LDS Growth Case Studies

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Top Ten Most Encouraging and Top Ten Most Discouraging Growth and Missionary Developments for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 2020

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OVERVIEW

This article reviews some of the most significant growth developments for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints during 2020. Most of these developments were previously reported in monthly newsletters on www.cumorah.com. Previous annual reviews of the top ten most encouraging and top 10 most discouraging growth and missionary developments for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have been posted on www.cumorah.com since 2014 and can be accessed here. The Church has not released any membership figures for the year 2020. Membership data for 2019 became available to the public in April 2020. Thus, all the most recent membership data contained in this article is current as of year-end 2019.

TOP TEN ENCOURAGING CHURCH GROWTH AND MISSIONARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. Fourteen New Temples Announced

The Church announced 14 new temples during 2020. In April, the Church announced the following eight new temples:

- Bahia Blanca, Argentina (fifth temple in Argentina)
- Tallahassee, Florida (third temple in Florida)
- Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of the Congo (second temple in the DR Congo)
- Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (second temple in Pennsylvania)
- Benin City, Nigeria (third temple in Nigeria)
- Syracuse, Utah (24th temple in Utah)
- Dubai, United Arab Emirates (first temple in the United Arab Emirates, first temple in the Middle East in modern times)
- Shanghai, China (first temple in the People's Republic of China outside of special administrative regions)

In October, the Church announced the following six new temples:

- Tarawa, Kiribati (first temple in Kiribati)
- Port Vila, Vanuatu (first temple in Vanuatu)
- Lindon, Utah (25th temple in Utah)
- Greater Guatemala City, Guatemala (fourth temple in Guatemala)
- São Paulo East, São Paulo, Brazil (second temple in the São Paulo metropolitan area, third temple in São Paulo State, 12th temple in Brazil)
- Santa Cruz, Bolivia (second temple in Bolivia)

New temples announced in 2020 fell into one of three categories: locations with a large center of the Church that warrants additional temples to accommodate patrons (i.e., Utah), locations distant from the nearest temple with a small number of Latter-day Saints (i.e., Oceania), and locations where the Church has steadily grown to the point that it can support a medium-sized temple (i.e., Benin City, Nigeria and Santa Cruz, Bolivia). Four of 14 new temples announced were in countries where no temples operate or were in the planning states prior to the temple announcement. Of the 14 new temples announced in 2019, only four (28.6%) were in the continental United States where 42% of worldwide dedicated or planned temples are located. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of the world's population resides in a sovereign country where a temple is planned or in operation. Lastly, the year 2020 was especially significant as there were 21 groundbreaking ceremonies held to begin temple construction. However, this did not break the record for the most temple groundbreakings in one year which was set back in 1999 when there were 32 groundbreakings.

2. Major Progress with Translation of Scriptures and Church Materials

The year 2020 will also stand as a significant year for the worldwide Church due to the major advances made with revamping or expanding its translation efforts for magazines and scriptures. The Church announced that its original four monthly magazines would be retired, and that three magazines—for adults (the Liahona), adolescents (For the Strength of Youth), and children (the Friend)—would be published and translated into 87 languages. In contrast, the Church previously published all or portions of Church magazines into 48 languages—many of which did not have monthly editions.[1] As of January 2021, the following languages have print and digital versions of magazines available: Cebuano, Chinese, Simplified Chinese, Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian, Portuguese, Russian, Samoan, Spanish, Swedish, Tagalog, Thai, Tongan, and Ukrainian. The following languages have print magazines available six times per year and digital magazines available each month: Albanian, Armenian, Bislama, Bulgarian, Cambodian, Croatian, Czech, Estonian, Fijian, Greek, Icelandic, Indonesian, Kiribati, Latvian, Lithuanian, Malagasy, Marshallese, Mongolian, Polish, Romanian, Slovenian, Swahili, Tahitian, and Vietnamese. The following languages have "select magazine content" available in digital format each month: Afrikaans, Amharic, Arabic, Burmese, Chuukese, Efik, Fante, Georgian, Haitian, Hiligaynon, Hindi, Hindi (Fiji), Hmong, Igbo, Ilokano, Kinyarwanda, Kosraean, Laotian, Lingala, Malay, Maltese, Nepali, Palauan, Pohnpeian, South Sotho, Serbian, Shona, Sinhala, Slovak, Tamil, Telugu, Tshiluba, Tswana, Turkish, Twi, Urdu, Xhosa, Yapese, Yoruba, and Zulu.[2]

