



LDS Growth Case Studies

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Analysis of LDS Growth in Kyiv, Ukraine

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Overview

With 2.8 million inhabitants within its city limits,^[1] Kyiv or Kiev is the capital and most populous city in Ukraine and the third most populous city in the former Soviet Union. There are an estimated 3.275 million people who live within the Kyiv agglomeration.^[2] Ethnic Ukrainians comprise a strong majority among the city's inhabitants and ethnic Russians constitute a sizable minority. There are small numbers of Jews, Armenians, and other Slavic and Turkic peoples.

This case study reviews past LDS growth in Kyiv and identifies successes, opportunities, and challenges for future growth. A comparative growth section compares the growth of the Church in Kyiv with other cities in the region and with other nontraditional Christian groups. A future prospects section provides an outlook for future growth.

LDS Background

In June 1991, the Church created its first branch in Kyiv. By the end of the year there were 44 members in the Kyiv Branch.^[3] In 1999, the Church operated 15 branches in Kyiv divided between three districts. In mid-2001, there were 12 branches in the Kyiv area divided between the Kyiv Ukraine Left Bank (five branches - Brovary, Kharkivs'ka, Lisova, Nova-Darnyts'ka, and Voskresens'ka) and the Kyiv Ukraine Sviatoshyns'kyi District (nine branches - Borschahivs'ka, Moskovs'ka, Nyvky, Obolons'ka, Pechers'ka, Peremohy, Sviatoshyns'kyi, Starokyivs'ka, and Vynohradars'ka). At the time the Bila Tserkva Branch also pertained to the Kyiv Ukraine Sviatoshyns'kyi District. By late 2002, there were 2,700 members in Kyiv.^[4] Assuming that membership growth rates in Kyiv were commensurate with membership growth rates in Ukraine as a whole between 2002 and 2011, the number of LDS members on church records in Kyiv by year-end 2011 is estimated at 3,450.

Between mid-2001 and mid-2004, the Church closed the following seven branches in the Kyiv area: Borschahivs'ka, Lisova, Obolons'ka, Voskresens'ka, Peremohy, Sviatoshyns'kyi, and Starokyivs'ka). In May 2004, the Church created the Kyiv Ukraine Stake. At the time the stake included seven wards and one branch (Kharkivs'kyi, Moskovs'kyi, Novo-Darnyts'kyi, Nyvky, Pechers'kyi, Voskresens'kyi and Vynohradars'kyi wards, and the Brovars'ka Branch. In 2006, the Church created an eighth ward (Borschahivs'kyi). In the mid-2000s, two new branches were also organized (Obolons'ka and Kyiv [English]). Between mid-2001 and mid-2011, the number of congregations within the Kyiv city limits declined from 13 to 10. Maps of LDS congregations in Kyiv are available for [2001](#) and at [present](#).

In 1998, the Church announced plans to construct the first temple in the former Soviet Union in Kyiv, Ukraine. In 2010, the Church dedicated the new temple. In 2012, the Church scheduled four endowment sessions a day Tuesdays through Fridays and five sessions on Saturdays.^[5]

In 2010, missionaries reported that there were two zones in Kyiv. Most wards in the stake appear to have between 70 and 150 active members.

Successes

The Church in Kyiv quickly developed as a center of strength shortly after the introduction of missionaries as indicated by prolific

congregational growth, the organization of the first stake in Eastern Europe, and the announcement of a temple. The size and strength of the local priesthood force permitted the Church to create its first stake in Eastern Europe in 2004; seven years prior to the organization of the first stake in Russia where the Church currently has twice as many members. Prior to branch consolidations in preparation to form ward-sized congregations, the Church operated three districts within Kyiv due to the large number of branches. No other city in Eastern Europe has ever had more than two districts headquartered in a single city besides Kyiv. The spiritual maturity and dedication of members and leaders is evident in the announcement of the first LDS temple in the former Soviet Union in Kyiv in 1998; only seven years following the organization of the first branch and arrival of proselytizing missionaries. Since its dedication in 2010, the Kyiv Ukraine Temple has been well-utilized by members in Kyiv according to member and missionary reports.

