



LDS Growth Case Studies

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The 3,000th Stake Milestone: Analysis

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Overview

In December 2012, the LDS Church reached its 3,000th stake milestone upon the creation of the Freetown Sierra Leone Stake. Increasing numbers of stakes are one of the most robust and holistic church growth indicators as stakes must meet certain requirements in a particular geographic area pertaining to membership totals, activity rates, and the number of active, full-tithe-paying Melchizedek Priesthood holders. However, it has taken the Church significantly longer to reach the 3,000th stake milestone than it took for it to reach the 2,000th stake milestone. The number of stakes doubled from 1,000 to 2,000 between 1979 and 1994 (15 years) whereas the number of stakes increased from 2,000 to 3,000 between 1994 and 2012 (18 years). In 1980, the official LDS Church magazine the Ensign projected that there would be 3,600 stakes by the year 2000 and 11.14 million members^[1] whereas the Church reported only 2,581 stakes at year-end 2000 - a thousand less than anticipated 20 years earlier. Membership projections were exactly on target as the Church reported 11.07 million members for year-end 2000. The discrepancy between membership and stake projections and actual numbers for 2000 suggests that inactivity and local leadership development projects has prevented the organization of a commensurate number of stakes during this period.

This case study provides a historical overview of stake growth since the Church's organization and a synopsis of the worldwide distribution of stakes at present-day. Lists of countries with a stake and the year the first stake was organized, countries with the most stakes, and countries with the most members without a stake are provided. Factors that influence the rate of stake growth are analyzed and prospects for future stake growth are discussed.

Historical Overview of Stake Growth

The number of LDS stakes has steadily grown since the mid-nineteenth century. Due to increasing membership in the Kirtland area, the Church organized its first stake in 1832 but the stake did not become fully functional with a high council until 1834.^[2] A handful of stakes operated in the 1830s and all the Church's stakes were discontinued in 1846 due to the migration of members to the Rocky Mountains. In 1847, the Church created the Salt Lake Stake. The total number of stakes in the Church reached 10 in 1874, 50 in 1901, 100 in 1928, 200 in 1952, 300 in 1960, 400 in 1964, 500 in 1970, 1,000 in 1979, 1,500 in 1984, 2,000 in 1994, and 2,500 in 1998. The rate of stake growth has varied over time. Since 1900, there have been several years where the percentage growth rate for the number of stakes was higher than 10% (1901, 1960, and 1977-1980). Within the past 50 years the annual percentage increase in the number of stakes increased by 5.5% in the 1960s, 8.2% in the 1970s, 4.8% in the 1980s, 3.9% in the 1990s, and 1.2% in the 2000s. The five years with the highest percentage growth in the number of stakes were 1978 (11.9%), 1980 (11.5%), 1977 (10.9%), 1979 (10.3%), and 1960 (10%) whereas the five years with the lowest percentage growth in the number of stakes were 2002 (-0.2%), 2003 (0.8%), 2008 (1.0%), 2001 (1.0%), and 2010 (1.1%). The year that experienced the largest increase in the number of stakes was 1996 (146) whereas the year that experienced the largest decrease in the number of stakes was 2002 (-5). Since 1999, the number of stakes has increased by 34 per year on average.

New Stakes Created per Year versus Increase in the Number of Stakes per Year

The increase in the number of stakes reported year-to-year is less than the number of new stakes created a year due to the Church discontinuing stakes. When a stake no longer meets the criteria to function as a stake, a stake may be discontinued and consolidated with neighboring stakes or become one or more member districts. There have been approximately 130 stakes discontinued worldwide since 1990. Most of these discontinued stakes outside the United States were consolidated due to low

member activity rates and poor sustainability of a sufficient number of local Melchizedek Priesthood holders whereas most stakes discontinued within the United States were closed due to large numbers of active members moving outside a stake's boundaries. Smaller numbers of new stakes created year-to-year since 1998 and increasing numbers of stake consolidations in the past decade delayed the Church from reaching the 3,000th stake milestone. If the Church had not discontinued any stakes since 1990, the 3,000th stake milestone would have been reached in 2010.

Distribution of Stakes - 2012

Half of all stakes are located in the United States and two-thirds of all stakes are located in the United States, Brazil, and Mexico - three countries that together comprise only nine percent of the world's population. At the time the Church reached 3,000 stakes, the percentage breakdown of stakes by world region was as follows: North America (52%), South America (21%), Central America (11%), Asia (5%), Europe (4%), Oceania (4%), Africa (2%), and the Caribbean (1%). The worldwide distribution of stakes supports the claim of some researchers that the Church is more of a Western Hemisphere church than a worldwide church considering 85% of the Church's stakes are located in the Americas.