Furthermore, the Church has recently published electronic versions of Latter-day Saint scriptures in additional languages on its official website. Many new translations have been added at https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/languages and are updated regularly as translation projects progress. See below for scripture translations which have been posted for the first time since 2018, although several have just been published in 2020 (Macedonian and South Sotho are the most recent to be published):

- Book of Mormon in Burmese (Full Book)
- Book of Mormon in Kinyarwanda (Title Page to Alma 42)
- Book of Mormon in Macedonian (Title Page to Alma 63)
- Book of Mormon in Pohnpeian (Title Page to Mosiah 29)
- Book of Mormon in South Sotho (Title Page to 1 Nephi 22)
- Doctrine and Covenants in Georgian (Full Book)
- Doctrine and Covenants in Persian (Full Book)
- Doctrine and Covenants in Tok Pisin (Title Page to Section 62)
- Doctrine and Covenants in Turkish (Title Page to Section 104)
- Doctrine and Covenants in Yoruba (Title Page to Section 42)
- Triple Combination in Amharic
- Triple Combination in Bislama
- Triple Combination in Hiligaynon
- Triple Combination in Lao
- Triple Combination in Serbian
- Triple Combination in Slovak
- Triple Combination in Slovenian
- Triple Combination in Twi

3. Member Group Locations Published on Church's Official Meetinghouse Locator

The Church has recently begun to publish meetinghouse locations in cities and towns where no official ward or branch operates. Reports from local members around the world confirm that most of these meetinghouses without an assigned ward or branch are utilized by a member group. As a result of this development, the location of scores of member groups previously unknown by The Cumorah Foundation have now been identified and included on our online International Atlas at https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=lds_home. The Church's meetinghouse locator website can be accessed at https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/maps/meetinghouses. This is a significant development as it provides information for members and interested individuals and families to locate the Church in additional cities, towns, and villages. Prior to this development, there was no public information on the location of member groups, resulting in many believing that the Church did not have a presence in some locations where it operated member groups. Notwithstanding this positive development, most member groups in the Church do not appear to be reported on the Church's meetinghouse locator site, particularly in developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and in Latin America—locations where the potential for growth is greatest. The most comprehensive data for member groups on the Church's meetinghouse website appears to be for North America and Europe.

4. First Young Single Adult (YSA) Ward Organized in Latin America

The Church organized a YSA ward in Mexico City. The new ward is the Politécnico YSA Ward in the México City Arbolillo Stake. Although the Church previously operated student wards and one student stake (Mexico City Zarahemla Stake) in Mexico City when it operated its school, El Centro Escolar Benemérito de las Américas, before it closed and became repurposed as a new missionary training center, these congregations were for students in high school and not young single adults. There is tremendous potential for the Church to organize YSA units in major cities in Latin America to encourage Latter-day Saints to marry within the Church and to attract young single adult converts. The new YSA Ward appears to be the first YSA congregation in Latin America. Local members report that the success of the Politécnico YSA Ward will likely have a major impact on the Church's decision to organize YSA wards in additional major cities in Latin America. The Church has rarely organized YSA congregations outside of the United States in Canada primarily due to the relatively small body of priesthood leadership in many countries of the world stretched to staff congregational leadership and the overrepresentation of YSA members in the demographics of many international congregations.

