

Overall LDS Growth Trend Case Studies

>

Top 10 Encouraging and Discouraging LDS Growth and Missionary Developments in 2015

Author: Matt Martinich, M.A.

Posted: January 1st, 2016

Overview

The 10 most encouraging LDS growth and missionary developments in 2015 are reviewed in this case study. Likewise, the 10 most discouraging LDS growth and missionary developments in 2015 are also examined. Limitations to this case study are identified.

Top 10 Encouraging LDS Growth and Missionary Developments

1. Stake, District, and Congregational Growth Rates Accelerate in 2015 - Largest Number of New Stakes Created in a Single Year since 1998, Largest Number of New Districts Created in a Single Year since 1994, Largest Net Increase in the Number of Congregations since 2005, Number of Congregations Surpasses the 30,000 Milestone

The Church experienced slight accelerations in stake, district, and congregational growth during 2015. A total of 67 new stakes were organized in 2015 – the largest number of new stakes organized since 1998 when the Church created 84 new stakes in a single year. Of the 67 stakes organized in 2015, 22 were created from member districts. In 2014, 20 of the 64 new stakes organized were created from districts. The net increase of stakes in 2015 (60) was the second highest reported by the Church since 1998.

The Church reported at least 32 new districts organized in 2015 - the largest number of new districts created by the Church in a single year since 1994 (a net increase of 62 districts occurred in 1994; as many as 74 districts may have been organized). The majority of new districts organized in 2015 were located in Africa (14), Latin America and the Caribbean (7), and Europe (6). However, the Church has reported a net decrease of three districts in 2015 as 13 districts were discontinued and 22 districts advanced into stakes.

Congregational growth rates in 2015 also slightly accelerated. The Church reached 30,000 official congregations (wards and branches) in 2015 for the first time in its history. The Church reached 10,000 official congregations in 1979 and 20,000 official congregations in 1992. As of late December 2015, the Church had reported a net increase of 395 official congregations – the largest annual net increase in wards and branches since 2005 when the Church reported a net increase of 417 wards and branches. Countries that experienced the largest net increases in the number of LDS congregations during 2015 include Brazil, Nigeria, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, the Philippines, and Mexico. Congregational growth has slightly accelerated in the mid-2010s although both numerical increases and percentage growth rates remain significantly less than in the 1980s and 1990s. In additional to official congregations, hundreds, if not thousands, of semi-official member groups also operate throughout the world. Congregational growth nonetheless remains slow for the Church as a whole as evidenced by an annual growth rate of a mere 1.33% in 2015. To contrast, the world population grew at a rate of 1.08% in 2015[1] – just 0.25% less than the LDS congregational growth rate for the year.

These developments signal modest improvements in "real growth" trends for the Church. It is important to note that the Church experienced its greatest numerical increases in stakes and districts during the late 1970s and in the 1990s notwithstanding fewer missionaries serving and fewer members of the Church. In the past couple years, stake and district growth has accelerated in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Oceania, but has slowed or has stagnated in Latin America and Europe.

Final, official numbers for the number of stakes and districts at year-end 2015 will be available in April 2016 when the Church presents its annual statistical report.

2. Rapid Growth Continues in West Africa

The Church sustained rapid membership and congregational growth throughout West Africa during 2015. Although no official LDS membership or congregational data will be released until April 2016, the Church experienced impressive net increases in the number of congregations during 2015 in most West African nations with an LDS presence including Nigeria (+38, 9.1% increase), Ghana (+37, 17.9% increase), Cote d'Ivoire (+36, 38.3% increase), and Sierra Leone (+6, 15.4% increase). The Church organized 11 new stakes and seven new districts in West Africa during 2015, resulting in a 22% annual increase in the number of stakes for the Church in the region.

