Overall LDS Growth Trend Case Studies

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LDS Temples and Their Impact on LDS Church Growth

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Overview

Within the past 20 years, the number of LDS temples operating, under construction, or announced substantially increased from approximately 50 to 166. Notwithstanding the significant expansion of the number of temples during this period, there is little evidence to support the claim of some church members and leaders that the construction of additional temples spurs greater church growth. Any relationship between building additional temples and church growth appears weak or nonexistent. Most temples constructed or announced within the past two decades were in locations that have exhibited modest to slow membership and congregational growth rates. Church growth trends as measured by membership and congregational growth appear unaffected by the construction of additional temples.

This essay examines the impact of constructing a new temple on church growth and provides a thorough analysis of stake growth in temple districts from the dedication of a temple to present day for temples constructed within the past two decades. Factors that correlate with temple construction are identified and discussed.

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Temple Construction and Stake Growth

The construction of additional temples does not guarantee membership and congregational growth. The Church announced its first temple in Panama in 2002 but has since experienced a slowdown in membership growth and a catastrophic decline in the number of wards and branches over the past decade, resulting in the consolidation of a stake and a district. In Costa Rica, the first temple was completed in 2000 yet no additional stakes have been organized since and congregational and membership growth rates have been unchanged or stagnant. In northern Europe, the first temples were constructed in Denmark and Finland in the mid 2000s yet both countries have experienced stagnant membership and congregational growth since the dedication of both temples. In England, the Preston England Temple was dedicated 1998 yet only one of the 24 stakes in the district was organized after the temple was completed. In Hong Kong, the number of stakes decreased from when the temple was dedicated in 1996 to present. In Spain, three of the ten stakes in the country were organized after the Madrid Spain Temple was dedicated in 1999. In Australia, the Church constructed four new temples in the early 2000s yet between 2000 and 2010 the number of wards and branches was virtually unchanged, membership growth rates held steady, and the number of stakes inched upward from 31 to 33.

In Latin America, temples constructed after 1990 exhibited higher increases in the number of stakes in their temple districts. Dedicated in 1999, the Bogotá Colombia Temple had eight of its 29 stakes organized after the temple was completed. Four of the 34 stakes assigned to the Guayaquil Ecuador Temple district were organized after the temple was dedicated in 1999. Four of the 27 stakes in the Cochabamba Bolivia Temple district were organized after the temple was dedicated in 2000. 21 of the 42 stakes assigned to the Caracas Venezuela Temple district were organized after the temple was dedicated in 2000. 10 of the 26 stakes assigned to the Santo Domingo Dominican Republic Temple district were organized after the temple was dedicated in 2000. Two of the 17 stakes assigned to the Montevideo Uruguay Temple district were organized after the temple was completed in 2001. Four of the 15 stakes assigned to the Asunción Paraguay Temple district were organized after 2001.

In Mexico, the Church augmented the number of temples from one in 1991 to 13 in 2011. Notwithstanding this major increase in the number of temples, rates of LDS growth as indicated by new stakes and congregations organized appeared unaffected. Both stakes in the Colonia Juárez Chihuahua México Temple were organized before the temple was dedicated in 1999. All 10 stakes assigned to the Ciudad Juárez México Temple district were organized before the temple was dedicated in 2000. All 11 stakes assigned to the Hermosillo Sonora México Temple district were organized before the temple was dedicated in 2000. All

eight stakes assigned to the Villahermosa México Temple district were organized before the temple was dedicated in 2000. Of the 28 stakes assigned to the Monterrey México Temple district, four were organized after the temple was dedicated in 2002. Four of the 12 stakes assigned to the Tampico México Temple district were organized after the temple was dedicated in 2000. Five of the 23 stakes in the Guadalajara México Temple district were organized after the temple was dedicated in 2001. Of the ten stakes in the Veracruz México Temple district, two were organized after the temple was dedicated in 2000. With six stakes, the Oaxaca México Temple district had only one new stake organized after the temple was dedicated in 2000. Two of the eight stakes assigned to the Tuxtla Gutiérrez México Temple district were organized after the temple was dedicated in 2000. Three of the 12 stakes assigned to the Mérida México Temple district were organized after the temple was dedicated in 2000.