5. Sustained Increases in the Number of Congregations in the United States

The Church in the United States reported a net increase of approximately 113 congregations during 2020 despite few congregations being created for most of the year due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupting normal Church operations. There were approximately 14,572 congregations in the United States as of year-end 2020. This increase in congregations constitutes a 0.78% annual increase – a small percentage increase but the second highest reported by the Church in the United States since 2015. Net increases in congregations strongly correlates with increases in the number of active members in the country for a specific area. However, other factors also drive congregational growth rates such as the expansion of the Church into previously unreached areas, the formation of more specialized congregations (i.e., language-specific or demographic-specific units), or changes in policy regarding the desired number of members per congregation on average. See below for the annual net change in the number of congregations for the United States within the past decade:

- 2020 +113
- 2019 +181
- 2018 +49
- 2017 +0
- 2016 +65
- 2015 +142
- 2014 +152
- 2013 +124
- 2012 +114
- 2011 +27

- 2010 +126

6. Rapid Growth in the two Congos: the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) and the Republic of the Congo

The year 2020 was significant for growth for the Church in the DR Congo and the Republic of the Congo. There was a net increase of 20 congregations for the year—a 9.5% increase—in the DR Congo during 2020. Although not close to the year with the highest annual percentage growth rate for congregations (highest in the past 20 years was 24.3% in 2001), 2020 was the year with the largest net increase in congregations in the DR Congo. The Church in the DR Congo has one of the highest member activity and convert retention rates in the world as an estimated 80% of Church-reported membership regularly attend services. The number of wards has grown significantly in several cities, and the creation of additional stakes appears imminent. For example, at the end of the year the Likasi DR Congo Stake (organized in 2016) had 13 wards and 3 branches, Mbuji-Mayi DR Congo Stake (organized in 2016) had 13 wards, the Katuba DR Congo Stake had 11 wards (organized in 2009 and last divided in 2017), the Luputa DR Congo Stake had 10 wards and 1 branch (organized in 2011), the Kinshasa DR Congo Kimbanseke Stake had 10 wards (organized in 2009 and last divided in 2018), and the Lubumbashi DR Congo Stake had 10 wards (organized in 1997 and last divided in 2017). The Church typically divides stakes when they reach 10 wards or more, but often it waits until there are between 11-13 wards to divide a single stake to create one more stake. Also, the Church in the DR Congo organized its first branch in the large city of Bandundu—the first official congregation of the Church in Bandundu Province where there is a population of likely 10 million or higher. Finally, the Church organized a new district in the southern city of Kasumbalesa on the Zambian border in early 2020.

The Church in the Republic of the Congo doubled the number of stakes in the country from two to four during 2020. The Pointe-Noire Republic of the Congo Stake was organized from the Church's former district in the city (originally organized in 2015), making Pointe-Noire the second city in the country with a stake. Moreover, the Church divided its two stakes in Brazzaville to create a third stake (Diata) by the end of the year. The Republic of the Congo Brazzaville Mission divided in 2020 to create the Cameroon Yaoundé Mission. As a result, the realigned mission now only administers the Republic of the Congo and no other neighboring countries. This change will allow for greater resources and mission president oversight into current Church centers and permit greater expansion into additional cities and towns.

7. Outreach Expansion in Some African Nations

Although less impressive that most recent years, the Church in Sub-Saharan African continued to expand its outreach in several nations during 2020 notwithstanding significant disruptions to missionary work and mission administration due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There were several significant developments in countries where the Church has an extremely limited presence. In Namibia, the Church organized a new branch in Ongwediva, making Ongwediva the third city in the country to have a branch organized and the first city in northern Namibia to have a Church presence. In Malawi, the Church created its first branch in the city of Kasungu where hundreds had joined the Church in the previous 6-12 months. With the organization of the new branch, there are now three cities with branches in Malawi. In Angola, the Church divided its original branches in Huambo and Lubango to create a second branch in each city—the first time the Church has divided a branch outside of the capital, Luanda. There are only three cities in Angola with an official ward or branch. In Senegal, the Church conducted its first baptism of new converts from the city of St Louis. Mission leadership also reported that the members in St Louis will be organized as an official member group in early January 2021.

