

The Law of the Harvest

Practical Principles of Effective Missionary Work

Section III. Chapter 27: Missionary Service

At year-end 2004, there were 51,067 full-time LDS missionaries, down from 61,638 in 2002. The combination of fewer young men in North America arriving at mission age due to shrinking LDS family sizes, poor success in mobilizing international missionaries, and higher standards with the "raising the bar" program resulted in the first major declines in the total number of missionaries serving since missions for young men were briefly shortened to eighteen months from 1982-1984. While the number of missionaries is expected to increase somewhat in coming years, the decrease in LDS family size and fractional rates of mission mobilization present long-term challenges. In the late 1980s, Ezra Taft Benson stated: "The Lord wants every young man to serve a full-time mission. Currently, only a fifth of the eligible young men in the Church are serving full-time missions. This is not pleasing to the Lord. We can do better. We must do better."[257] Sociologist James Duke noted cited the Young Men's Study:[258] "of 100 males born in the church, only 76 were ordained Deacons, 65 were ordained Teachers, 58 were ordained Priests, and only 32% went on missions. My understanding is that these statistics have not improved since 1984 when this study was published. If there is a major challenge in the Church, it is to retain our young people, the rising generation."[259] This study refers to U.S. membership and only to young men born in the Church, not to converts or those outside of the United States, where percentage rates of mission service are in single digits in most countries. Eighty percent of LDS missionaries come from North America, although nearly 80 percent of convert baptisms occur outside of North America. Even in Latin American nations where the Church has been established for decades, the Church still depends heavily on North American missionaries. //

Encouraging Native Missionaries

Native missionaries are essential to optimal Church growth. Joseph Smith taught that missionaries are often most effective in their native lands and cultures: "Take Jacob Zundell and Frederick H. Moeser, and tell them never to drink a drop of ale, wine, or any spirit, only that which flows right out from the presence of God; and send them to Germany; and when you meet with an Arab, send him to Arabia; when you find an Italian, send him to Italy; and a Frenchman, to France; or an Indian, that is suitable, send him among the Indians. Send them to the different places where they belong. Send somebody to Central America and to all Spanish America; and don't let a single corner of the earth go without a mission."[260] Ezra Taft Benson taught: "When missionaries are called to serve locally, great benefits accrue to the Church in local areas. First, the missionaries can speak the language fluently so that no language training is necessary. Second, the acceptance by local people to the missionaries of their own nationality is superior to the reception received by non-nationals. Third, the great benefit which the missionaries themselves receive through their mission experience is not exported from the local area but serves to strengthen and build the kingdom in the homeland. Thus, there must be increased emphasis on the preparation of young men and women to step forward and carry the missionary responsibility in their own lands."[261]

Mobilizing International Missionaries

Foreign missionaries are prohibited or seriously restricted in 119 countries, with over half of the world's population.[262] Native missionaries are allowed in many of these nations. Latter-day Saints must become more effective in inspiring both international missionary service and reliable member-missionary participation if the LDS faith is to become a major world religion. Patrick Johnstone's Operation World noted that in 2001 there were approximately 201,260 full-time Protestant missionaries worldwide.[263] Thirty-six percent of Protestant missionaries come from North America, while 35 percent come from Asia, 11 percent from Europe, 6 percent from Africa, 5 percent from Latin America, and 3 percent from the Pacific. Of these missionaries, 52 percent serve in their own country, while 48 percent serve abroad. Two-thirds of LDS missionaries serve the Western hemisphere with only 12 percent of the world's population, while the major population centers of the Eastern hemisphere remain highly underserved. There are over 12,000 Protestant missionaries from South Korea alone, of whom 10,646 are serving in 156 other countries.[264] Over 44,000 Protestant missionaries are serving from India, with 60 percent serving domestically and 40 percent serving abroad. Within the next few years, India is expected to surpass the United States as the leading sender of Protestant and evangelical missionaries. There are only about fifty LDS missionaries serving in all of India, and only a fraction are natives. Gospel For Asia (GFA), a Protestant missionary group started by native Indian K. P. Yohannan in 1980, represents the most remarkable model of international missionary recruitment. GFA now fields over 11,000 native missionaries from India and plans to reach 100,000 missionaries by 2020.[265] Yohannan's Gospel For Asia group offers from its Web site Revolution in World Missions, a free book, which demonstrates sound principles of native missionary recruitment and training and which deserve careful study and consideration by anyone involved in mobilizing international missionaries.[266]

Fostering Self-sufficiency of International Missions

Only in relatively few countries outside of North America has the Church consistently experienced self-sustaining rates of native missionary service. The few bright spots deserve closer study for more general implementation. LDS missions in West Africa are overwhelmingly staffed by native missionaries, and it is estimated that there are up to 3,000 returned missionaries in West Africa.[267] Mongolia alone produces 40 percent of all LDS missionaries coming from the Asia Area, and approximately 10 percent of Mongolia's LDS members have either served or are currently serving missions.[268] Strides have been made in some areas of Latin America also. In 1999, President Maynes of the South America West Area reported that the number of local full-time missionaries in Peru and Bolivia increased by 70 percent during the prior year, attributing this mainly to "strong priesthood support of missionary preparation classes" and the Church Education System.[269] It remains to be seen whether this increase will continue or remain sustained. A new vision and new approaches to international missionary service will be necessary to meet the world's needs. Modified elements of the program pioneered by K. P. Yohannan can dramatically increase missionary service rates without compromising standards.

