



LDS Growth Case Studies

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The Relationship Between LDS Growth and Increases in Missions

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Overview

The LDS Church maintains two separate hierarchal structures for administrating church membership and its full-time missionary program. Church leaders supervise full-time missionaries in administrative units called missions that contain specific geographic boundaries and are led by a mission presidency. The Church generally organizes new missions in response to a perceived need whether it is to expand national outreach, reduce the administrative demand on mission leaders in missions where larger numbers of missionaries are assigned or that cover large geographical areas, provide greater administrative support for local church leaders in districts and mission branches, or revitalize reactivation efforts. As of August 2012, there were 347 LDS missions worldwide based in 82 countries or dependencies.

This case study examines the relationship between the general growth of the LDS Church and the number of LDS missions. A brief synopsis of the increase in the number of missions worldwide is provided followed by a review of individual mission creations and consolidations since 2000. An analysis of trends in mission growth is conducted by world region and the relationship between full-time missionary numbers and mission creations and consolidations is explored. The relationship between organizing new missions on membership, congregational, and stake and district growth is studied. Lastly, future prospects for mission growth and general LDS growth is provided.

LDS Background

In 1837, the Church organized its first formal full-time mission called the British Mission. Additional missions created prior to year-end 1850 included the Eastern States (1839), Society Islands [Tahitian] (1844), Welsh (1845), California (1846), Scandinavian (1850), Italian (1850), Swiss (1850), and Sandwich Islands (1850) Missions. The number of missions reached nine in 1850 and 20 in 1900, 43 in 1950, 58 in 1960, 93 in 1970, 188 in 1980, 256 in 1990, 334 in 2000, and 340 in 2010.

Since 2000, the Church has created 48 new missions in Illinois Nauvoo (2000), Mexico Mexico City West (2001), Washington Everett (2001), Arizona Mesa (2002), Cape Verde Praia (2002), Colorado Colorado Springs (2002), Nigeria Ibadan (2002), Nigeria Uyo (2002), Texas Lubbock (2002), Washington Kennewick (2002), Georgia Atlanta North (2003), Mexico Guadalajara South (2003), Chile Concepcion South (2003), Philippines Laoag (2004), Mozambique Maputo (2005), Ghana Cape Coast (2005), Uganda Kampala (2005), Brazil Cuiaba (2006), Marshall Islands Majuro (2006), Philippines Butuan (2006), Puerto Rico San Juan East (2007), Sierra Leone Freetown (2007), Ukraine Dnepropetrovsk (2007), India New Delhi (2007), Brazil Teresina (2009), Democratic Republic of Congo Lubumbashi (2010), Guatemala Retalhuleu (2010), Mexico Mexico City Northwest (2010), Mexico Villahermosa (2010), New Mexico Farmington (2010), Nicaragua Managua North (2010), Peru Cusco (2010), Peru Lima West (2010), Philippines Iloilo (2010), Utah St. George (2010), Benin Cotonou (2011), Mexico Mexico City Southeast (2011), Peru Chiclayo (2011), Philippines Quezon City North (2011), Zambia Lusaka (2011), Colombia Medellin (2012), Ghana Kumasi (2012), Mexico Puebla North (2012), Mexico Xalapa (2012), Nevada Reno (2012), Vanuatu Port Vila (2012), Utah Salt Lake City Central (2012), and Utah Salt Lake City West (2012).

Since 2000, the Church has discontinued 36 missions in France Bordeaux (2001), Germany Dusseldorf (2001), Japan Kobe (2001), Austria Vienna (2002), Netherlands Amsterdam (2002), England Bristol (2002), Italy Padova (2002), Portugal Lisbon North (2002), Germany Leipzig (2003), Spain Las Palmas (2006), Japan Tokyo South (2007), Brazil Belo Horizonte East (2009), California San Francisco (2009), Nigeria Lagos East (2009), Pennsylvania Harrisburg (2009), Taiwan Kaohsiung (2009), Australia Sydney North (2010), Australia Melbourne West (2010), Germany Hamburg (2010), Illinois Chicago South (2010),

Illinois Peoria (2010), Ireland Dublin (2010), Italy Catania (2010), Japan Hiroshima (2010), Korea Seoul West (2010), New Jersey Cherry Hill (2010), Ohio Cincinnati (2010), Puerto Rico San Juan East (2010), Spain Bilbao (2010), Switzerland Zurich (2010), Canada Toronto East (2011), Connecticut Hartford (2011), Georgia Macon (2011), Portugal Porto (2011), Switzerland Geneva (2011), and Russia Moscow West (2012).