There were also some notable outreach expansion developments in other nations with a more established Church presence. In Nigeria, the Church created its first branch in Kogi State in the city of Idah. Kogi State numbered among the few remaining predominantly Christian Nigerian states without an official Church presence prior to the creation of the Idah Branch. In Botswana, the Church organized its first branch in the city of Serowe—one of the most populous cities in Botswana In Liberia, the Ganta Branch was organized. The Ganta Branch is one of the most distant branches in Liberia from the mission offices in Monrovia, it is first branch in Nimba County, and it is the first branch in Liberia along the Guinean border. In Zimbabwe, the Church organized its first branch in the medium-sized city of Rusape.

8. Outreach Expansion in Brazil Despite COVID-19 Pandemic

The Church in Brazil reported notable efforts to establish the Church in previously unreached or lesser-reached cities and areas of the country. These efforts are partially responsible for the net increase of 25 congregations in Brazil in 2020 (1.2% increase from 2019). This relatively small increase in the number of congregations in Brazil in 2020 appears primarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the new congregations created in 2020 were organized in January or February, or during the last few months of the year. Notable branches organized in cities where no branch previously operated include Icó, Ceará; Pindaré Mirim, Maranhão; Maravilha, Santa Catarina; and Mairinque, Sao Paulo. Member groups also opened in a number of previously unreached cities such as Quixelô, Ceará; Itapecuru Mirim, Maranhão; Vargem das Flores, Minas Gerais; Antonina, Parana; Carambeí, Parana; Santa Cruz do Capibaribe, Pernambuco; São Caetano, Pernambuco; Mangaratiba, Rio de Janeiro; Jaru, Rondônia; Pariquera-Açu, Sao Paulo; and Pouso Alegre, Tocantins. Notwithstanding this progress, there remain approximately 400 cities in Brazil inhabited by 20,000 or more people where the Church operates no congregations.

9. New Districts Organized in Albania and Finland

The Church organized two new districts in Europe during 2020. The Church in Europe rarely organizes new districts given that most countries are administered by stakes, or there are efforts to consolidate the few remaining district into neighboring stakes due to low growth rates. In Finland, the Church reinstated the Kuopio Finland District in a special conference on January 12th, 2020. The district was originally organized sometime prior to 1980, and it was discontinued in 2006. The district was reinstated due to increase in church attendance in recent years. There were 260 who attended the meeting to organize the district—approximately 100 more people than the combined attendance of the four branches five years ago which now comprise the district. Active members moving to Kuopio and recent convert baptisms have appeared primarily responsible for the increase in active membership. This development is significant as it demonstrates that measurable progress and growth can occur for the Church even in northern European countries with a long-term Church presence with high levels of secularism and economic development.

In Albania, the Church organized a new district with six branches that previously pertained to the Tirana Albania Stake or mission branches recently organized in southeastern Albania. The Elbasan Albania District is the Church's first district in Albania ever organized outside of the capital city, Tirana. Unlike other the Church in other Eastern European countries, the Church in Albania has continued to report steady increases in membership and congregations. In 2019, Church membership increased by 4.21%. The Church in Albania also organized a couple new member groups during early 2020 on the outskirts of Tirana in Kamez and Kombinat.

10. Increases in the Number of Convert Baptisms in Some Missions Since COVID-19 Pandemic Began, the Convert Baptisms in 2019 Higher than 2018, Fast Offering Donations Increase since COVID-19 Pandemic Began

Reports have circulated that some missions in 2020 have either matched the same number of convert baptisms as achieved in 2019 or have surpassed the number of convert baptisms reported in 2019. These reports have primarily originated from missions in Europe and other historically low baptizing areas of the world. Another scenario reported has been that the monthly number of convert baptisms for some months increased in 2020 versus the same month for 2019. For example, the two missions in Quito, Ecuador reported more convert baptisms in August 2020 than in August 2019.[3] However, reports from missions in locations like Sub-Saharan Africa point to a dramatic decrease in convert baptisms in 2020 compared to 2021. Convert baptism and country-by-country membership figures for 2020 will not be released until the upcoming April 2021 General Conference. These data will be important to examine to assess whether membership growth trends significantly changed in 2020 compared to other years.