First Stake by Country

The United States was the first country with a stake (1834). By 1959, three additional countries had stakes: Canada (1895), Mexico (1895), and New Zealand (1958). In the 1960s, the Church created its first stakes in the United Kingdom (1960), Australia (1960), Germany (1961), the Netherlands (1961), Switzerland (1961), Samoa (1962), Brazil (1966), Argentina (1966), Guatemala (1967), Uruguay (1967), Tonga (1968), and American Samoa (1969). In the 1970s, the Church created its first stakes in Peru (1970), Japan (1970), South Africa (1970), Chile (1972), French Polynesia (1972), the Philippines (1973), El Salvador (1973), South Korea (1973), Denmark (1974), France (1975), Sweden (1975), Taiwan (1976), Hong Kong (1976), Colombia (1977), Venezuela (1977), Honduras (1977), Costa Rica (1977), Belgium (1977), Finland (1977), Norway (1977), Ecuador (1978), Bolivia (1979), Paraguay (1979), and Panama (1979). In the 1980s, the Church created its first stakes in Puerto Rico (1980), Austria (1980), Nicaragua (1981), Spain (1982), Fiji (1983), the Dominican Republic (1986), and Nigeria (1988). In the 1990s, the Church created its first stakes in Ghana (1991), Papua New Guinea (1995), Thailand (1995), Singapore (1995), Ireland (1995), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1996), Kiribati (1996), Cote d'Ivoire (1997), Haiti (1997), and Zimbabwe (1999). In the 2000s, the Church created its first stakes in Liberia (2000), Madagascar (2000), Kenya (2001), the Republic of the Congo (2003), Ukraine (2004), Hungary (2006), Mongolia (2009), Trinidad and Tobago (2009), and the Marshall Islands (2009). In the 2010s, the Church created its first stakes in Uganda (2010), Guam (2010), Indonesia (2011), Russia (2011), Cape Verde (2012), India (2012), New Caledonia (2012), Botswana (2012), and Sierra Leone (2012). The number of countries that had their first stake created was three in the nineteenth century, one from 1900 to 1959, 12 in the 1960s, 24 in the 1970s, eight in the 1980s, 10 in the 1990s, eight in the 2000s, and nine from 2010 to late-2012.

Countries with the most Stakes

In late 2012, the 10 countries with the most stakes were the United States (1,497), Brazil (246), Mexico (225), Peru (98), Philippines (83), Chile (74), Argentina (72), Canada (47), the United Kingdom (45), and Guatemala (40). Approximately 80% of all LDS stakes are located in these 10 countries.

Countries with the most Members without a Stake

In late 2012, there were 18 countries that had more than 2,000 members and no LDS stakes including Cambodia (10,999), mainland China (estimated at approximately 10,000), Malaysia (7,926), Liberia (5,863), Mozambique (5,617), Jamaica (5,449), Guyana (5,198), Vanuatu (4,864), and the Federated States of Micronesia (4,302), Belize (4,018), Pakistan (estimated at 3,200), Romania (2,972), Armenia (2,965), Zambia (2,903), the Czech Republic (2,312), Bulgaria (2,251), and Albania (2,093). All of these countries have the minimal number of members needed to organize a stake (1,900) but due to other factors the Church has been unable to create stakes in these countries such as low member activity rates, insufficient active membership concentrated in a single district to form a stake, and inadequate numbers of local church leaders to staff both ward and stake callings.

Factors that Influence the Rate of Stake Growth

Congregational growth constitutes the greatest factor influencing stake growth trends as stakes generally must have a minimum of five wards to operate. The slowdown in new ward creations and the consolidation of hundreds of units throughout Latin America and Europe contributed to stagnant stake growth in the early 2000s. Increasing numbers of ward and branches in the mid-1990s and the latter-half of the 2000s correlated with increasing numbers of stakes during these periods. Member activity and convert retention rates are factored into congregational growth as the Church must meet specific membership requirements in order to organize additional wards and branches. Progress in helping branches in districts reach the minimum qualifications to become wards also plays a role in stake growth as districts mature into stakes.

National outreach expansion comprises the primary method that the Church achieves steady congregational growth as new areas open to proselytism and branches, wards, and stakes are organized as converts remain active. Due to traditional LDS outreach expansion paradigms relying on full-time missionaries to accomplish this feat, the number of missionaries serving has

also had an influence on congregational growth. With fewer locations opened to missionary work in the 2000s and than in the 1990s, the Church has experienced a slowdown in congregational growth in many areas of the world which, in turn, has decreased stake growth.

Future Prospects

It is unclear how many years it will take for the Church to reach 4,000 stakes due to the variation in the annual increase of new stakes over the past decade from as few as -5 (2002) to over 50 in 2012. If the Church replicates its growth trends in the 2000s until the Church reaches 4,000 stakes, it will take three more decades - or the year 2042 - to meet this milestone. However, if the number of stakes increases on average by 50 a year, then this milestone will be reached within two decades, or around the year 2032. Accelerating national outreach expansion, initiating church planting programs, and increasing convert baptismal standards to improve convert retention and member activity rates may accelerate stake growth in the long run if these policies are consistently enforced throughout the Church.

[1] A Statistical Profile: What Numbers Tell Us about Ourselves," Ensign, April 1980: 15.

[2] Albrecht, Stan L. "Stake," Encyclopedia of Mormonism, p. 1,411-1,414.
<http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/EoM/id/4391>