A map displaying the locations of missions created or discontinued since 2000 can be found [here](#).

Analysis

The Church permanently discontinued more missions between 2000 and 2012 than in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries combined. This has occurred in part due to the decline in the number of full-time missionaries serving and emphasis on redistribution of mission resources based on receptivity or administrative needs. There have likely been more missions discontinued during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries than during the twenty-first century, but the majority of these discontinued missions in the 1800s and 1900s were only temporarily closed and later reopened such as early missions in Asia, Europe, and Oceania.

The creation and consolidation of missions has significantly varied by region since 2000. The most dramatic shift in mission resources occurred in Europe as nearly half of the all missions consolidated were in Europe. The reduction of missions in Europe was not limited to countries that had multiple missions as the Church closed its only mission in several European countries (Austria, Ireland, and the Netherlands) and both its missions in Switzerland. The number of missions discontinued by region since 2000 totaled 17 in Europe, nine in North America, five in Asia, two in Oceania, one in Africa, one in the Caribbean, and one in South America whereas the number of new missions created by region since 2000 totaled 12 in North America, 11 in Africa, nine in Central America, seven in South America, five in Asia, two in Oceania, one in the Caribbean, and one in Europe. The net growth or decrease in missions by region during this period was 10 in Africa; nine in Central America; six in South America; three in North America; zero in Asia, the Caribbean, and Oceania; and -16 in Europe.

North America ranks as the region that had the most new missions created and the second most discontinued due to the large number of missions in the region (109 in 2012) and redistribution of resources from less productive areas (eastern United States) to more productive ones (intermountain West). The Church appears to concentrate approximately one-third of its missions in North America because the majority of the Church's full-time missionary force serves from the United States and Canada and the United States is the world's third most populous country. However there remains a severe imbalance in the distribution of mission resources and world population considering approximately one-third of the Church's missions service five percent of the world's population.

There has been a correlation between the number of missionaries serving and the number of new missions created or discontinued. For example, between 1970 and 1980 the number of missions more than doubled from 93 to 188 (102% increase) and the number of missionaries called to serve a year more than doubled from 7,590 to 16,600 (119% increase). However, between 1981 and 1986 the number of missions increased from 188 to 192 (2.1% increase) and the number of missionaries called a year increased 17,800 to 20,798 (16.4% increase). Between 2000 and 2010 the number of missions increased from 334 to 340 (1.8% increase) and the total number of missionaries serving decreased from 60,784 to 52,225 (14% decrease).

New missions have been organized in response to a perceived need to capitalize on current growth conditions and to accelerate and improve the quality of growth. Therefore membership and congregational growth occurs before a new mission is organized to warrant the creation of a new mission and the creation of the new mission channels more missionaries and resources into a region thereby accelerating growth. For example, in the Church in Uganda experienced rapid growth upon its initial establishment, growing from less than 100 members in 1991 to 800 in 1993. Between 1993 and 2005 - the year the Church created its first mission in Uganda - membership growth rates slowed, increasing arithmetically by 200 to 500 members a year. Between 2006 and 2011, the Church in Uganda has generally added 1,000 members a year as church membership grew from 4,358 to 10,368. However, convert retention rates appeared to decline following the organization of the new mission as there has been no difference in congregational growth rates over the past two decades. The number of wards and branches totaled one in 1991, six in 1993, 12 in 1999, 14 in 2005, and 22 in 2011.

Comparing Mission Growth to Other Growth Indicators

Several of the countries with the most LDS missions, members, and congregations exhibit the strongest correlations between mission growth with other growth indicators such as congregational growth, stake and district growth, and membership growth. For example, in Brazil there is nearly a perfect correlation between the increase in missions and membership from 1940 to 2011 ($r = 0.966$), the increase in missions and units from 1987 to 2011 ($r = 0.977$), and the increase in missions and stakes and districts from 1987 to 2011 ($r = 0.954$). In the United States, there is a high correlation between the increase in missions and membership ($r = 0.887$), units ($r = 0.904$), and stakes and districts ($r = 0.896$) between 1987 and 2011. In Mexico, there is a high correlation between the increase in missions and membership ($r = 0.951$), units ($r = 0.904$), and stakes and districts ($r = 0.985$) during the same time period.

