LDS Growth Case Studies

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Top Five Encouraging and Discouraging Church Growth Developments: 2006-2011

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Encouraging Developments

1. Outreach expansion in Sub-Saharan Africa

The Church made some significant strides in opening additional areas to proselytism in Sub-Saharan Africa between 2006 and 2011. This progress occurred on a variety of levels ranging from improving accessibility to LDS congregations by organizing additional units in cities which already had an LDS presence and establishing the first church units in previously unreached cities, towns, and villages.

In West Africa, the Church made major progress within the last five years multiplying the number of outreach centers in the largest cities. In Nigeria, the Church nearly doubled the number of wards in Benin City. In Liberia, the number of branches doubled from nine to 18 and the first congregations were organized outside Monrovia. In Togo, the number of branches in the country tripled from two to six. In Sierra Leone, the number of branches increased by 50% as additional congregations were created in all three cities which had an LDS presence. In Ghana, the Church implemented coordinated and aggressive outreach expansion efforts namely in Accra and Kumasi as dozens of new wards and branches were organized. In Nigeria, the first branches were organized in Bayelsa State and in a few previously unreached cities such as Ikorodu and Ekpoma.

Substantial strides were achieved in opening additional locations to proselytism in East Africa and Madagascar between 2006 and 2011. In Uganda, six of the ten cities with an LDS presence had their first congregations organized. In Ethiopia, LDS congregations were organized in Awasa, Shashemene, and a few additional cities and towns in southern areas of the country. In Tanzania, the first branches outside of Dar Es Salaam were organized in Arusha and Mwanza; both of which were led by local members. In Burundi and Rwanda, the Church organized branches in Bujumbura and Kigali. In Kenya, the first branches were organized in Kisumu and Busia and most locations with LDS congregations had additional units organized such as Nairobi, the Kilunga Hills, and Eldoret. In Madagascar, the Church had a presence only in the capital Antananarivo until 2005 but by late 2011 the Church had branches or groups in at least 12 additional cities, towns, and villages.

In Cental Africa, the Church achieved major progress expanding its presence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo where the first branches were organized in approximately a dozen locations such as Mwene-Ditu, Kipushi, Matadi, and Uvira.

Notable instances of national outreach expansion occurred in southern Africa between 2006 and 2011. In Botswana, the Church expanded its presence from three cities (Gaborone, Francistown, and Lobatse) to seven (Molepolole, Kanye, Mochudi, and Kasane). In Mozambique, the Church organized its first units in several cities such as Chimoio, Dondo, Luaha, Maxixe, Nampula, and Quelimane. In Angola, the Church expanded into locations outside the capital Luanda for the first time such as Lubango, Huambo, and Luena. The number of branches in Luanda also increased from one to four. In South Africa, significant congregational growth occurred in some cities such as Richard's Bay and in lesser-reached townships surrounding Johannesburg.

2. Accelerated congregational growth in the Philippines

In 2011, the Church began to creep out of a nearly decade long streak of stagnant congregational growth in the Philippines. The Church reached a high of 1,234 congregations in 2002 but the number of congregations declined to 1,113 in 2003, 1,085 in 2004, 1,077 in 2005, and 1,075 in 2006. In the late 2000s, meager congregational growth occurred as wards and branches totaled 1,083 in 2007, 1,087 in 2008, 1,095 in 2009, and 1,100 in 2010.

In 2011, the number of wards and branches increased by 20; approximately the increase for the five previous years combined. New congregations were organized in virtually every major region of the Philippines but were particularly concentrated in Luzon. The advancement of multiple branches into wards in some stakes permitted the organization of additional stakes in Luzon. Many new branches organized where the first the Church has created in a few locations such as Coron, Oras, and Sablayan.

3. Redistribution of mission resources to more productive areas

Between 2006 and 2011, the Church redistributed its limited missionary manpower from less productive areas to more receptive areas. This reshuffling of missions resulted in the creation of 23 new missions and the closure of 25 missions. Regions which had a net increase in the number of missions included Central America (5), South America (4), and Africa (3) whereas regions which experienced a net loss of missions included North America (-7), Europe (-6), and Oceania (-1). There was no change in the number of missions between 2006 and 2011 in two regions: Asia and the Caribbean.

