



LDS Growth Case Studies

>

Analysis of LDS Growth in Lima, Peru

Author: Matt Martinich

Overview

Consisting of the Peruvian administrative divisions of Callao and urban areas of Lima Province near the city of Lima, the Lima Metropolitan Area supports a population of 9.45 million people according to 2012 estimates^[1] and is the fourth most populous metropolitan area in South America after Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires, and Rio de Janeiro. There are 50 city districts that pertain to the Lima Metropolitan area; one of which has no inhabitants (Islas de San Lorenzo y el Frontón). In mid-2012, the LDS Church reported 40 stakes in the Lima Metropolitan Area; more than any other metropolitan area in South America. The average stake services 236,264 people, equating to nearly one stake per city district.

This case study reviews the growth of the Church in Lima, Peru as indicated by stake growth and provides a city district analysis of outreach as defined by the ratio of city district population to LDS wards and branches. Successes, opportunities, challenges, and future prospects for growth are discussed. A comparative growth section compares and contrasts LDS growth in Lima in comparison to other select cities in Peru.

Stake Growth

The Church organized its first stake in Lima in Limatambo (1970). Additional stakes were organized in Magdalena (1974), Central (1976), Independencia (1976), Callao (1979), San Juan (1979), San Martin (1979), San Felipe (1983), San Luis (1983), Palao (1984), Villa Maria (1985), Chorrillos (1988), Comas (1988), El Olivar (1988), Las Flores (1988), Las Palmeras (1988), Maranga (1988), Vitarte (1988), Canto Grande (1990), Chosica (1991), Tahuantinsuyo (1991), Villa Salvador (1992), Wiesse (1993), Santa Anita (1995), Carabayllo (1996), San Gabriel (1996), Surco (1996), Rimac (1996), Ventanilla (1996), La Molina (1997), Campoy (1997), Violetas (1997), Santa Isabel (1997), Puente Piedra (2003), El Trebol (2003), Condevilla (2009), La Libertad (2009), Magnolias (2009), Los Olivos (2009), Prolima (2009), and Chaclacayo (2011). At present, the Church has discontinued only one stake, the Lima Peru Violetas Stake, in 2003.

There was one stake in Lima in 1970, seven in 1980, 19 in 1990, 33 in 2000, 39 in 2010, and 40 in mid-2012.

LDS Congregation Analysis

In late 2001, there were approximately 260 congregations in the Lima Metropolitan Area. In 2011, there were approximately 280 wards and branches in the Lima Metropolitan Area. At present, the average ward or branch services a geographic area populated by 36,300 inhabitants. Of the 49 populated city districts, the Church headquarters a ward or branch in 44 city districts. The Church extends the most penetrating outreach in La Punta (one unit per 3,793 people), La Perla (one per 12,177), Carmen de la Legua Reynoso (one per 14,022), Santa Rosa (one per 15,399), and Independencia (one per 18,042). The city district with the most Latter-day Saint wards and branches is San Martín de Porres where 27 wards operate. The least reached city districts with at least one ward or branch include San Borja (one per 111,568), Surquillo (one per 92,328), Breña (one per 79,456), Pueblo Libre (one per 77,038), and Carabayllo (one per 66,990). A map providing city district-by-district statistics on the degree of LDS outreach in Lima can be found [here](#).

The five city districts without a ward or branch include Pucusana (14,403), San Bartolo (7,008), Punta Hermosa (6,935), Punta Negra (6,878), and Santa María del Mar (1,220). All of these city districts are located on the southernmost portion of the city along the coast. A map providing city district-by-district statistics on the status of LDS outreach in Lima can be found [here](#).