The Church also reported its 2019 Statistical Report in April 2020. The report indicated that the number of convert baptisms in 2019, 248,835, was 6.2% higher than the number of convert baptisms reported in 2018. Nevertheless, the Church continued to report slow membership growth rates (1.54% in 2019), albeit 2019 was the first year since 2012 in which membership growth rates accelerated instead of decelerated. Finally, Church President Russell M. Nelson reported that fast offerings have increased during the current COVID-19 pandemic. He stated, "Remarkably, through all of this, the voluntary fast offerings of our members have increased."[4] This is one of the rare instances the Church has commented on monetary donations from its members.

TOP TEN DISCOURAGING CHURCH GROWTH AND MISSIONARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. Annual Increase in Children of Record Lowest since 2007

The annual increase in children of record for 2019 was a mere 94,266—the lowest annual increase in unbaptized children under age 8 added to Church records since 2007 when it was 91,800. This low number of unbaptized children added to Church records reflects declining birth rates among Latter-day Saints in the United States, as well as the Church's difficulties to attract full families into the Church and families in which both parents are active members of the Church. The Church reported its record high for the annual increase in children of record in 1982 at 124,000. The annual increases in children of record has typically ranged from 100,000-120,000 within the past decade.

2. The COVID-19 Pandemic Significant Disrupts Missionary Work and Church Operations around the Globe, Mozambique Beira Mission Creation Postponed

The number of full-time missionaries serving worldwide significantly decreased in 2020 and probably did not recover to pre-pandemic levels by the end of the year. This marks the first time the number of full-time missionaries significantly decreased since the end of the double cohort "surge" in the number of members serving full-time missions that resulted from lowering the minimum age for missionary service in 2012. In early February 2020, the Church reported nearly 68,000 members serving full-time missions (nearly 1,000 more than at year-end 2019), whereas in late April 2020 there were only 42,000 members serving full-time missions as a result of "pandemic-adjustment releases."[5] Elder Uchtdorf reported that the number of members serving full-time missionaries rebounded to more than 52,000 by mid-August 2020 as missionaries returned into the field. Elder Uchtdorf also noted that nearly 32,000 full-time missionaries were relocated within a relatively short period of time in the spring of 2020, and that there are 400 full-time missionaries who have extended their service as they are unable to return home due to travel restrictions. Furthermore, 24 mission presidents and their wives have extended their assignments, and 21 local couples have been called to serve as interim mission leaders until the official mission presidents arrive. As of mid-2020, half of the Church's 407 missions have missionaries who mainly worked from their apartments through the use of technology to proselyte.[6] No updated figure on the number of members serving full-time proselytizing missions was reported as of the end of 2020. This information will be available in the 2020 Statistical Report that will be released in April 2021 at General Conference. Furthermore, the Church organized seven of its eight new missions it planned to open in 2020, namely the Brazil Recife South, Cameroon Yaoundé, Ecuador Guayaquil East, Ethiopia Addis Ababa, Tanzania Dar es Salaam, Texas Austin, and Texas Dallas East Missions. The Mozambique Beira Mission did not open in 2020 as originally anticipated, and the Church reported that the new mission will be organized in July 2021 instead. Since the start of the pandemic, many cities, and even entire countries, remain without full-time missionaries assigned. Nevertheless, missionaries continue to teach prospective members via the internet from other countries, and convert baptisms continue to occur regularly in many areas of the world, albeit the highest baptizing areas of the world have appeared to experience significant decreases in the number of new converts joining the Church due to disrupted missionary operations.

3. United States Membership Growth Rates Remain Very Low

The Church reported an annual membership growth rate of 0.59% for the United States in 2019—the lowest annual membership growth rate for the United States in perhaps the past 100 years. Annual membership growth rates for the Church in the United States have fallen from usually over two percent annually in the 1980 and 1990s to 1-2% in the 2000s, and 0.5-1.5% in the 2010s. Declining birth rates among Latter-day Saints appear primarily to blame for slowing membership growth rates in the United States as children born into the Church has been the primary mechanism that the Church achieves growth in the country. The number of convert baptisms has also appeared to noticeably decrease as well in the past 1-2 decades, albeit these numbers appear highly variable by year and mission location. The retention of youth and young adult Latter-day Saints has also made a major impact on growth trends, particularly in regards to many of these individuals never marrying or having children. The increasing influence of secularism on society has also appeared to impact the Church's growth in the United States more significantly than in previous decades.