The most rapid LDS growth in West Africa occurred in Cote d'Ivoire. The number of congregations increased by at least 36 (38.3% annual increase) during the year as a result of rapid congregational growth in Abidjan and the organization of the first LDS branches in many previously unreached cities. The Church organized its first official branches in 13 additional cities during 2015, including Abengourou, Affery, Agboville, Akoupé, Alepe, Azaguié, Bondoukou, Bouake, Duekoue, Issia, Lakota, Man, and Sassandra. No other country with less than half a million members reported the organization of as many wards or branches in as many previously unreached cities. As a result, the number of cities with at least one ward or branch increased from 18 to 31. The Church has reported rapid congregational growth in two of these recently opened cities as evidenced by the organization of three branches each in Abengourou and Bouake during 2015. Two new stakes were organized in Cote d'Ivoire during 2015, including the first stake outside Abidjan (Yamoussoukro) and the Church's eighth stake in Abidjan. Three new districts were also organized in Daloa, Divo, and Soubre. The Church announced plans to construct a temple in Abidjan in April 2015. The Church reported approximately 27,000 members in Cote d'Ivoire at year-end 2014.

The Church in Ghana organized its eighth and ninth stakes in the capital city, Accra, and established new member districts in two additional cities: Agona and Tamale. The first official LDS branches were organized in nine additional Ghanaian cities and towns during 2015, including Aflao, Assin Edubiase, Hohoe, Juapong, Kenyasi No. 2, Kpando, Maase, Osiem, and Tafo. Congregational growth in 2015 primarily occurred in the Greater Accra metropolitan area and Kumasi.

The Church in Nigeria reported the largest number of new stakes ever organized in a single year. Seven new stakes were created in Lagos (2), Aba, Abak, Benin City, Calabar, and Okpuala Ngwa. One new district was also organized in Ondo. The Church organized its first official branches in Benue State in late 2015 in two cities: Makurdi and Otukpo. The Church created its first official branches in six additional Nigerian cities during 2015, including Ago-Iwoye, Ibusa, Igwuruta, Ijebu-Ife, Iyalu Ibere, and Rumuji.

The Church in other West African nations has sustained steady growth. The Church in Sierra Leone has continued to report congregational growth and steady numbers of convert baptisms despite no full-time missionaries assigned to the country during 2015. One ward and five branches were created during the year. The Church in Togo organized two new congregations in the Lomé Togo Stake. A second stake in Togo appears likely to be organized in the near future due to rapid congregational growth within the past few years. The Church organized the Lomé Togo Stake in late 2013 and currently reports nine wards and seven branches in the stake.

3. Church Creates its First Stakes in Three Nations

Mozambique

The Church organized its first stake in Mozambique on February 15th in the capital city of Maputo. Six of the seven branches in the former Maputo Mozambique District advanced into wards when the stake was organized. Rapid growth occurred during the year as the last remaining branch advanced into a ward and two additional wards were created. Currently nine wards operate in the Maputo Mozambique Stake. The Church organized its second stake in Mozambique a month later on March 22nd in Beira – the second most populous city in the country. Rapid growth in Beira prompted church leaders to also organize the Beira Mozambique Manga District on the same day from several branches in the northwest area of the city. Recent progress establishing stakes and organizing additional congregations in Mozambique has primarily occurred as a result of focus from the Mozambique Maputo Mission to teach and baptize entire families, prepare young men to serve full-time missions, train local church leaders, and maintain a vision to achieve "real growth." The Church in Mozambique established its first official congregations in 1996 and organized the first mission in 2005. The Church reported nearly 8,000 members in the country at year-end 2014.

Zambia

The Church created its first stake in Zambia on March 15th. The Lusaka Zambia Stake was organized from the Lusaka Zambia District and all seven wards in the former district became wards in the new stake. Mission and district leadership over the years have carefully and diligently prepared local membership for the responsibilities of a stake to ensure the district fully met the minimum criteria to become a stake. The Church reestablished an official presence in Zambia in 1992 and organized the first Zambian mission in 2011. The Church in Zambia reported 3,359 members at year-end 2014.