In the United States, the Church initiated an aggressive temple building period between the mid-1990s and early 2000s resulting in the number of temples doubling within a 10-year period. The Church constructed many of its new temples in isolated areas with few members or in the south and east. Approximately one-third of temples constructed between the mid-1990s and early 2000s had no new stakes organized within their districts, one-third had only one new stake organized, and one-third had more than one new stake organized.

In early 2012, the Birmingham Alabama Temple district included nine stakes; only one of which was organized after 2000 when the temple was dedicated. The Redlands California Temple district has 20 stakes; only two of which were organized after the temple was dedicated in 2003. Of the 17 stakes pertaining to the St. Louis Missouri Temple, only one was organized after the temple was dedicated in 1997. The Oklahoma City Oklahoma Temple district had all but one of its 13 stakes organized before the temple was dedicated in 2000. The Nashville Tennessee Temple includes eight stakes; only one of which was organized after 2000 when the temple was dedicated. Only one of the 11 stakes pertaining to the Manhattan New York Temple district was organized after the temple was dedicated in 2004. Of the 12 stakes assigned to the Columbia River Washington Temple district only one was organized after the temple was dedicated in 2001. Of the 16 American stakes assigned to the San Diego California Temple district, only one was organized after the temple was dedicated in 1993. The Anchorage Alaska Temple district has seven stakes; only one of which was organized after the temple was dedicated in 1999. Only one of the 13 stakes assigned to the Vernal Utah Temple district was organized after the temple was dedicated in 1997.

All five stakes within the Memphis Tennessee Temple district were organized before the temple was dedicated in 2000. All 14 stakes pertaining to the Boston Massachusetts Temple were organized before the temple was dedicated in 2000. All seven stakes in the Palmyra New York Temple district were organized before the temple was dedicated in 2000. All seven stakes in the Detroit Michigan Temple district were organized before the temple was dedicated in 1999; the last new stake in the district was created in 1978. All five stakes in the Nauvoo Illinois Temple district were organized before the temple was dedicated in 2002. All three stakes in the Bismarck North Dakota Temple district were organized before the temple was dedicated in 1999. All 12 stakes pertaining to the Winter Quarters Nebraska Temple were organized before the temple was dedicated in 2001. All five stakes in the Lubbock Texas Temple district were organized before the temple was dedicated in 2002. All 11 stakes pertaining to the Billings Montana Temple district were organized before the temple was dedicated in 1999. All 11 stakes pertaining to the Snowflake Arizona Temple district were organized before the temple was dedicated in 2002. All eight stakes assigned to the Medford Oregon Temple district were organized before the temple was dedicated in 2000. All eight stakes assigned to the Reno Nevada Temple were organized before the temple was dedicated in 2000. All eight stakes in the Fresno California Stake were organized before the temple was dedicated in 2000. All three stakes assigned to the Kona Hawaii Temple district were organized before the temple was dedicated; the most recently created stake was organized in 1975. All six stakes assigned to the Monticello Utah Temple were organized before the temple was dedicated in 1998. The number of stakes declined in the Baton Rouge Louisiana Temple district from nine to eight following the dedication of the temple in 2000.

Some states with temples constructed in the late 1990s and early 2000s have experienced steady church growth in terms of increases in the number of congregations and stakes. Five of the 17 stakes pertaining to the Houston Texas Temple district were organized after the temple was dedicated in 2000. Five of the 25 stakes in the Orlando Florida Temple district were organized after the temple was dedicated in 1994. Three of the 14 stakes in the San Antonio Texas Temple district were organized after the temple was dedicated in 2005. Three of the 11 stakes within the Raleigh North Carolina Temple district were organized after the temple was dedicated in 1999. Three of the 12 stakes in the Louisville Kentucky Temple district were organized after the temple was dedicated in 2000. Three of the 14 stakes in the Columbia South Carolina Temple district were organized after the temple was dedicated in 1999. Three of the 16 stakes in the Columbus Ohio Temple district were organized after the temple was dedicated in 1999. Two of the nine stakes in the Minneapolis Minnesota Temple district were organized after the temple was dedicated in 2000. Two of the 13 stakes in the Albuquerque New Mexico Temple district were organized after the temple was dedicated in 2000. Two of the 14 stakes in the Spokane Washington Temple district were organized after the temple was dedicated in 1999.