4. Church Decline in California Continues

The Church discontinued two stakes in California during 2020. Part of a long-term trend of Church decline, the Church in

California has struggled for decades to achieve measurable growth due to high rates of member relocation to other states. The number of stakes in California has decreased from an all-time high of 162 in 1995 to 151 at present, with likely several more stake consolidations in the near future. In the past decade, the Church has usually discontinued one stake per year in California. The total number of congregations has also noticeably declined from a previous peak at 1,386 in 2005 and 2006 to 1,229 at year-end 2019. In 2020, the Church in California organized three new congregations (all Spanish-speaking branches), whereas it discontinued 13 wards and three branches in California during the same year. The number of convert baptisms in California has been too low to replace members who move to other states. High cost of living has been a major contributor for the exodus of active Latter-day Saint families and individuals moving away from California. Moreover, difficulties with the retention of youth and young adults as well as the long-term retention of new converts have also negatively affected growth rates for the Church in California.

5. Consolidations of Branches and Districts in Malaysia Continue

Once one of the fastest growing countries for the Church, Malaysia continues to experience slow membership growth rates and ongoing congregation and district consolidations. Membership growth rates have ranged from 2-3% a year since 2013, and the number of branches in Malaysia has decreased from 34 in 2015 to 29 at year-end 2020. Two branches closed in 2020, namely the Subang Jaya Branch and the Miri 3rd (Mandarin) Branch. Also, the Church combined the Ipoh Malaysia District with the Kuala Lumpur Malaysia District. Now, there is only one district for Western Malaysia. The decision to consolidate branches and another district appeared focused on plans to organize the Church's first stake in the country. Malaysia is the country with the most members without a stake. Low convert retention, member inactivity, and membership spread across several major cities have all appeared to hamper efforts to organize the first stake in the country.

6. Districts Discontinued in Poland and Portugal

The Church discontinued one of its two districts in Poland in 2020, the Katowice Poland District, and there is now one district that services the entire country. The district was originally organized in 2004 and included five branches in southern Poland. Although the Church in Poland technically has the adequate number of members to organize a stake (2,058 in 2019), membership is spread throughout the country, making the logistics of operating a stake difficult. Moreover, none of the branches appear to have enough active members to create wards with perhaps one or two exceptions. Consolidating branches to create larger congregations is also unfeasible given that there are no cities in Poland with more than one branch, and current branches are not within close geographical proximity to one another. The decision to combine all the branches in Poland into a single district likely points to many years of extremely slow membership growth, anticipated slow growth in the future, and efforts to consolidate the limited Polish leadership to better service the small body of active members.

The Church also discontinued a district in Portugal in 2020, namely the Santarem Portugal District. The district was originally organized in 1991 and included six branches north of Lisbon. Most of the branches in the district had few active members, resulting in no realistic prospects of the district becoming a stake in the foreseeable future. The decision to consolidate the district with neighboring stakes was likely motivated to conserve Church resources and also to permit stake leadership to take over the mentoring and support of branches instead of the Portugal Lisbon Mission. The Church in Portugal had a period of accelerated membership growth combined with the organization of many new branches in the early 2010s, but growth trends have since decreased significantly and have returned to growth levels experienced prior to 2010.

7. Ward Consolidations Continue in Taiwan

The Church in Taiwan continues to report steady decreases in the number or congregations in the country. Eight congregations closed during 2020—a 7.4% decrease from year-end 2019 when there were 108 congregations nationwide. Continued congregation closures signal that stake consolidations appear likely in the coming years. The Church in Taiwan pursued an aggressive plan to organize more congregations and stakes during much of the 2010s, and this plan achieved some good measurable results in many areas such as with the maturation of all remaining districts into stakes. However, many wards divided with few active members, and this resulted in many congregations unable to become self-sustaining thereafter. The Church in Taiwan has historically struggled with some of the lowest member activity rates in Asia.