Vanuatu

The Church established its first stake in the Pacific island nation of Vanuatu in June 21st in the capital city of Port Vila. The new stake includes five wards and three branches – all of which are located on the island of Efate. Vanuatu was previously one of the last nations in Oceania with a population of at least 50,000 people without a stake. The Church organized its first branch in Vanuatu in 1973 and organized the Vanuatu Port Vila Mission in 2012. The Church in Vanuatu reported nearly 6,700 members at year-end 2014.

The organization of stakes in these three nations provides strong evidence for the Church improving its self-sufficiency in these countries. Local members hold all administrative callings in stakes, whereas mission leadership oversee the operation of districts. Stakes provide one of the most reliable and meaningful measures for church growth in the LDS Church as stakes must meet not only numerical membership requirements but also certain qualifications for gender ratios (i.e. active Melchizedek Priesthood holders to general members), the number of congregations, and the number of active members.

4. Reversing Stagnant Growth in Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan

The Church in Taiwan organized four new stakes during 2015 in Hualien, Kaohsiung, Taichung, and Taipei. As a result, the number of stakes increased from 12 to 16. Currently the Church in Taiwan reports the third most stakes in Asia after the Philippines (96 stakes) and Japan (28 stakes). Congregational growth also accelerated in Taiwan during 2015. The Church reported a net increase of eight congregations during the year – a 7.6% annual increase and the largest net increase in the number of congregations in Taiwan in at least 16 years. It is unclear whether the number of convert baptisms has increased in the two Taiwanese missions during 2015 compared to previous years. However, missionaries report significant improvements in member reactivation and local leadership development efforts.

Recent trends reversing stagnant LDS growth in Hong Kong continued in 2015. The number of congregations declined from a high of 41 in 2001 to 39 in 2002, 37 in 2003, 36 in 2005, 33 in 2006, and 32 in 2008. The Church began to experience net increases in the number of congregations in 2012 and today reports 40 congregations. Three new wards were organized during 2015 in Tin Sau, Fanling, and Po Lam. The Church in Hong Kong's ongoing progress in reversing congregational growth trends deserves the praise and the attention of church leaders worldwide. Rarely has the Church reversed trends of declining or stagnant congregational growth within industrialized countries where Western secularism exhibits a strong influence on society. Analysis of the principles utilized and vision adopted by the China Hong Kong Mission and the four Hong Kong stakes may reveal approaches that can be implemented in other industrialized and secularized countries to accelerate real LDS growth. Missionaries note that a fifth stake in Hong Kong may be organized in the near future due to recent congregational growth.

The Church in Macau organized a district in 2015 to administer the three Macanese branches in this special administrative region of China. This marks the first time the Church has established a district in Macau. The Church established a third branch in Macau in 2014 to administer Mandarin Chinese speakers.

5. Unprecedented National Outreach Expansion Continues in Brazil

The Church in Brazil continued to implement an aggressive national outreach expansion campaign that aims to open nearly 150 additional cities to missionary work between 2013 and 2015. The organization of new member groups and branches in previously unreached cities has significantly influenced congregational growth trends in 2015 as the Church in Brazil reported the largest net increase in the number of congregations since 2008. The majority of recently organized member groups or branches have been established in the most populous unreached cities. Despite recent progress, there remain over 400 cities in Brazil with over 20,000 inhabitants without an official LDS congregation or known member group.

6. Congregational Growth Accelerates in Brazil and Mexico – Both Nations Surpass the 2,000 Congregation Milestone

The Church in Brazil and Mexico surpassed 2,000 official congregations in 2015. The Church in Brazil reported a net increase of approximately 40 congregations in 2015 and currently reports the second largest number of wards and branches in the world after the United States. National outreach expansion has been the primary catalyst that has accelerated congregational growth in 2015 as many member groups have been organized into official branches during the year. The Church in Mexico had previously reached the milestone of 2,000 congregations in 2009, but congregational decline resulted in the number of congregation decreasing below 2,000 in 2012. The Church in Mexico has reached a new all-time high for the number of congregations in 2015 as there are currently 2,015 wards and branches in the country. Both nations experience significant problems with convert attrition, member inactivity, and local leadership development.