The only temples constructed within the past two decades in the United States which had six or more new stakes created within their temple districts where in Utah. Eight of the 35 stakes assigned to the Bountiful Utah Temple were organized after the temple was dedicated in 1995. 28 of the 69 stakes assigned to the Mount Timpanogos Utah Temple were organized after the temple was dedicated in 1996.

Factors Promoting Temple Construction

The relationship between LDS Church growth and temples is most strongly related to the degree of self-sufficiency achieved prior to the announcement of a new temple. This relationship occurs because in nearly all locations with a temple, membership is capable of meeting its own administrative and ecclesiastical needs. For this reason, the Church in recent years has constructed temples that only service a handful of stakes and a relatively small LDS population yet there remain other locations

with nearly one or two dozen stakes that could potentially be serviced by a temple yet LDS populations remain unable or are inconsistent in meeting their self-sufficiency needs. For example, in early 2012 all temple districts in Australia had 11 or fewer stakes and most temple districts in Canada had 10 or fewer stakes yet in Brazil all temple districts had 20 or more stakes.

With 79 of the Church's 166 temples, the Church in the United States is a testimony of the self-sufficiency of the Church in many locations throughout the country. If the level of self-sufficiency of the Church was comparable to the United States in countries that demonstrate significantly lower self-sufficiency such as Mexico, Brazil, and the Philippines, we would expect that the ratio of members to temples would be nearly the same. The average LDS temple in the United States services 78,000 members. If this same ratio were applied to other countries, there would be 16 temples in Mexico, 15 in Brazil, eight in the Philippines, seven in Chile, six in Peru, five in Argentina, and three in Guatemala whereas at present there are 13 temples in Mexico, seven in Brazil, three in the Philippines, and two in Chile, Peru, Argentina, and Guatemala.

Geographic distance has prompted the construction of most new temples in the Church within the past two decades. In the October 2009 Semiannual General Conference, LDS Church President Thomas S. Monson stated, "We continue to build temples. We desire that as many members as possible have an opportunity to attend the temple without having to travel inordinate distances. Worldwide, 83 percent of our members live within 200 miles (320 km) of a temple. That percentage will continue to increase as we construct new temples around the world."[1] In the past two decades, the Church announced four and seven new temples in Australia and Canada, respectively notwithstanding LDS membership is less than 200,000 in each nation. A higher degree of financial self-sufficiency than other nations and moderate member activity rates appear to have partially influenced the likelihood of building additional temples in these locations but geographic distances appears the primary reason. Geographically, Canada is the world's second largest country whereas Australia is the world's sixth largest country. Long distances and the highly urbanized population in these two nations have also contributed to decisions to build additional temples. The United States is geographically the world's third largest country. With slightly less than half of worldwide LDS membership it is therefore unsurprising that slightly less than half of LDS temples are in the United States.

Not only is the influence of building new temples on church growth weak in areas they service but locations without temples do not appear to have had growth negatively affected by the lack of a temple. Temples are announced and constructed after growth has already occurred. For example, the Church announced its first temple in Honduras in 2006 notwithstanding there were 20 stakes operating at the time and the Church organizing most of these stakes in the 1990s. Rapid membership and congregational growth occurred in Nigeria and Ghana prior to the announcement and dedication of temples in both nations. This finding continues to be manifest in dozens of countries around the world with few members and no temples but high membership and congregational growth rates.

Conclusion

The construction of additional temples does not appear to have a direct impact on LDS growth trends as manifest by membership and congregational growth rates and increases in the number of stakes and districts. Antecedent growth in the number of members, congregations, stakes, and districts and distance from an operating temple appear the primary factors in the decision for the Church to build additional temples. Latter-day Saints believe that temples are announced by revelation to the President of the Church, but these and other variables appear the most strongly correlated in where the Church decides to build additional temples. The relationship between church growth and LDS temples appears linked to numerical increases in membership, congregations, and stakes in a given area prior to the announcement of a temple.

[1] Monson, Thomas S. "Welcome to Conference," lds.org, retrieved 2 March 2012. http://www.lds.org/general-conference/2009/10/welcome-to-conference?lang=eng