8. Rare Incident of Branch Consolidations in Nigeria

The Church discontinued two branches in Nigeria in 2020. The Church rarely closes congregations in Nigeria due to high receptivity to the Latter-day Saint gospel message and generally good member-missionary participation. This marks the first time in perhaps as long as 10 years in which the Church discontinued an official congregation in Nigeria. The two branches that closed were the Adonte 2nd Branch (originally organized in 2017) and the Kwale 2nd Branches (organized in mid-2019) which pertained directly to the Nigeria Benin City Mission. Information on what may have impacted the decision to closes the branches is unavailable.

9. Branch Never Organized in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

Mission leadership reports from the Cote d'Ivoire Yamoussoukro Mission indicated plans to organize the first official branch in Burkina Faso in 2020. However, as of the end of 2020, the branch in Ouagadougou was never organized. The onset of the

COVID-19 pandemic may have significantly impacted plans to organize the branch due to travel concerns, and also the probability that the new branch may not receive enough mission support if the pandemic impacted mission leadership's ability to meet with members and help officiate the Church in Burkina Faso.

10. Stakes Creations Cancelled in Some Areas during 2020 due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Church cancelled plans to organize new stakes in some areas of the world in 2020. For example, the Church planned to organize the Nampula Mozambique District into a stake in April 2020, but the stake was never organized due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some original plans to organize new stakes were postponed to later in 2020, particularly within the United States. It is anticipated any outstanding plans to organize new stakes in 2020 will come to fruition in 2021, but delays to create the new stakes, combined with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on member activity and Church attendance rates, have the potential to prompt Church leaders to abandon plans to organize some new stakes altogether. However, there have not been any reports received to indicate that this has happened yet.

LIMITATIONS

The subjective nature of determining which missionary and church growth developments numbered among the most significant for 2020 constitutes the greatest limitation to this article. Some developments have likely been unknown to the author due to limited access to statistical data and a lack of reports from members, missionaries, and church leaders from some areas of the world. Data obtained regarding the organization of new congregations/stakes and the expansion of national outreach was retrieved from official Church sources such as churchofjesuschrist.org/maps. Local member, full-time missionary, and church leader reports also contributed to the findings in this article. Official country-by-country membership data for year-end 2020 will likely not become available until April 2021 shortly after General Conference. Some 2020 data regarding congregational growth and stake and district growth in this case study may be inaccurate due to lags in the Church updating congregational and organizational totals for the year 2020.

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[2] "Changes Are Coming to Church Magazines in 2021." Church Newsroom. 14 August 2020. https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/church-magazines-2021

[3] Leininger, Alyse Murphy. "How missionaries in Ecuador are finding 'new and more creative ways' to teach amid COVID-19 challenges." 17 November 2020. The Church News. https://www.thechurchnews.com/members/2020-11-17/missionary-work-covid-19-ecuador-quito-mission-social-media-smartphones

[4] Weaver, Sarah Jane. "Video: President Nelson talks about the 'painful' decision to close temples amid COVID-19." The Church News. 27 July 2020. https://www.thechurchnews.com/temples/2020-07-27/covid-19-president-nelson-decision-close-temples-video-189635

[5] Taylor, Scott. 13 August 2020. "Elder Uchtdorf in virtual missionary devotional: A look at pandemic's impact, using technology and making disciples." The Church News. https://www.thechurchnews.com/leaders-and-ministry/2020-08-13/elder-uchtdorf-virtual-missionary-devotional-technology-covid-19-

[6] Taylor, Scott. 13 August 2020. "Elder Uchtdorf in virtual missionary devotional: A look at pandemic's impact, using technology and making disciples." The Church News. https://www.thechurchnews.com/leaders-and-ministry/2020-08-13/elder-uchtdorf-virtual-missionary-devotional-technology-covid-19-