Successes

Lima is one of the most well-reached major Latin American cities by the LDS Church as indicated by at least one functioning ward in branch in all but six outlying, sparsely populated districts. All of the city districts with the highest Human Development Index (HDI) values have an LDS presence notwithstanding higher living standards often correlating with lower receptivity to mission outreach. The average ward or branch in the metropolitan area services less than 50,000 inhabitants and the majority of the city population resides within a kilometer of an LDS meetinghouse. Only nine city districts have an average of more than 40,000 people per ward or branch. Furthermore congregations are well distributed over the entire city with little variation in the degree of outreach by geographic location. This has occurred likely due to equal distribution of mission resources throughout the entire city, little variation in receptivity to the Church between city districts, or a combination of the two.

The Church has a massive missionary presence in Lima with five missions headquartered in the city. All but one of the Lima missions serve additional areas of the country, but half or more missionaries in each of these missions appear to serve within the Lima Metropolitan Area. The few Latin American countries demonstrate as high self-sufficiency in local members staffing missions within their own country as Peru. Due to the stable and increasing number of Peruvian members serving missions, the Church has organized additional missions within the past decade.

Church leaders have continued to organize new wards and branches in many stakes. For example, the number of wards in the Lima Peru Villa Salvador Stake increased from six to 10 in 2009. Steady increases in the number of wards in northern Lima prompted the organization of a few new stakes in 2009. There have also been only a few ward consolidations in central areas and the Callao area over the past decade notwithstanding very little if any population growth in these districts.

Opportunities

Local church leadership has appeared more stable in the Lima area than in many other of the most populous cities in South America as indicated by comparatively few congregation consolidations, a net increase in the number of units over the past decade, and the creation of eight new stakes since 2003. Stronger local leadership provides self-sufficient resources that can undertake administrative responsibilities, meet local members' needs, and implement a strategic vision for missionary activity.

The Church has ample opportunities to open additional congregations in lesser-reached areas of many city districts. Many city districts are only minimally reached with only one or two congregations notwithstanding 50,000 or more inhabitants. The Church extends more penetrating outreach in many smaller cities in Peru. For example, Ilo has a population of 58,600 and a stake consisting of six wards and a branch, Moquegua has a population of 52,400 and a stake consisting of six wards and two branches that all meet within the city, Puno has a population of 120,000 and two stakes, 12 wards, and three branches, Sicuani has a population of 42,600 and a stake with four wards based in the city, Cerro de Pasco has a population of 66,900 and a stake with seven wards and a branch based in the city, and Huacho has a population of 54,000 and a stake with six wards based in the city. The organization of additional independent branches and wards is time consuming as it requires approval from various local, regional, and international leadership presidencies, including the First Presidency of the Church. Furthermore, the organization of wards and branches requires membership in a given area to meet certain minimal standards to qualify for an official unit to operate. These standards have changed over time. A decade ago a branch could be organized if there was only two member families and one male adult in one family that held the Melchizedek Priesthood or was a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood.^[2] Within recent years, missionaries report in other Latin American countries that at least six active, full tithe-paying priesthood holders must reside within a given area to qualify for approval to become a branch. Church leaders have implemented higher standards to achieve a greater level of self-sufficiency from each congregation, thereby reducing the likelihood that a new congregations closes or consolidates with other nearby units. Higher standards can dissuade church leaders to pursue opening additional congregations due to the lengthy and often frustrating process of simultaneously redrawing ward and branch boundaries, identifying potential church leaders, retaining active members, reactivating large numbers of inactive members, and finding, teaching, baptizing, and retaining new converts.

The organization of dependent units provides an excellent, speedy, and effective method to bypass the frustrations of months or even years required to receive approval to create new congregations and reduces the risk incurred from prematurely organizing an independent branch or ward. Dependent units can begin operating often within a matter of weeks or a couple months and require only the approval of local, and at times regional, church leadership. Small groups generally meet in a small rented facility or in a members' home if no other location is available.

