionary-focused Christian groups with a presence in Greenland and/or the Faroe Islands is summarized. Limitations to this case study are identified. Prospects for future growth are predicted.

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LDS Background

The Church has periodically operated congregations in Greenland. A member group or branch has periodically operated at Thule Air Base to service military personnel since the mid-twentieth century. In 2015, the Church did not operate an official branch at the air base, but appeared to hold worship services as a member group.

A branch appeared to operate in Nuuk from as early as the late 1990s until mid-2014 when the branch was discontinued. Ethnic Danish Latter-day Saints played a central role in the organization of the branch as there were few, if any, indigenous Greenlandic members. Members reported that the Church briefly assigned full-time missionaries to Greenland within the past decade. However, these missionaries were withdrawn by international church leadership due to concerns with the Church lacking an official agreement with the Greenlandic government to proselyte.

The discontinuation of the branch in Nuuk in 2014 centered on the sole active LDS family moving away from Greenland. This resulted in no active priesthood holders to lead the branch. Members who previously attended the Nuuk Branch reported in mid-2014 that there did not appear to be a functioning member group in Greenland following the closure of the Nuuk Branch. These members indicated that a handful of inactive members appear to continue to reside in Greenland. LDS-reported membership for Greenland has ranged from as high as 25 in 2006 to as low as 12 in 2000 and 2004.

The Church has had some minor successes teaching and baptizing ethnic Greenlanders who reside in Denmark. An Inuit Latter-day Saint from Greenland began his mission in the Utah Ogden Mission in 2010. Senior missionaries reported that he joined the Church in Denmark 18 months prior to his mission.

The Church has never appeared to operate a branch in the Faroe Islands. European members in northern Europe report that mission leadership has periodically visited isolated members who reside in the Faroe Islands. There appear to be few, if any, Faroese who have joined the LDS Church.

Opportunities

Greenland and the Faroe Islands number among the most populous nations or dependences in Europe and North America without an official LDS presence. There appear to be no restrictions on religious freedom that prevent the establishment of the Church or the assignment of full-time missionaries. Although the Church may need to obtain consent from local governments to conduct formal proselytism efforts and assign missionaries, there do not appear to be any laws or policies that would prevent the Church from acquiring permission. The assignment of one senior missionary couple each to Greenland and the Faroe Islands would provide an effective intervention for the Church to acquire needed approvals, organize investigators and isolated members, establish member groups, and prepare for the arrival of young, full-time missionaries.

The Denmark Copenhagen Mission numbers among the Church's smallest missions in regards to the number of congregations within the mission boundaries. The mission serviced only 25 congregations (23 in Denmark, 2 in Iceland) as of mid-2015. All congregations in Denmark are located within the boundaries of stakes. These conditions indicate that the mission has a small administrative responsibility to members within its boundaries and appears equipped to coordinate the opening of Greenland and the Faroe Islands without overburdening mission leaders.

The utilization of members in Denmark with connections to Greenland or the Faroe Islands has good potential to assist in the establishment of the Church in either location. There have been a handful of Greenlanders who have joined the Church. Mission leaders keeping track of the location of these members and utilizing their knowledge and skills to assist in the establishment of the Church in Greenland may correspond to more positive outcomes. Missionary efforts in Denmark among Greenlanders may also provide an impetus for the establishment of the Church in Greenland. There were an estimated 7,000 speakers of Greenlandic Inuit who resided in Denmark as of 2007.^[1] Many Greenlandic Inuit speak Danish as a second language,^[2] thereby simplifying mission efforts to initial proselyte in Danish. There are an estimated 21,000 Faroese speakers in Denmark.^[3] Missionary efforts among Faroese living in Denmark has good potential to build a Faroese membership base within the Denmark Copenhagen Mission.

Social media proselytism efforts present good opportunities to reach the relatively tiny populations of Greenland and the Faroe Islands. Social media platforms like Facebook permit users to target specific locations with advertisements. These advertisements can promote an LDS website, the Danish version of Mormon.org, or special Facebook groups or websites with an LDS theme. One Danish member created a Facebook group (Jesusip Kristusip Oqaluffia ulluni kingullerni illernartulusunit)^[4] in late 2014/early 2015 to conduct online proselytism geared toward Greenlanders. The website had nearly 1,900 likes as of June 2015 – most of whom were Inuit Greenlanders who resided in Greenland. Many of the posts on the webpage had comments from interested individuals. Coordination of the website with full-time missionaries has tremendous potential to identify interested individuals and effectively initiate formal proselytism efforts.

Challenges

The comparatively tiny population of Greenland and the Faroe Islands, and their isolation from the European mainland, constitute the greatest challenge for the Church to establish a permanent LDS presence in either location. Distance from mission headquarters in Denmark requires significant amounts of time and money for church leaders to visit these locations to meet isolated members and investigators, assess conditions for assigning full-time missionaries, and supervise church activities. The Church has generally avoided the placement of full-time missionaries in geographically remote areas due to challenges with supervising missionaries and meeting administrative needs. The small population of Greenland and the Faroe Islands may dissuade mission leaders from beginning missionary activity in favor of opening additional cities in Denmark to proselytism. Some cities in Denmark where there are no full-time missionaries assigned and no LDS congregations support populations comparable to the entire population of Greenland or the Faroe Islands such as Helsingør, Kolding, and Vejle.