7. Trends of Congregational Decline Reverse in Argentina and France

The Church in 2015 reported a net increase in the number of congregations in Argentina and France for the first time in many years. Congregational decline or stagnant congregational growth has persisted in both nations since the mid-2000s due to low member activity rates and convert retention problems. The Church in Argentina reported a net increase of two congregations in 2015 – the first time a net increase in the number of congregations has occurred since 2007. The Church in France reported a net increase of two congregations – the first net increase since 2005. Although progress thus far has been minimal, these developments may signal improvements in local leadership development, convert retention, and reactivation efforts among

less-active and inactive members.

8. Central Eurasian Mission Organized to Administer Turkic Nations

In April 2015, the Church announced plans to organize a new mission to administer the Turkic nations of Central Asia, Asia Minor, and the Caucasus. Most of these nations were not previously assigned to a mission but rather fell under the direct administration of the Europe East Area. The Central Eurasian Mission was organized in July 2015 with headquarters based in Istanbul, Turkey. Nations assigned to the new mission included Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Two nations in the new mission were previously assigned to other missions, namely Kazakhstan (Russia Novosibirsk Mission) and Turkey (Bulgaria Sofia Mission). Altogether the new Central Eurasian Mission includes approximately 150 million people within its geographical boundaries, thereby tying with the Uganda Kampala Mission as the mission in the LDS Church with the fourth largest population.

The establishment of a new mission that includes less than one thousand Latter-day Saints and a population of over 150 million within its geographical boundaries constitutes a major success and advancement in the expansion of the Church into lesser-reached areas of the world. Rarely has the Church organized new missions in locations of the world where there are few members spread over vast geographical distances, widespread government restrictions on religious freedom, and predominantly Muslim populations. The Central Eurasian mission initially included only seven branches (four in Turkey, two in Kazakhstan, one in Azerbaijan); only four of which had full-time missionaries assigned. The Church organized mission branches for each of the seven nations that pertain to the mission in mid-2015. The Church also organized its first official branch in Gaziantep, Turkey – the first new branch organized in Turkey in approximately two decades.

9. New Districts and New Stake in Russia

The Church in Russia organized or reestablished six new districts, namely the Samara Russia, Rostov-na-Donu Russia, Moscow Russia North, Moscow Russia South, Simferopol Russia, and Volgograd Russia Districts. Four of these districts had previously operated within the past decade, but were discontinued in an effort to strengthen branches and conserve limited priesthood manpower. Changes in mission and area policies regarding the operation of districts appears primarily responsible for the establishment of six new districts within a short period of time in an area of the world that experiences slow or stagnant LDS growth. However, the operation of these districts presents good opportunities for local members to serve in leadership positions, strengthen members, and revitalize missionary efforts. The Church also organized its third stake in Russia during 2015. The Saratov Russia Stake was organized from the Saratov Russia District and includes the five wards and three branches. Russian stakes have been previously established in Moscow (2011) and St Petersburg (2012). The Church in Russia currently reports three stakes and seven districts.

