



People-Specific LDS Outreach Case Studies

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LDS Outreach among Arabs in the United States

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Overview

The Arab population in the United States numbered 1.52 million according to 2010 census data.^[1] Most Arab Americans self-identify as Lebanese (485,917), Egyptian (179,853), and Syrian (147,426).^[2] Data from the 2000 census notes that the five states with the largest Arab populations include California (190,890), New York (120,370), Michigan (115,284), Florida (77,461), and New Jersey (71,770).^[3] Most Arab Americans are Christians^[4] and adhere to traditional Christian denominations such as Maronite Catholicism and the Syriac Orthodox Church. Muslims constitute a sizable minority. The LDS Church in the United States has recently begun to extend Arab-specific outreach in a couple select locations. However, there remains no appreciable LDS Arab community in the United States despite Arab Americans constituting more than 1.5 million.

This case study reviews the history of the LDS Church among Arabs in the United States. Church growth and missionary successes are identified. Opportunities and challenges for future growth are analyzed. The growth of the Church among other Middle Eastern peoples in the United States is reviewed. The size and growth trends of other missionary-focused Christian groups that target Arab Americans are examined. Limitations to this case study are identified and prospects for future growth are predicted.

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LDS History

The Church has baptized small numbers of Arabs in the United States within the past several decades. Most Arabs converts in the latter half of the twentieth century joined the Church in a handful of Middle Eastern nations such as Jordan and Lebanon. Some of these members ultimately immigrated to the United States due to violence and political instability in the region.

Arabic-speaking full-time missionaries were not assigned in the United States until approximately 2013 when the California San Diego Mission designed a missionary companionship as Arabic-speaking. As of late 2015 there appeared to be two Arabic-speaking missionary companionships in the California San Diego Mission. The Church reported small numbers of Arab members in several cities by the mid-2010s such as Pasadena, California; El Cajon, California; Rochester, Minnesota; Jersey City, New Jersey; and Houston, Texas.

The Church translated select passages of the Book of Mormon into Arabic in 1980. The Book of Mormon was translated in its entirety in 1986.^[5] The Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price were translated in 1989.^[6] Translations of General Conference addresses into Arabic have been available for many years.

A map displaying the locations with sizable numbers of Arabic American Latter-day Saints can be found [here](#).

Successes

The designation of a handful of missionaries as Arabic-speaking in the California San Diego Mission constitutes the greatest success the Church has achieved in extending specialized outreach among this large ethnic minority in the United States. Although initial proselytism efforts have been extremely limited and have yielded few results, efforts by mission leadership to initiate Arab-specific outreach signifies a major step towards introducing the Church to this population. The Church has appeared to have some minor successes baptizing handfuls of Arabic-speaking converts in several cities.

The Church has translated all LDS scriptures and a sizable number of gospel study and missionary materials into standard Arabic. The ample number of gospel study resources appears to sufficiently meet missionary and testimony development needs. The Church has had many of these materials translated for several decades to assist in missionary efforts among Arabic speakers worldwide.

Opportunities

The arrival of hundreds of thousands of Arab refugees into the United States presents good opportunities for missionary activity. Although it is important that proselytism efforts are sensitive to the economic and societal needs of these individuals, many of these individuals may be receptive to the LDS gospel witness. Congregations with small numbers of Arab members present the best opportunity for the Church to engage in member-missionary efforts among recently immigrated Arab peoples due to the familiarity of these members with culture and the Arabic language. Holding Arabic-speaking Sunday School classes and translating sacrament meeting services into Arabic has good potential to assess for receptivity and provide outreach without requiring significant mission resources. Locations that appear most favorable for Arab-specific outreach include the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area, California; Detroit, Michigan; and the greater New York City metropolitan area.

There are good opportunities for the Church to target well-established Arab American communities. Christians comprise the majority of the Arab American population and present fewer difficulties to proselyte than their Muslim counterparts. The conversion of Christian Arabs to nontraditional Christian faiths is generally met with less hostility than the conversion of Muslims by proselytizing Christian denominations.

Social media proselytism efforts may be effective in reaching Arab populations. These approaches require little money and can reach thousands of people with online advertisements. Arabic-speaking members can help spearhead these efforts by creating social media groups to communicate with one another and sharing ideas to target Arab communities with the LDS gospel witness.

Challenges

The Church reports essentially no LDS community among Arab Americans. Few Arabic Americans have converted to nontraditional Christian faiths such as the LDS Church. Most adhere to traditional Christian denominations or Islam. The Church has not developed teaching strategies tailored to the religious background of Muslims or Arab Christian denominations (i.e. Maronite Catholicism and the Syriac Orthodoxy). Thus, missionaries have reported challenges with explaining basic LDS teachings and doctrines to the understanding of Muslims. Arabic-speaking peoples have exhibited modest receptivity to the LDS Church in the United States and other missionary-focused Christian groups notwithstanding many of these populations living in the United States for many years. These conditions will require cultural sensitivity and skill by stake and mission leaders to appropriately adapt proselytism and missionary teaching approaches to the needs of Arab Americans.

