LDS Growth Case Studies

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Analysis of LDS Growth in Metro Manila, Philippines

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Overview

With 21.7 million inhabitants, Manila is the world's ninth most populous urban agglomeration as of October 2012.[1] The entire Manila agglomeration includes Metropolitan Manila (abbreviated Metro Manila and also called the National Capital Region [NCR]) and municipalities and cities in adjacent provinces such as Antipolo, Cavite City, and San Jose del Monte. In 2010, there were 11.86 million inhabitants within Metro Manila divided into 17 administrative divisions (16 cities and one municipality).[2] The population density is 18,641 per square kilometer;[3] similar to the Greater Boston metropolitan area.

The LDS Church has maintained a presence in Manila for over 50 years and initiated formal missionary activity in 1961. Today there are 88 congregations, 14 stakes, and one district that are headquartered in Metro Manila or have at least one congregation within the city limits of Metro Manila.

This case study examines congregational and stake growth trends within Metro Manila, highlights LDS growth successes, and analyzes opportunities and challenges for future growth. A comparative growth section compares the growth of the LDS Church in Metro Manila with other major cities in the Philippines and contrasts the size and growth of the LDS Church with other proselytizing Christian groups. Future prospects for LDS growth are summarized and conclude this case study.

LDS Background

In 1973, the Church created its first stake in Metro Manila, the Manila Philippines Stake. Additional stakes were organized in Makati (1977), Quezon City (1977), Marikina (1980), Caloocan (1981), Parañaque (1981), Las Piñas (1985), Pasig (1985), Novaliches (1997), Quezon City South (1997), Pasay (1998), Valenzuela (1998), Fairview (2000), and Makati East (2011). The number of stakes totaled four in 1980, eight in 1990, 13 in 2000, and 14 in late 2012. In 1998, the Pasig Philippines Stake was divided to create a new stake headquartered outside of Metro Manila called the Taytay Philippines Stake.[4] In 2001, there were 90 congregations (80 wards, 10 branches) based within Metro Manila that on average serviced approximately 110,000 people per ward or branch.

In late 2012, there were eight wards in the Caloocan Philippines Stake, six wards in the Fairview Philippines Stake, six wards and one branch in the Las Piñas Philippines Stake, five wards and one branch in the Makati Philippines Stake, eight wards in the Makati Philippines East Stake, eight wards in the Manila Philippines Stake, seven wards and one branch in the Marikina Philippines Stake, eight wards and one branch in the Novaliches Philippines Stake, seven wards in the Parañaque Philippines Stake, six wards in the Pasay Philippines Stake, nine wards in the Pasig Philippines Stake, six wards in the Quezon City Philippines Stake, six wards in the Quezon City Philippines South Stake, six branches in the San Jose del Monte Philippines District, and seven wards in the Valenzuela Philippines Stake. In late 2012, there were 88 congregations (85 wards, three branches) based within Metro Manila that on average serviced approximately 135,000 people per ward or branch. Maps of LDS congregations in 2012 can be found here.

The Church has experienced other indicators of growth in Metro Manila aside from stake and congregational growth. Announced in 1981, the Manila Philippines Temple was dedicated in 1984 and serviced the entire country until the dedication of the Cebu City Philippines Temple in 2010. In 1983, the Church opened the Philippines Missionary Training Center (MTC). In 1998, the Church organized a separate area for the Philippines headquartered in Manila.[5] In 2012, there were three missions

based within Metro Manila: The Philippines Manila (1967), the Philippines Quezon City (1986), and the Philippines Quezon City North (2011) Missions.

Successes

The relatively high degree of LDS outreach in Metro Manila constitutes one of the greatest achievements of the Church in the Philippines. The Church in Metro Manila extends a higher degree of outreach than in most cities in Asia supporting populations of more than one million people. Over the past decade, the Church has continuously operated at least one congregation in every city and municipality of Metro Manila. In late 2012, there were two or more wards headquartered in each administrative division with the exception of San Juan City. The average congregation in four administrative cities (Pateros, Makati, Marikina, and Pasay) services fewer than 100,000 people, providing greater opportunities in these locations for the general population to come into contact with members and missionaries. Congregations are evenly distributed throughout Metro Manila as demonstrated by the least-reached cities reporting only twice as many inhabitants within the geographical boundaries in the average congregation as the city average. Other major cities in the Philippines experience greater variability in LDS outreach between administrative divisions. A map displaying the degree of LDS outreach by administrative city or municipality can be found here.

Metro Manila continues to serve as the headquarters of LDS missionary and administrative operations in the Philippines due to its large population, national capital status, and the size and strength of the Church. The organization of three stakes by 1977 provided a sufficient body of active membership to merit the construction of a temple less than a decade later. The decision by church leaders to establish a separate MTC for the Philippines has helped decentralize LDS missionary resources from North America and provides a sense of LDS community within the Philippines. No other city in the Philippines has as many stakes and congregations as Metro Manila. The Church in Metro Manila has exhibited greater stability in local leadership than any other city in East Asia among cities with multiple LDS stakes and over five million inhabitants. There has never been a stake discontinued in Metro Manila whereas the Church has discontinued 10 stakes elsewhere in the Philippines and at least one stake in the largest city of several countries in the region including China - Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea. Metro Manila was also the only city with more than 100,000 inhabitants in the Philippines that had a new stake organized in the past decade (Makati Philippines East).