The Church has extended and sustained a higher degree of outreach in Kyiv than any other major city in the former Soviet Union as evidenced by the lowest average population served per congregation and the operation of LDS congregations throughout the city. In 2001, the average congregation in Kyiv included approximately 200,000 people within its geographical boundaries whereas in 2011 the average congregation included 280,000 people within its geographical boundaries. Most cities in the region have an average of half a million or more people within the geographical boundaries of a ward or branch. Currently nine of the 10 city districts of Kyiv have an LDS congregation. For a map of city districts in Kyiv and status of LDS outreach, click [here](#).

Kyiv numbers among the few cities in Eastern Europe where the number of wards and branches increased between 2004 and 2010. The Church organized three additional congregations in Kyiv since the district matured into a stake whereas most cities in the region reported no change or a decline in the number of wards and branches. This finding suggests that the Church in Kyiv has developed a strong base of church leadership and sizable numbers of active members in each congregation that has not only deterred congregation consolidations but has permitted the organization of a couple additional units.

Moderate member activity rates occur in most wards and branches. The Church in most major cities in Eastern Europe experiences low member activity rates due to quick baptism tactics, substance abuse problems, inadequate prebaptismal preparation, and socialization problems at church. The number of active members in wards and branches in Kyiv appears twice as many as many other units throughout the former Soviet Union.

Opportunities

Lesser-reached subdivisions and communities within Kyiv offer good opportunities for revitalizing outreach expansion efforts. Holding cottage meetings in members' homes who live in areas distant from meetinghouses can help spur growth in these locations. Organizing additional congregations may occur if there are a sizable number of members within a specific area that can meet administrative responsibilities and staff leadership. The organization of groups that operate under the supervision of a ward provides a practical solution to reducing travel times for any members and investigators in the target area and lays the groundwork for a branch to operate if these efforts are successful. Holosiiv (233,157)[6] is the only unreached city district in Kyiv and appears one of the most favorable areas to hold cottage meetings and organize a group due to distance from the nearest meetinghouse over 10 kilometers away. The creation of several groups or small branches in lesser-reached areas where there are good prospects for growth will be critical towards ensuring long-term congregational growth in Kyiv and the organization of additional stakes one day.

There have been few if any overt efforts to proselyte ethnic minorities and foreigners. The Kyiv (English) Branch offers some current opportunities to reach peoples who do not speak Ukrainian or Russian as a native language. Many foreigners and ethnic minorities appear to exhibit higher receptivity to LDS missionary efforts. Organizing language-specific groups or Sunday school classes may provide an effective method to capitalize on opportunities to reach ethnic minority groups. The transient and temporary residency of many nonnative individuals and their relatively small numbers may create challenges to establish self-sufficient branches for specific ethnic groups such as Chinese, Indians, and Armenians.

Challenges

Local populations have exhibited increasingly lower receptivity to LDS missionaries and church teachings since the early 1990s. The number of convert baptisms has significantly declined within the past 15 years. In the 1990s, there were many months where the Ukraine Kyiv Mission baptized between 50 and 100 converts a month whereas by the late 2000s the mission baptized between 75 and 110 converts a year. In the early 2010s, returned missionaries report that the Ukraine Kyiv Mission baptized between 100 and 200 new converts a year indicating a slight increase in the number of converts baptized. Challenges tailoring traditional LDS proselytism tactics and teaching methods to nominally Orthodox Ukrainians and Russians have also reduced receptivity. Other outreach-oriented Christian groups developed self-sufficient local leadership and took advantage of favorable growth conditions back in the 1990s, resulting in many previously receptive individuals becoming shepherded into other denominations.

Branch consolidations in the early 2000s has reduced the Church's outreach capabilities. There are fewer LDS congregations in Kyiv at present than a decade ago. The primary reason for the Church consolidating branches centered on creating ward-sized branches in order for the district to reach the minimal standards for a stake to operate. Due to the decreasing number of branches in the city, the Church closed two of its three original districts in order to have the minimum number of congregations and active members needed to have a stake. Less favorable cultural and societal conditions for missionary work

challenge efforts to reestablish closed congregations now that a stake is established and wards are self-sufficient.