The Church in countries where there are few members but large numbers of missions has exhibited similar findings. In Russia, there is a strong correlation between the number of missions and membership ($r = 0.795$) but a nearly perfect correlation in the number of missions and units ($r = 0.956$) and missions and stakes and districts ($r = 0.967$) between 1991 to 2011. These findings have occurred because the organization of new missions in Russia has been intimately connected to national outreach expansion; the primary force for congregational growth in Russia. The first consolidation of a mission in Russia to date - the Russia Moscow West Mission in 2012 - occurred on the heels of countrywide branch closures and consolidations that plunged the number of wards and branches from over 130 to 100 in just a few years. There has also been no sustained congregational growth between the creation of the most recent mission (Russia Vladivostok in 1999) to present. Lastly, increases in districts have been highly correlated with the creation of new missions as national outreach expansion occurs.

Some countries do not follow these trends. For example, in Germany the Church experienced virtually no correlation between membership growth and the number of missions from 1973 to 2011 ($r = -0.125$), a moderate positive correlation between the number of missions and the number of units ($r = 0.568$) from 1987 to 2011, and a moderate negative correlation between the number of missions and the number of stakes and districts ($r = -0.578$) from 1987 to 2011. These weaker or nonexistent correlations between the number of missions and other growth indicators are attributed to low receptivity, the ongoing reduction in the number of American military personnel stationed in Germany, and modest member activity rates.

The formation of new missions outside the United States has often accelerated national outreach expansion. For example, the Church in Uganda had a presence only in Kampala, Jinja, and Entebbe prior to the organization of the mission. Since the creation of the Uganda Kampala Mission in 2005 the Church has opened seven additional cities to proselytism. In Mozambique, the Church opened its first mission in 2005 and at the time had a presence only in Beira, Maputo, and Marromeu notwithstanding a missionary presence since 1999. In 2011, the Church in Mozambique had a presence in a total of ten cities. The rapid growth in the number of missions in Brazil during the 1990s occurred in tandem with scores of cities opening to missionary work as well.

Opportunities and Future Prospects

Within the past decade international church leadership has become more cognizant of redistributing mission resources from less productive areas like Europe, industrialized East Asia, and the eastern United States to more productive or lesser-reached areas such as Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Philippines. This has occurred in part due to diminished returns in convert baptisms in less receptive areas, the decline in the number of full-time missionaries by 10,000, and subsequent stagnant growth in the number of missionaries serving thereafter. The large annual increase in the number of full-time missionaries serving in 2011 of six percent is a welcomed development in an era of stagnant missionary growth and is likely the primary reason the Church consolidated only one mission in 2012 notwithstanding creating eight new missions that same year. Consistent increases in the number of missionaries serving worldwide appears likely within the next decade but it is unclear how much of an increase will occur. The Church will continue to rely on redistributing limited missionary manpower on a worldwide scale to take advantage of increasing opportunities to expand outreach in lesser-reached and unreached areas that exhibit good receptivity. As demonstrated by the concentration of new missions organized thus far in the twenty-first century, most new missions will likely be created in world regions that demonstrate increasing numbers of members serving full-time missions or self-sufficient missionary forces such as Sub-Saharan Africa, some areas of Latin America, and the Western United States.

Many receptive countries currently have no missions established. There are no missions in Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Namibia, Swaziland, Tanzania, and Togo notwithstanding good conditions for proselytism. The Church has more carefully prepared areas for the organization of new missions, especially countries where the Church does not headquarter a mission, and has often prepared countries for years in advance before a mission is officially organized. For example, missionaries report meticulous preparation in the pending organization of the Angola Luanda Mission. Within the next decade the Church appears most likely to organize its first missions in Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Liberia, Malawi, the Solomon Islands, and Tanzania and its second mission in Papua New Guinea, Thailand, and Zimbabwe due to recent church growth trends, the status of religious freedom, political stability, and the size of current LDS missions. Countries containing multiple missions that appear most likely to experience a net increase in the number of missions functioning within the next decade appear limited to areas of Latin America, South Africa, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and possibly India. The organization of additional missions in these countries will be crucial for the Church to accelerate growth and continually expand national outreach.