The lack of an indigenous LDS community in either Greenland or the Faroe Islands will require church leaders in Denmark or Iceland to take the first steps to initiate the establishment of the Church. The Church has maintained a long-term presence in Denmark for over 160 years. However, the size of the Church has remained miniscule in comparison to the national population as only one in 1,279 was LDS as of 2014 (or 0.078% of the population). Few Danish members in Denmark has appeared to correspond with few members who have relocated to autonomous, overseas administrative divisions as evidenced by only one active Danish Latter-day Saint family that maintained the operation of the Nuuk Branch for many years – and the dissolution of the congregation upon their return to Denmark. The Church has generally avoided the opening of additional nations to missionary work when there are not a sufficient number of native members to provide a membership base from which missionaries can build. This has resulted in cyclical logic – the Church avoids the placement of missionaries until there are a sufficient number of members to help support the missionaries. The assignment of full-time missionaries is essential for the Church to gain members in previously unreached locations. As a result, the Church experiences significant delays in opening additional locations to missionary work and some locations never open to missionaries at all.

European secularism has been a significant influence on society in Greenland and the Faroe Islands. Receptivity to LDS missionaries may be low due to disinterested in organized religion, strong ethnoreligious ties to Lutheranism, and misperceptions on LDS teachings. Other missionary-focused Christian groups note that indigenous populations have exhibited low receptivity to their proselytism efforts. Consequently, the prospective assignment of full-time missionaries to Greenland or the Faroe Islands may yield few results for many years.

Delays in the establishment of an LDS presence in Greenland or the Faroe Islands may result in missed opportunities for

growth. Indigenous populations may become less receptive to nontraditional, missionary-focused Christian groups in the coming years and decades. Societal or governmental conditions may also change and result in diminished religious freedom or greater challenges for new religious groups to establish a presence in these locations. Previously receptive individuals and family may also become shepherded into other missionary-focused groups that maintain a presence in these locations such as Jehovah's Witnesses.

No LDS scriptures or gospel study or missionary materials have been translated into Faroese or Greenlandic. A lack of a single missionary tract in either language may create cultural barriers during initial proselytism efforts. However, the translation of materials in these languages does not appear mandatory for local populations to study the gospel as nearly the entire population is fluent in Danish. No translations of materials or scriptures into indigenous languages may pose challenges for the Church to convey a sense that its teachings are compatible with Faroese and Greenlandic culture and society.

Comparative Growth

Greenland and the Faroe Islands constitute the most populous autonomous nations, dependencies, or administrative divisions in Europe where there is no LDS presence. The European nations with the most recent LDS establishment include several nations in the former Yugoslavia such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Montenegro. The Church established a missionary presence in these nations during the early 2010s. The Church does not operate congregations or specifically assign missionaries to serve in several European microstates such as Liechtenstein, Monaco, and San Marino.

Some missionary-focused Christian denominations with a worldwide presence report a presence in the Faroe Islands and Greenland whereas others do not. Evangelicals are the largest nontraditional Christian group and claim 28.1% of the population of the Faroe Islands^[5] and 5.0% of the population of Greenland.^[6] Jehovah's Witnesses maintain a presence in several locations in both the Faroe Islands and Greenland. However, Witnesses have reported essentially stagnant growth in recent years. Witnesses in the Faroe Islands reported an average of 117 publishers (active members who regularly engage in proselytism), four congregations, and one baptism in 2014. Witnesses in Greenland reported an average of 145 publishers, six congregations, and three baptisms in 2014. All four Witness congregations in the Faroe Islands hold worship services in Faroese whereas all six Witness congregations in Greenland hold worship services in Danish. Witnesses have translated their official website, jw.org, into Greenlandic.^[7] Adventists have historically reported a minimal presence in Greenland that has consisted of only approximately one dozen members.^[8] Adventists do not appear to currently operate a congregation in Greenland. Adventists appear to operate one congregation in the Faroe Islands.^[9] The Church of the Nazarene does not appear to maintain a presence in Greenland or the Faroe Islands.

Limitations

The Church does not publish the number of members in Greenland or the Faroe Islands. There are no estimates available regarding the number of people who have joined the Church from either location. Although high-quality reports were available from Danish LDS leadership in Denmark, no reports were available from Greenlandic or Faroese members.

Future Prospects

The outlook for a future LDS establishment in the Faroe Islands and Greenland appears unfavorable. Distance from mission headquarters in Denmark, a comparatively tiny target populations, historical disinterest from church leaders to avoid the opening of remote locations to missionary work without a membership base to build upon, a lack of an LDS community among Inuit Greenlanders or Faroese, and no translations of LDS materials into Greenlandic or Faroese pose significant challenges to future proselytism efforts. Online proselytism efforts and the assignment of senior missionary couples appear the most likely methods for the Church to establish an official presence in Greenland and the Faroe Islands one day. Delays in the establishment an LDS presence in either location may result in missed opportunities for growth, especially if European secularism continues to erode interest in religion and receptivity to nontraditional Christian groups.

- [1] "Inuktitut, Greenlandic," www.ethnologue.com, retrieved 12 June 2015. <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/kal>
- [2] "Inuktitut, Greenlandic," www.ethnologue.com, retrieved 12 June 2015. <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/kal>
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- [6] "Country: Greenland," Joshua Project, retrieved 11 June 2015. <http://joshuaproject.net/countries/GL>
- [7] [jw.org](http://www.jw.org), retrieved 11 June 2015. <http://www.jw.org/kl/>
- [8] "Greenland Mission (1992-1994)," www.adventiststatistics.org, retrieved 11 June 2015. http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldInstID=2660706
- [9] "Directory Entries in Faroe Islands," www.adventistdirectory.org, retrieved 11 June 2015. <http://www.adventistdirectory.org/SearchResults.aspx?CtryCode=FO>