The Church in Ukraine remains highly dependent on foreign missionaries to staff its three missions. The total number of Ukrainian members serving missions at any given time appears insufficient to entirely staff even one of the three missions headquartered in the country. Due to the available leadership and ward and branch missionary manpower in Kyiv, the Church may experience growth through member-missionary and church planting efforts headed by local leaders. Mission and stake leaders continue to rely on full-time missionaries for finding, teaching, and preparing investigators for baptism.

Comparative Growth

The LDS Church in Kyiv, Ukraine extends more penetrating outreach than in any other Eastern European city and is one of only four cities in Eastern Europe that have a stake. Other cities with a stake currently include Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Budapest. In Russia, the average congregation within the Moscow city limits includes 1.48 million people within its geographical boundaries whereas the average LDS congregation within the St Petersburg city limits services 708,000 people. In Hungary, the average congregation based within the Budapest city limits include 578,000 inhabitants within its geographical boundaries.

Other nontraditional Christian groups report a more widespread presence in Kyiv than the LDS Church. Jehovah's Witnesses report 70 congregations within the Kyiv city limits and also operate language-specific groups in Chinese (2), Armenian (1), English (1), French (1), Hindi (1), sign language (1), Spanish (1), and Vietnamese (1).^[7] Seventh Day Adventists report 5,772 members and 25 churches within the city limits of Kyiv.^[8] Over the past decade, the number of Adventist congregations has increased from 24 to 25, membership has increased by approximately 1,000, and there have been generally 100 to 400 convert baptisms a year.^[9] Other nontraditional Christian groups report slow growth but generally a larger presence in Kyiv than the LDS Church.

Future Prospects

The outlook for future LDS growth in Kyiv is mixed. The Church will remain a center of strength in the region due to the operation of a strong stake and Eastern Europe's only temple. Kyiv could potentially house a missionary training center (MTC) for Eastern Europe but extremely few members currently serving missions and challenges augmenting the foreign missionary force in the region make any prospects for an MTC remote for the foreseeable future. Slow membership and congregational growth will likely occur during the next decade due to small, but steady, numbers of convert baptisms and natural growth. Branches within the stake may mature into wards once they reach the minimum qualifications for a ward to operate (approximately 15 active Melchizedek Priesthood holders, 190 members on church records). The Church may organize a second stake in Kyiv once there are over 3,800 members, 250 or more active full-tithe paying Melchizedek Priesthood holders, and at least 10 wards.

^[1] "Ukraine: Kyiv," www.citypopulation.de, retrieved 2 November 2012. <http://www.citypopulation.de/Ukraine-Kiev.html>

^[2] "The Principal Agglomerations of the World," www.citypopulation.de, retrieved 2 November 2012. <http://www.citypopulation.de/world/Agglomerations.html>

^[3] "Ukraine," Deseret Morning News 2007 Church Almanac, p. 472

^[4] Stahle, Shaun D. "Ukrainian faith," LDS Church News, 2 November 2002. <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/42733/Ukrainian-faith.html>

^[5] "Kyiv Ukraine Temple -Schedule," [lds.org](http://www.lds.org), retrieved 27 October 2012. <http://www.lds.org/church/temples/kyiv-ukraine?lang=eng#tab=schedule>

^[6] "UKRAINE: Kyiv," www.citypopulation.de, retrieved 27 October 2012. <http://www.citypopulation.de/Ukraine-Kiev.html>

^[7] <http://www.jw.org/apps/index.html?option=FRNsPnPBrTZGT>

^[8] "Kiev Conference," www.adventistyearbook.org, retrieved 2 November 2012. <http://www.adventistyearbook.org/default.aspx?page=ViewAdmField&Year=9999&AdmFieldID=KIEV>

^[9] "Kiev Conference (2008-Present)," www.adventiststatistics.org, retrieved 2 November 2012. http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldID=C_KIEV