10. Exploring Opportunities for Future LDS Outreach in Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, and Timor-Leste

Mission and area leaders explored opportunities for establishing an official LDS presence in several countries where no church presence currently operates. Mission leadership in the Angola Luanda Mission visited isolated members and investigators in Sao Tome and Principe in early 2015. A special sacrament meeting service was held and Sao Tomean converts who had joined the Church abroad joined mission leadership during their visit to this small, Portuguese-speaking island nation off the coast of Africa. Senior missionaries on assignment from the Africa West Area Presidency visited a small member group that holds worship services in Dakar, Senegal during 2015. Missionaries reported that foreigners constituted the entire membership of the member group at the time. The Church reported a need for a senior missionary couple to serve in Dakar, Senegal in late 2015 in its Senior Missionary Opportunities Bulletin.[2] The Church assigned the first senior missionary couple to Timor-Leste on humanitarian assignment in mid-2015. LDS apostle Elder Jeffrey R. Holland dedicated the nation for missionary work and the Church organized a mission region under the Indonesia Jakarta Mission to administer Timor-Leste. Currently a member group functions in Dili to service the senior missionary couple and any investigators or isolated members in the area.

Top 10 Discouraging LDS Growth and Missionary Developments

1. Trends in Congregational Decline Intensify in Peru and Venezuela and Persist in Bolivia and Uruguay

The Church in Latin America continues to report net declines in the number of congregations in several nations despite steady increases in church membership and thousands of convert baptisms a year in each of these nations.

The Church in Peru reported a net decline of 10 congregations for 2015; a 1.29% annual decrease. The Church has consistently posted net declines in the number of wards and branches in Peru since 2012. The number of congregations has declined from 788 at year-end 2011 to 764 at present, yet membership has continued to annually increase by over 2.5%. Membership increased from 508,812 in 2011 to 557,328 in 2014, indicating that over 50,000 people have had their names added to church records during this period yet the number of congregations has declined by 24. These findings suggest significant problems with member inactivity, convert attrition, and local leadership development. The organization of two new missions in 2013 has appeared to make little to no impact on reversing nationwide trends of congregational decline despite ongoing membership growth.

The Church in Venezuela reported a net decline of 12 congregations in 2015; a 4.48% annual decrease. The Church has posted year-to-year losses in the number of wards and branches since 2012. The number of congregations has declined from an all-time high of 283 in 2011 to 256 at present. Membership has continued to increase annually by approximately two percent within this period despite congregational decline. Membership increased from 153,701 in 2011 to 164,048 in 2014.

The Church in Bolivia reported a net decline of three congregations in 2015; a 1.19% annual decrease. The Church in Bolivia has reported essentially stagnant growth within the past six years. The Church previously reached an all-time high of 257 congregations at year-end 2013, whereas there were 250 congregations as of year-end 2015. Steady membership growth has continued despite net decreases in the number of congregations, suggesting problems with convert retention, member inactivity, and local leadership development.

The Church in Uruguay reported a net decline of two congregations for 2015; a 1.40% annual decrease. The Church has posted year-to-year losses in the number of wards and branches since 2011. The number of congregations declined from 162 in 2010 to 141 at present. Membership has continued to increase annually by approximately 1.5-2.5% within the past decade despite stagnant congregational growth in the mid to late 2000s and congregational decline in the 2010s. Membership increased from 95,726 in 2010 to 102,999 in 2014.

2. At least 114 Countries and Dependencies Experience No Net Change in the Number of Official Congregations for 2015

The Church reported no change in the number of wards and branches for 114 countries, territories, and dependencies in the world during 2015. The Church achieved progress in some of these nations organizing new stakes, augmenting the number of convert baptisms, advancing branches into wards, and opening new member groups. However, the Church did not experience a net increase in official congregations in many of these nations due to member inactivity, convert retention problems, and insufficient numbers of priesthood holders to serve in leadership positions. World entities that reported no change in the number of official congregations during 2015 included Afghanistan, Albania, Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, Austria, the Bahamas, Bahrain, Barbados, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Bermuda, Bonaire, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Bulgaria, Burma, Burundi, Cambodia, Cayman Islands, Central African Republic, Cook Islands, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Curacao, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Egypt, Estonia, the Falkland Islands, Finland, French Guiana, Gabon, Georgia, Greece, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Guam, Guernsey, Guyana, Haiti, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Isle of Man, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Jersey, Jordan, Kenya, Kiribati, Kosovo, Kuwait, Latvia, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macau, Macedonia, Malawi, Malta, Marshall Islands, Martinique, Mauritius, the Federated States of Micronesia, Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Nauru, the Netherlands, New Caledonia, Niue, the Northern Mariana Islands, Norway, Oman, Palau, Panama, Paraguay, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Qatar, Reunion, Romania, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Serbia, Singapore, Sint Maarten, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Sweden, Tanzania, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands, Tuvalu, United Arab Emirates, Vietnam, British Virgin Islands, and the US Virgin Islands.