Challenges

Over the past decade the Church has experienced no increase or a decrease in the number of wards and branches in several stakes. Lackluster church planting efforts appear one of the primary reasons for the slowdown in new stake organizations over the past decade as few stakes have experienced congregational growth to the point that requires a stake division. Due to only a few dozen new wards and branches organized and a dozen or more ward and branch closures, the total number of units in the Lima area only modestly increased in the 2000s. Some ward and branch organizations and consolidations are attributed to members relocating to other areas of the city, resulting in increasing church attendance in some units and decreasing attendance in others. Low member activity rates also present a serious problem as active membership constitutes a small minority of total church membership on record. Congregation consolidations and low member activity rates prompted the closure of the Lima Peru Las Violetas Stake; the only stake the Church has discontinued in Lima to date. Several additional

stakes currently operate with the minimum number of wards required for a stake to function. Any future unit consolidations and no new unit creations may necessitate additional stake closures.

All five city districts with no ward or branch number among the six city districts with the smallest populations, are among the most remote and rural, and have low population densities. Four of these unreached city districts support populations of less than 10,000. Opening groups or branches in these locations may appear impractical due to comparatively few inhabitants than lesser-reached communities within more populous districts that already have at least one ward or branch. However, it is likely that dozens of Latter-day Saints reside in most of these districts. In 2011, one in 58 Peruvians were nominally LDS. If this ratio were the same in unreached city districts, there would be 248 members in Pucusana, 121 members in San Bartolo, 120 members in Punta Hermosa, 119 members in Punta Negra, and 21 members in Santa María del Mar. It is highly unlikely that the percentage of nominal Latter-day Saints in these five unreached city districts is concurrent with the percentage of members nationwide, but with nearly two percent of Peruvians on church records suggests that there are likely dozens of Latter-day Saints in these districts that may be reactivated if a group or branch were planted closer to their homes.

Comparative Growth

Although Lima ranked as the fourth most populous metropolitan area in South America in 2012, it ranked as the metropolitan area in South America with the most stakes and congregations. However, Lima is the third least-reached city in Peru among the 21 cities populated by over 100,000 inhabitants after Ica and Sullana. Using the most recent city population and LDS unit totals and listed in order of city population size, the average congregation serviced 36,300 in Lima, 18,200 in Arequipa, 17,500 in Trujillo, 16,400 in Chiclayo, 18,900 in Piura, 16,100 in Iquitos, 26,800 in Cuzco, 17,600 in Chimbote, 23,100 in Huancayo, 34,100 in Pucallpa, 14,300 in Tacna, 36,600 in Ica, 30,100 in Juliaca, 36,400 in Sullana, 27,100 in Cajamarca, 25,600 in Chincha Alta, 30,200 in Ayacucho, 10,700 in Huanuco, 8,000 in Puno, 29,300 in Tarapoto, and 25,200 in Huaraz. Congregations in several cities with less than 100,000 inhabitants service less than 10,000 people per unit on average.

Future Prospects

Steady membership and congregational growth over the past two decades and increasing numbers of full-time missionaries assigned to serve in Lima suggest that the establishment of additional wards and branches is likely for the foreseeable future. The Church may headquarter its first congregations in Pucusana and other unreached districts in the extreme south within the next decade. Low member activity rates and mediocre convert retention suggest that the Church may not make much progress organizing new wards and branches at a rate outpacing the city's strong population growth rate. Nevertheless, the most populous and least reached city districts appear likely to have more wards and branches organized. Several stakes appear close to dividing, namely the Lima Peru Canto Grande (10 wards), Lima Peru La Molina (10 wards), and Lima Villa Salvador (11 wards) Stakes. The Church may need to discontinue a few stakes in the central and northern areas that have only five or six wards if no new units are organized and some congregations close.

[1] "PERU: Lima Metropolitan Area," [www.citypopulation.de](http://www.citypopulation.de/php/peru-limametro.php), retrieved 10 July 2012.
<http://www.citypopulation.de/php/peru-limametro.php>

[2] "Church Administration," True to the Faith, p. 36