The number of wards in Metro Manila increased by five within the past decade although the total number of LDS congregations declined during this period. The increase in the number of wards was primarily attributed to branches becoming wards as the number of new wards organized from ward divisions nearly equaled the number of wards closed during this period. It is unclear whether branches became wards as a result of natural growth, convert baptisms, reactivation efforts, or a combination of these factors. Between 2001 and late 2012, four branches matured into wards in the Parañaque Philippines Stake (Las Piñas 1st and Pamplona), Caloocan Philippines Stake (Navotas), and the Marikina Philippines Stake (Marikina 6th). This development stands as a relatively small accomplishment for the Church considering the percentage increase in the number of wards was only one-quarter of the percentage increase in the population of Metro Manila within the past decade. This suggests that population growth significantly outpaced LDS growth during this period.

In the early 2010s, congregational growth experienced a slight acceleration. Several new wards were organized and no additional wards were closed. The consistent organization of new units will be required for the Church to make noticeable progress expanding outreach and organizing additional stakes.

Opportunities

Local populations exhibiting good receptivity to the Church and large populations concentrated in small geographical areas provide favorable opportunities for church growth. There remain enormous populations that are minimally serviced as evidenced by the average ward or branch in Metro Manila servicing 135,000 people. The Church has extended more penetrating outreach in less populous large and medium-sized cities in northern Luzon. For example, wards and branches in some cities with less than 50,000 inhabitants in northern Luzon such as Camiling, Laoag, and Santiago have one congregation per 10,000 or fewer inhabitants. Most cities in northern Luzon with over 100,000 inhabitants have their own stake whereas Metro Manila has, on average, one stake per 847,000 people. If the Church were to have one stake per 100,000 people in Metro Manila, there would be 118 stakes. The Church has not come close to replicating the degree of growth and outreach expansion experienced in smaller cities in northern Luzon likely due to lower receptivity. However, this comparison sheds insight into possibilities for future growth in Metro Manila. The organization of branches in lesser-reached communities offers one of the most practical solutions to reenergizing anemic church growth over the past decade as branches may be more readily organized than wards, they require fewer active members to operate, the Church has recently experienced success advancing branches to ward status, and it is a long-established finding that newer units tend to be more successful in missionary efforts.[6] New congregations also provide good opportunities to facilitate reactivation efforts and local leadership development.

Proselytism and church planting opportunities exist for ethnolinguistic minority groups. The Church appears to only engage in organized missionary activity among Tagalog and English speakers. There are no reported wards or branches that hold services in commonly spoken minority languages such as Cebuano, Ilocano, Chinese languages, and Korean. With a widespread presence in most areas of the Philippines, the Church likely has a sizable number of active and less-active members in Metro Manila who speak other Philippine languages that can provide a basis to organize Sunday School classes, cottage meetings, and dependent groups and branches in an effort to maximize outreach potential, foster socialization

opportunities, and establish LDS community. Language comprehension challenges do not appear to pose a significant challenge for assimilating nonnative speakers of Tagalog into current Tagalog-speaking wards and branches in Metro Manlia due to its widespread use in government, media, and business throughout the country. Small numbers of traditionally Muslim Philippine peoples in the Metro Manila area offer unique opportunities to proselyte this group as the Church has no presence in most Muslim-majority areas of the southern Philippines. However, returned missionaries in several missions report that mission presidencies discourage the teaching and baptism of Muslims largely due to violence and political instability in the southern Philippines.

Challenges

Low member activity and convert retention rates constitute the primary barrier to greater church growth in the Philippines. Nationwide the member activity rate is estimated at approximately 20%, indicating that four-fifths of Filipino Latter-day Saints do not attend church services weekly and engage in few, if any, personal religious habits and behaviors like scripture reading and keeping the Word of Wisdom. The relevance of this grim nationwide statistic to church growth trends in Metro Manila is apparent in missionaries reportedly baptizing thousands of new converts between 2001 and 2012 but that the increase in active membership was insufficient to operate more congregations in 2012 than in 2001. The number of congregations declined from 91 to 89 during this period, suggesting little increase in active membership if there was any increase at all. The rate of population growth in Metro Manila has surpassed the growth of the LDS Church within the past decade as the city population increased by approximately 22% whereas the number of LDS congregations decreased by two percent.