3. Ongoing Challenges Achieving "Real Growth" in Mexico

The Church in Mexico continues to report little progress achieving “real growth” despite a continuous LDS presence since the early twentieth century and the operation of 13 temples, 34 missions, 230 stakes, and 40 districts. Although the Church reached the milestones of 2,000 congregations in 2015, there was a net increase of only 17 congregations during the year – a 0.85% annual increase. Only three new stakes were organized in Mexico during 2015 and one stake was discontinued. Missionaries and local members report significant problems with comparatively few active members and hundreds of inactive members in most wards and branches. Congregational and stake growth rates has substantially decelerated within the past decade due to problems with local leadership development and most Mexican missions implementing rushed, quick-baptism tactics. Opportunities for growth nonetheless remain good in many areas of the country, albeit problems with inactivity and convert attrition have consumed many of the Church’s resources in the nation. Most of the Amerindian peoples in Mexico receive no specialized LDS outreach despite many of these peoples exhibiting good receptivity to nontraditional Christian denominations. Other denominations, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, maintain outreach and operate language-specific congregations among scores of Amerindian peoples.

4. Congregational Decline and Stake Consolidations Persist in South Korea

The Church in South Korea reported a net decline of four congregations for 2015; a 3.17% annual decrease. The Church has posted year-to-year losses or no increase in the number of wards and branches since 1999. The number of congregations has declined from 175 in 1999 to 122 at present. Membership has generally increased by 0.5-3% a year within the past decade. Membership increased from 71,166 in 1999 to 86,719 in 2014. The Church also discontinued another stake in Seoul during 2015 due to congregational decline. The number of stakes in South Korea has declined from 17 to 15 within the past four years. Nationwide member activity rates appear as low as 10-15%.

5. Sole LDS Branch in South Sudan Closes

The Church appeared to discontinue its sole LDS branch in South Sudan in early 2015. The Uganda Kampala Mission organized the Juba Branch in November 2009 and the first South Sudanese members from the branch to serve full-time missions began their service in the mid-2010s. Civil war, safety concerns, and problems with mission leadership administering

and monitoring the Church's activities in South Sudan appear responsible for the closure of the branch.

6. Little to No Expansion of National Outreach Occurs in Many Countries in the Africa Southeast Area

The Church continued to report minimal to no progress expanding its presence in many Sub-Saharan African nations notwithstanding local populations exhibiting high receptivity to LDS outreach and the massive surge in the number of members serving full-time missions during the 2010s. Nations in the Africa Southeast Area where the Church reports an official congregation in four or fewer cities or towns include Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Gabon, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Reunion, Rwanda, Swaziland, Tanzania, and Zambia. The lack of national outreach expansion in these nations appears attributed to comparatively few mission resources allocated to the Africa Southeast Area and mission/area leaders implementing a conservative interpretation of the centers of strength policy. As a result, many missions remain understaffed and mission resources remain concentrated to a handful of select cities.

7. Stagnant National Outreach Expansion in India

The Church in India has made no noticeable progress expanding its presence into additional cities for several years. Currently only five percent of the national population resides in a city where an LDS congregation operates. No progress has been made in the Church rectifying challenges with obtaining and renewing foreign missionary visas. Foreign missionaries have been essential in making progress expanding outreach for the Church in India due to approximately 12,300 members living in a country of 1.2 billion people. Many North American missionaries have had to leave the country within the past year when they experience challenges renewing visas. Most of these missionaries have been reassigned to missions in the Philippines or North America. This has resulted in significant disruptions to missionary operations in India. Although progress has been achieved improving the self-sufficiency of the Indian full-time missionary force in recent years, mission resources remain totally inadequate to properly proselyte the enormous Indian population. Only 15 cities and towns in India have an official LDS presence.