The consolidation of missions and the reduction of the number of full-time missionaries assigned to many missions in Europe and North America was vital toward the organization of additional missions in more receptive locations where church leadership resources were often less developed such as in Latin America and Africa. Mission presidents in some missions that closed in Europe and the United States reported moderate numbers of converts baptized and average convert retention rates compared to other nearby missions but an increase in local leadership sustainability and improved administrative self-reliance that required fewer mission resources.

The organization and consolidation of missions primarily occurred in North America, Latin America, Europe, and Africa between 2006 and 2011. The Church organized three new missions in 2006 (Brazil Cuiaba, Philippines Butuan, and Marshall Islands Majuro), four missions in 2007 (Ukraine Dnepropetrovsk, Sierra Leone Freetown, Puerto Rico San Juan East, and India New Delhi), one mission in 2009 (Brazil Teresina), 10 missions in 2010 (Democratic Republic of Congo Lubumbashi, New Mexico Farmington, Philippines Iloilo, Peru Cusco, Peru Lima West, Utah St. George, Guatemala Retalhuleu, Nicaragua Managua North, Mexico Mexico City Northwest, and Mexico Villahermosa), and five missions in 2011 (Zambia Lusaka, Benin Cotonou, Mexico Mexico City Southeast, Philippines Quezon City North, and Peru Chiclayo) whereas the Church discontinued one mission in 2007 (Japan Tokyo North and Japan Tokyo South consolidated into one mission), five missions in 2009 (Brazil Belo Horizonte East, California San Francisco, Pennsylvania Harrisburg, Nigeria Lagos East, Taiwan Kaohsiung), 14 missions in 2010 (Australia Sydney North, Australia Melbourne West, Germany Hamburg, Switzerland Zurich, Ireland Dublin, Italy Catania, Spain Bilbao, Puerto Rico San Juan East, Illinois Peoria, Illinois Chicago South, Korea Seoul West, Japan Hiroshima, New Jersey Cherry Hill, and Ohio Cincinnati), and five missions in 2011 (Canada Toroto East and West consolidated into one mission, Connecticut Hartford, Portugal Porto, Switzerland Geneva, and Georgia Macon).

4. New temple announcements

The Church announced 35 new temples between 2006 and 2011 resulting in the number of planned or operating temples worldwide increasing from 131 to 166.

In 2006, four temples were announced in Cebu City, Philippines; Vancouver, British Columbia; Tegucigalpa, Honduras; and Quetzaltenango, Guatemala. In 2007, two temples were announced in Manaus, Brazil and El Salvador, San Salvador. In 2008, nine temples were announced in Gila Valley, Arizona; Gilbert, Arizona; Phoenix, Arizona; Calgary, Alberta; Córdoba, Argentina; Kansas City, Missouri; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Rome, Italy; and Trujillo, Peru. In 2009, five temples were announced in Brigham City, Utah; Concepción, Chile; Fort Lauderdale, Florida; Fortaleza, Brazil; and Sapporo, Japan. In 2010, six temples were announced in Payson, Utah; Lisbon, Portugal; Indianapolis, Indiana; Urdaneta, Philippines; Hartford, Connecticut; and Tijuana, Mexico. In 2011, nine temples were announced in Fort Collins, Colorado; Meridian, Idaho; Winnipeg, Manitoba; Provo (City Center), Utah; Barranquilla, Colombia; Durban, South Africa; Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Star Valley, Wyoming; and Paris, France.

5. Nations opening to missionary work

Several nations in Africa, Europe, and Asia were opened to missionary work - albeit some only with senior missionary couples working on a member referral basis - between 2006 and 2011. In Africa, the Church established a presence in Burundi, Gabon, Rwanda, and South Sudan. In Burundi, the Church reestablished a presence in Bujumbura in September 2010 and assigned eight young full-time missionaries and two senior missionary couples. An official branch was organized in early 2011 and a second branch was organized in mid-2011. In Gabon, an administrative branch was organized in 2011 and a group operated in Libreville. In Rwanda, the Church organized its first branch in Kigali in 2008 and senior missionaries appeared to be permanently assigned by 2010. In South Sudan, the first visits from mission leaders occurred in 2008 and the first branch was organized in Juba in late 2009.