Stagnant congregational growth or congregational decline occurred in 10 of the 13 original stakes headquartered in Metro Manila between 2001 and late 2012. Based on the stake boundaries of 2001, the number of congregations increased by three in the Makati Philippines Stake (Bonifacio 5th, Bonifacio 6th, and Bonifacio 7th Wards) and by one in the Pasay Philippines (Pasay 4th Ward) and Pasig Philippines (Pasig 4th Ward) Stakes. There was no change in the number of congregations in the Fairview Philippines, Las Piñas Philippines, Novaliches Philippines, Parañaque Philippines, and Pasig Philippines Stakes and the San Jose del Monte Philippines District. The number of congregations declined by one in the Manila Philippines (Greenhills Ward), Quezon City Philippines (U P Diliman Ward), and Quezon City Philippines South (Roosevelt Ward) Stakes and by two in the Caloocan Philippines (Dampalit and Tinajeros Branches) and Valenzuela Philippines (Iba Ward and Valenzuela 2nd Branch) Stakes. Congregational growth trends over the past decade indicate a "centers of strength" policy for organizing new congregations as there has been only one new branch created within the past decade in Metro Manila (Makati 4th [English]). In 2001, there were 10 branches based within Metro Manila whereas in late 2012 there were only three. The creation of new branches will be an important method to spur the expansion of proselytism efforts and accelerate growth, but there is no indication that church leaders in the city have considered this approach in recent years.

Low standards of living and corruption create a barrier for church growth. Every city and municipality within Metro Manila has slums where there are poor sanitary conditions, higher rates of crime, and conflict between slum-dwellers and city government. Many who live in destitute conditions have diminished interest in the Church as they are unable to meet their basic physical needs. The Church also struggles to develop sufficient local leadership and real growth in these conditions. Corruption remains a serious problem nationwide and has hurt economic growth. Many cannot find a job due to corruption in business and government and government inefficiency in managing the economy. Thousands of Filipino Latter-day Saints have relocated to the Middle East, South Korea, and other nations as migrant workers for better employment opportunities and send remittances back to the Philippines to help support their families.

Comparative Growth

The LDS Church in Metro Manila operates more stakes than any other metropolitan area in the Philippines but the Church extends more penetrating outreach in most other major cities. In the Cebu City metropolitan area, the Church operates five stakes and the average ward or branch services 68,000 people; approximately half as many as the average congregation in Metro Manila. In Davao, the Church operates two stakes and the average ward or branch services 89,000 people. In Zamboanga, the Church operates one stake and the average ward services 129,000 people. In Cagayan de Oro, the Church operates three stakes and the average ward or branch services 60,000 people.

Several other proselytizing Christian groups report a larger presence, more congregations, and greater growth in active membership in Metro Manila than the LDS Church. Seventh Day Adventists have experienced slow congregational growth over the past decade and generally organize less than 10 new churches a year in Metro Manila and surrounding provinces. Adventists generally report approximately 5,000 convert baptisms a year in central Luzon.[7] Jehovah's Witnesses operate more than 200 congregations within Metro Manila, including over 60 in Quezon City alone. Non-Tagalog-speaking congregations and groups operate principally within the most populous cities of Metro Manila such as downtown Manila, Quezon City, Caloocan, Makati, and Parañaque. Language-specific congregations and groups operate in several languages, including Filipino Sign Language (three congregations, one group), Iloko [Ilokano] (three congregations, one group), English (three congregations), Cebuano (one congregation, four groups), Mandarin Chinese (one congregation, one group), Japanese (one congregation, one group), Korean (one congregation, one group), Min Nan Chinese (one congregation), Hiligaynon (one congregation), and Punjabi (one group).[8] Founded in the Philippines, Iglesia ni Cristo has a widespread presence in Metro Manila and comprises the third largest religious group in the Philippines after Catholicism and Islam.

Future Prospects

The outlook for future church growth in Metro Manila appears good as within the past couple years the Church reversed its trend of stagnant congregational growth by organizing several new wards and avoiding any additional ward and branch consolidations. Receptivity remains good and the Church can expect steady growth in active membership if reasonably high convert baptismal standards are enforced. The organization of additional wards will be required in order for additional stakes to be organized in Metro Manila as none of the 14 stakes in the city have the minimum number of wards needed to divide.

[1] "THE PRINCIPAL AGGLOMERATIONS OF THE WORLD," www.citypopulation.de, retrieved 7 November 2012. http://www.citypopulation.de/world/Agglomerations.html

[2] "PHILIPPINES: Administrative Division," www.citypopulation.de, retrieved 7 November 2012. http://www.citypopulation.de/php/philippines-admin.php

[3] "PHILIPPINES: Major Cities," www.citypopulation.de, retrieved 10 November 2012. http://www.citypopulation.de/Philippines-UA50.html

[4] "New stake presidencies," LDS Church News, 21 March 1998. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/31514/New-stake-presidencies.html

[5] "5 new areas announced worldwide," LDS Church News, 4 July 1998. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/31389/5-new-areas-announced-worldwide.html

[6] Stewart, David. "Church Planting," The Law of the Harvest, retrieved 10 November 2012. http://www.cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=32

[7] "Central Luzon Conference (1966-Present)," www.adventiststatistics.org, retrieved 10 November 2012. http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldID=C10069

[8] "Congregation Meeting Search," http://www.jw.org/apps/index.html?option=FRNsPnPBrTZGT