The Church has experienced convert retention and member activity problems in most locations where there are sizable concentrations of Arabic members. Most Arabic populations reside in cities where the Church experiences problems with self-sustaining congregations among the general population. As a result, there are few resources and little interest to reach ethnolinguistic minority groups such as Arabs. The Church has not translated its Hastening the Work of Salvation website or broadcast into Arabic. The Church has yet to translate Mormon.org into Arabic to assist online missionary efforts. However, there are many Arabic translations of LDS materials available through lds.org that can be utilized for online member-missionary work.

The Church does not publish information on which wards or branches in the United States hold Sunday School classes or operate member groups to meet the needs of a specific ethnolinguistic minority group. The lack of information on Arabic-speaking Sunday School classes online may prevent some interested Arabic members or investigators from seriously considering attending church. Publishing information on Arabic-speaking member groups and Sunday School classes on the Church's online meetinghouse locator appears an effective method to present this information to interested individuals and assist in missionary efforts.

Comparative Growth

The Church in the United States extends minimal outreach among other Middle Eastern peoples. This outreach has primarily occurred in California. The Church has frequently designated one or two missionary companionships in the Los Angeles, California area to exclusively work among Armenians in the Glendale area. However, no Armenian-speaking branch operates due to an insufficient number of active members and qualified priesthood holders. The Church has appeared to operate an Armenian-speaking member group for many years in the Glendale area. Iranian-specific outreach conducted in Persian (Farsi) has been inconsistently extended in the Los Angeles area although no Persian-speaking congregation has been organized.

Several missionary-focused Christian groups have established Arabic-speaking congregations in the United States and maintain an Arab presence that totally dwarfs the LDS Church. Up to five percent of some Arab groups such as Palestinians are Evangelical.^[7] Jehovah's Witnesses report 40 congregations that extend outreach in the Arabic language. However, only 14 of

these congregations exclusively hold worship services in Arabic as the other 26 congregations only hold some meetings in this language.[8] The Seventh-Day Adventist Church notes no Arabic-speaking congregations in the United States.[9] The Church of the Nazarene operates at least seven Arabic-speaking congregations in the United States.[10]

Limitations

The Church does not publish the worldwide number of Arab Latter-day Saints. The number of Arabs who have joined the Church in the United States is unknown. Member activity and convert retention rates among Arabs are difficult to assess as the Church does not publish these statistics. There were no efforts to estimate these statistics in this case study due to a lack of data. Although some reports from returned missionaries were available during the writing of this case study, no reports from Arab American Latter-day Saints were utilized.

Future Prospects

The outlook for future LDS growth among Arab Americans appears unfavorable. No Arabic-speaking congregation operate in the United States. The Church has only recently begun to extend Arab-specific outreach and this outreach remains limited to only one of the Church's 124 missions in the United States. Problems with limited mission resources in the urban locations where the majority of Arab Americans reside, the lack of an LDS community among Arab Americans, modest receptivity to LDS outreach, and delays extending Arab-specific missionary activity until the early 2010s appear primarily responsible for this lack of progress. Progress with establishing an LDS presence among Arab Americans appears most favorable if the Church takes care to maintain consistently high convert baptismal standards, organize Arabic-speaking Sunday School classes and/or member groups to strengthen a sense of LDS community among Arabs, and establish additional Arabic-speaking language programs in additional missions with sizable Arab populations.
<http://www.lessgauss.com/>

[1] Asi, Maryam; Beaulieu, Daniel. "Arab Households in the United States: 2006-2010," US Census Bureau, May 2013. <https://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/acsbr10-20.pdf>

[2] Asi, Maryam; Beaulieu, Daniel. "Arab Households in the United States: 2006-2010," US Census Bureau, May 2013. <https://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/acsbr10-20.pdf>

[3] "The Arab Population: 2000," Census 2000 Brief, December 2003. <https://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/c2kbr-23.pdf>

[4] "Arab Americans," Countries and Their Cultures, retrieved 16 July 2015. <http://www.everyculture.com/multi/A-Br/Arab-Americans.html>

[5] "Book of Mormon Editions," Deseret News 2003 Church Almanac, p. 635.

[6] Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price in Arabic – accessed 16 July 2015. https://www.lds.org/bc/content/shared/content/arabic/pdf/language-materials/33386_ara.pdf?lang=eng&clang=ara

[7] "Country: United States," Joshua Project, retrieved 16 July 2015. <http://joshuaproject.net/countries/US>

[8] "Find a Meeting of Jehovah's Witnesses," jw.org, retrieved 16 July 2015. http://www.jw.org/apps/E_FsPnZGTZNCf

[9] "Adventist Directory," Adventistdirectory.org, retrieved 16 July 2015. <http://adventistdirectory.org/default.aspx?page=SearchResults&Search=vietnamese&submit=>

[10] "Nazarene Church Data Search," Nazarene.org, retrieved 30 June 2015. <http://nazarene.org/find-a-church>