In Europe, the first branches were organized in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Montenegro. In 2010, the Church organized administrative branches in each of these four nations. By early 2011, the first independent branches were organized in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo Branch) and Kosovo (Pristina Branch). Administrative branches continue to operate in Macedonia and Montenegro where members appear to meet in groups. A few senior missionary couples are

assigned to primarily conduct humanitarian and development work in these four nations but also offer local leadership training and church administrative assistance. In Asia, the Church assigned proselytizing missionaries to Georgia for the first time in early 2006. The Church also organized a branch in Baku, Azerbaijan to service foreigners temporarily living in the country for employment but no missionary activity occurred as the Church is not recognized by the government.

Discouraging Developments

1. Stagnant congregational growth in Mexico

In the past five years, congregational growth came to a abrupt halt for the LDS Church in Mexico. The number of wards and branches increased from 1,936 in 2006 to 1,962 in 2007, 1,977 in 2008, 2,007 in 2009, and 2,009 in 2010 but declined to approximately 2,000 in 2011. The decrease in the number of wards and branches by about ten in comparison to the rise of nominal membership of approximately 80,000 between year-end 2009 and year-end 2011 is extremely concerning and suggests poor convert retention rates during this period. Increased standards to organize new wards and branches may be a possible reason for this sudden change in congregational growth trends.

2. No increase in the number of missionaries serving worldwide

The number of full-time missionaries serving worldwide has remain relatively unchanged for nearly a decade. The Church reported 52,225 missionaries serving at year-end 2010; 939 less missionaries serving than at year-end 2006 and 8,559 less than at year-end 2000. Between 2006 and 2010, the number of missionaries serving oscillated between a high of 53,164 in 2006 to a low of 51,736 in 2009.

The stagnation of missionary numbers indicates several challenges for the Church. First, the percentage of members born into the Church who serve missions appears to have declined within the past decade. A substantial drop in the yearly increase of new children on record in the 1980s appears partially to blame for reduced numbers of missionaries serving within the past decade, but this should not have as dramatic of an effect of the total number of members serving missions when taking into account converts who serve full-time missions. Second, the Church in most countries relies heavily on North American full-time missionaries to staff their missionary forces. Many countries have fewer members serving missions today than compared to 10 or 20 years ago, such as South Korea. Third, local leaders in most nations have lacked vision and resources to prepare and train youth for missionary service. The absence of an LDS community in many nations has deterred youth from serving missions as there is little support from fellow members and leaders. Furthermore, many returned missions often relocate outside their home countries as there are no church universities within their homelands, exacerbating the situation as potential church leadership is siphoned into the United States where the Church has ample leadership manpower in most areas.

3. Continued reliance on North American missionaries

Self-sufficiency issues have been one of the major challenges for long-term growth in the LDS Church in most nations around the world. Many countries which have self-sufficient local leadership tend to draw upon a small nucleus of dedicated leadership whereas the bulk of nominal membership has little or no involvement in missionary efforts, church administration, and holding callings. Mission leaders often outsource leadership manpower to North American missionaries in many areas of the world due to limited numbers of active members to meet administrative demands.

4. Ongoing convert retention and member activity issues worldwide

Most countries did not appear to exhibit any substantial change in convert retention and member activity rates between 2006 and 2011. Launched in 2004, the revamped church missionary program Preach My Gospel has been inconsistently applied in many of the Church's missions. Mission presidents and local church leaders have interpreted the manual differently - with some opting for setting large, arbitrary baptismal quotas for their young full-time missionaries to reach whereas others implement strict protocol for prebaptismal qualifications. Some mission presidents have engaged in sustained national outreach expansion initiatives such as in Hungary whereas other mission presidents have discouraged any expansion of outreach into locations without a formal church presence notwithstanding several worthy priesthood holders in these locations, such as in some areas of Brazil, East Asia, and Africa.

5. Declining national outreach in Eastern Europe

Changing area policies regarding the minimal standards for branches to operate and the number of active members in a city for full-time missionaries to be assigned have had disastrous effects on church growth in Eastern Europe. In Bulgaria, the Church appeared to entirely close branches - without organizing member groups thereafter - in several cities. Cities such as St Petersburg and Moscow have undergo at least two cycles of branch splits and consolidations within the past two decades; one complete cycle occurred between 2006 and 2011. Decreasing the number of cities with LDS congregations represents a step

back in expanding national outreach in the region notwithstanding low receptivity and local leadership challenges.