8. Missionaries Removed from Burundi

Senior missionary couples and young, full-time missionaries serving in the Democratic Republic of the Congo Lubumbashi Mission were evacuated from Burundi in May 2015. Political instability, violence, and safety concerns prompted the removal of full-time missionaries. Although the three Burundian branches appear capable of meeting their own leadership and missionary needs within the foreseeable future, the removal of full-time missionaries from Burundi poses a significant challenge for accelerating growth in this minimally-reached nation of the Church inhabited by more than 10 million people.

9. Slight Congregational Decline Occurs in the Dominican Republic, Germany, and the United Kingdom

The Church in the Dominican Republic has reported a significant slowdown in growth within the past several years. Annual membership growth rates have declined from 3-6% for most years in the 2000s to a mere 0.9% in 2014. The number of official congregations also declined by six in 2015 – the largest net decrease in the number of wards and branches ever reported by the Church in the Dominican Republic. Most Dominican congregations discontinued in 2015 were located in the Santiago area. The Church in Germany also reported the largest net decrease in the number of official congregations in its history during 2015. The number of wards and branches declined by six during the year. The closure of several branches in the former Erfurt Germany District, and few new congregations organized nationwide, appears primarily responsible for German congregational decline. The Church in the United Kingdom also reported a net decrease of four congregations during the year as several wards were discontinued in England. The Church had previously reported extremely slow congregational growth in the early 2010s.

10. Scores of Districts in the Philippines Continue to Fall Short of Activity Requirements to Become Stakes

The Philippines Area has instituted many effective policies to address problems with low member activity and convert retention rates within the past five years. As a result, many LDS statistical measurements have steadily increased during this period such as the number of temple recommend holders, the number of full-tithe payers, the number of members serving full-time missions, and sacrament meeting attendance. Congregational and stake growth rates have also slightly accelerated during this period, indicating progress with local leadership development and increasing the number of active members. To accommodate increasing numbers of members serving full-time missions and to capitalize on opportunities for growth, the Church has organized six new missions in the Philippines since 2010.

Despite these achievements, the Church in the Philippines continues to report low member activity rates in most areas of the country. No other country has as many districts as the Philippines. There were 77 Philippine districts at year-end 2015 – nearly twice the number of districts in Mexico – the nation with the second largest number of districts (40). Most Philippine districts report a sufficient number of congregations and members to become stakes, but lack the needed number of active, full-tithe paying Melchizedek Priesthood holders to meet the minimal criteria for stakes to operate.

Limitations

The subjective nature of determining which LDS missionary and church growth developments numbered among the most significant for 2015 constitutes the greatest limitation to this case study. Some developments have likely been unknown to missiology researchers due to limited access to LDS statistical data and a lack of reports from members, missionaries, and church leaders from particular areas of the world. Data obtained regarding the organization of new congregations/stakes and the expansion of national outreach was retrieved from official LDS sources such as lds.org/maps. Local member, full-time missionary, and church leader reports also contributed to the findings in this case study. Official country-by-country membership data for year-end 2015 will not become available until April 2016. Some 2015 data regarding congregational growth and stake and district growth in this case study may be inaccurate due to lags in the Church updating congregational and organizational totals for the year 2015.

[1] "World," CIA World Factbook, retrieved 31 December 2015. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/xx.html

[2] "Senior Missionary Opportunities Bulletin," 25 December 2015 . https://www.lds.org/bc/content/ldsorg/callings/missionary/senior-missionary/senior-missionary-opportunities.pdf?lang=eng