Missionary Allocation

President Spencer W. Kimball described in his vision of world missionary efforts that "the missionaries would be sent where the most good could be accomplished."[270] Barrett and Johnson's World Christian Trends reported that "it costs Christians 700 times more money to baptize converts in rich World C countries (Switzerland) than in poor World A countries (Nepal). They noted that the ten least cost-effective countries and territories for Christian outreach with a population over one million are Japan, Switzerland, Bermuda, Denmark, Belgium, Norway, Germany, France, Austria, and Italy, while the ten most cost-effective countries are Mozambique, Ethiopia, Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Nepal, Chad, Burundi, Somalia, and Cambodia".[271] Even after consolidations, twenty-two full-time LDS missions service the ten least cost-effective countries. The ten most cost-effective nations have a combined population of over 225 million. Only Chad, Nepal, and possibly Somalia, with a combined population of 34 million, prohibit foreign missionaries, while the other seven nations allow foreign missionaries wide freedom to proselyte. Although several of these countries are served by small groups of LDS missionaries serving under missions based in neighboring nations, only two -- the Democratic Republic of Congo and Cambodia -- have their own full-time LDS missions. Barrett and Johnson state that the five megapeoples most responsive to Christianity, per hour of ministry, are the Khandeshi, Awadhi, Magadhi, Bai, and Berar Marathi. Four of these five peoples live in India, where proselytizing is permitted, but no LDS outreach is directed toward any of these groups.

Today, almost one-third of the LDS missionary force is concentrated in the United States, with less than five percent of the world's population. While recent years have seen some progress in consolidating less effective LDS missions in Europe and Japan and the expansion of African missions, less than one-sixth of LDS missions serve the most underserved two-thirds of the world's population. Immigrants from the third world constitute a large percentage of LDS converts in North America, Western Europe and Canada. The proportional overrepresentation of missionary efforts in developed nations and underrepresentation of developing nations is inefficient, since such immigrants can be reached at far less cost in their native lands. Retention of immigrant converts in most areas is very poor due to the combination of language barriers, frequent lack of member fellowshippers from the same cultural community, and transient nature of immigrant life. While outreach directed to international immigrant minorities will continue to play an important role in Church growth, especially in Western Europe and other areas where missionary efforts among the local populace are stagnant, similarly robust outreach efforts are needed in the native lands of these peoples. One cannot doubt that heeding President Kimball's call for greater awareness and utilization of missionary opportunities among receptive peoples, coupled with more culturally relevant missionary approaches, would lead to an explosion of growth. Windows for outreach in new areas may be limited, so we must be fully prepared to initiate gospel outreach efforts promptly when opportunities arise.

[257] Benson, Ezra Taft, Come, Listen to a Prophet's Voice, 5.
[258] Weed, Stan and Joe Olsen, "Key to Strong Young Men," Ensign, December 1984: 66-68.
[259] Duke, James T., "Latter-day Saints in a Secular World: What We Have Learned about Latter-day Saints from Social Research," Martin B Hickman 1999 Lecture, Brigham Young University, College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences, March 4, 1999, fhss.byu.edu/adm/hickman_lecture.htm.
[260] Burton, Alma P., ed., Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1977, 173.
[261] Benson, Ezra Taft, Language Training Mission Groundbreaking, Provo, Utah, July 18, 1974.
[262] Yohannan, K .P., Revolution in World Missions, Carrollton, TX: GFA Books, 2000. See also www.gfa.org.
[263] Johnstone, Patrick and Jason Mandryk, Operation World, Harrisonburg, VA: Paternoster, 2005.
[264] Johnstone, Patrick and Jason Mandryk, Operation World, Harrisonburg, VA: Paternoster, 2005.
[265] Yohannan, K. P., "The 10 Major Ministries of Gospel for Asia," www.gfa.org/site/about_gfa/brochure/whatdoing.html.
[266] Yohannan, K. P., Revolution in World Missions, Carrollton, TX: GFA Books, 2000. See also www.gfa.org.
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[268] Stewart, David, "The Mongolian Miracle," December 16, 2001, .
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[270] Kimball, Spencer W., "When the World Will Be Converted," Ensign, October 1974, originally presented at Regional Representatives' Seminar, April 4, 1974.
[271] Barrett, David and Todd Johnson, World Christian Trends AD 30-AD 2200, Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2001.