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 2022

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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 2022. Most of these developments were previously reported in monthly newsletters on www.cumorah.com. Previous annual reviews of the top 10 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 (except for 2021) and can be accessed here. The Church has not yet released membership figures for the year 2022. Membership data for 2022 will likely become available to the public in April 2023. Thus, all the most recent membership data contained in this article is current as of year-end 2021.

TOP TEN ENCOURAGING CHURCH GROWTH AND MISSIONARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. Thirty-Five New Temples Announced – Most Temples Ever Announced in a Single Year

The Church announced 35 new temples during 2022—the largest number of temples ever announced in a single year. In April, the Church announced plans to construct 17 new temples in the following locations:

- Wellington, New Zealand (third temple in New Zealand)
- Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo (first temple in the Republic of the Congo)
- Barcelona, Spain (second temple in Spain)
- Birmingham, United Kingdom (third temple in the United Kingdom)
- Cusco, Peru (fifth temple in Peru)
- Maceió, Brazil (15th temple in Brazil)
- Santos, Brazil (16th temple in Brazil)
- San Luis Potosí, Mexico (18th temple in Mexico)
- Mexico City Benemérito, Mexico (19th temple in Mexico)
- Tampa, Florida (fourth temple in Florida)
- Knoxville, Tennessee (third temple in Tennessee)
- Cleveland, Ohio (second temple in Ohio [not including the Kirtland Temple])
- Wichita, Kansas (first temple in Kansas)
- Austin, Texas (seventh temple in Texas)
- Missoula, Montana (third temple in Montana)
- Montpelier, Idaho (ninth temple in Idaho)
- Modesto, California (10th temple in California)

In October, the Church announced plans to construct 18 new temples in the following locations:

- Busan, Korea (second temple in South Korea)
- Naga, Philippines (ninth temple in the Philippines)
- Santiago, Philippines (10th temple in the Philippines)
- Eket, Nigeria (fourth temple in Nigeria)
- Chiclayo, Peru (sixth temple in Peru)
- Buenos Aires City Center, Argentina (sixth temple in Argentina)
- Londrina, Brazil (17th temple in Brazil)
- Riberão Prêto, Brazil (18th temple in Brazil)
- Huehuetenango, Guatemala (fifth temple in Guatemala)
- Jacksonville, Florida (fifth temple in Florida)
- Grand Rapids, Michigan (second temple in Michigan)
- Prosper, Texas (eighth temple in Texas)
- Lone Mountain, Nevada (fourth temple in Nevada)
- Tacoma, Washington (fifth temple in Washington)
- Cuernavaca, Mexico (20th temple in Mexico)
- Pachuca, Mexico (21st temple in Mexico)
- Toluca, Mexico (22nd temple in Mexico)
- Tula, Mexico (23rd temple in Mexico)

Of the 35 temples announced in 2022, 40% were in Latin America and 37% were in the United States. Only 23% of the new temples announced in 2022 were located outside of the Americas. Many new temples announced are in locations with a sizable Church presence where there is a temple nearby but that may not be easily accessible for more frequent temple attendance (such as in the Mexico City metropolitan area, Tacoma, Austin, Las Vegas, Prosper, and Buenos Aires), but most temples were announced in locations where there are a cluster of stakes that are distant from the nearest temple (such as in Brazil, Peru, the Philippines, Europe, Africa, and the eastern United States). Unlike recent years, no new temples were announced in Utah in 2022. Moreover, only one of the 35 new temples announced was in a country where no temples have been previously announced (Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo), and only one of the 35 new temples announced was in a state of the United States without a temple previously announced (Wichita, Kansas). Church President Russell M. Nelson has now announced more than 100 temples since he became president of the Church in 2018. The rapid proliferation of temple announcements in recent years has appeared primarily due to efforts by the Church to make temples more accessible to Latter-day Saints around the world, as most new temples announced have not been due to recent rapid growth in membership or congregations.

2. Several New Missions Organized or Planned; No Missions Discontinued

The Church organized the following four new missions during 2022:

- England Bristol (reinstated)
- Hawaii Laie (opened in January 2022)
- Rwanda Kigali
- Spain Madrid North

Additionally, the Church in November 2022 announced plans to organize the following six new missions in 2023:

- Cote d'Ivoire Abidjan North
- Democratic Republic of the Congo Kananga
- Nigeria Aba
- Nigeria Abuja
- South Africa Pretoria
- Romania Bucharest (reinstated)

There will be 416 missions by July 2023 if all six of these new missions are organized. The Church reached an all-time high of 422 missions in 2016.

These 10 new or planned missions are all concentrated in Africa (6) and Europe (3) except for the Hawaii Laie Mission. The creation of the two new missions in Nigeria will bring the total number of missions in the country to nine – the most missions of any country on the Afro-Eurasian landmass. The Church in Sub-Saharan Africa has generally reported steady increases in the number of local members serving full-time missions, and thus, the creation of new missions is likely due to increases in the number of missionaries available from the region to organize additional missions and expand outreach.

The Church in Africa, Europe, and Asia continues to have a small number of missions compared to targeted populations. For example, there will be only nine missions to proselyte 225 million people in Nigeria – an average of 25 million people per mission. New missions in Europe constitute a reopening of previously closed/consolidated missions. For example, the Church previously operated the England Bristol Mission from 1962 until 2002 and the Romania Bucharest Mission from 1993 until 2018. Moreover, the Church used to operate three additional missions in Spain (Spain Bilbao, 1987-2010; Spain Las Palmas, 1988-2006; Spain Malaga, 1976-2018). It is unclear why the Church has reopened several European missions given the decline in the number of missions in the region has appeared due to low receptivity to Latter-day Saint proselytism, fewer member districts requiring mission president oversight, and redistribution of missionary resources to more productive areas of the world.

However, Romania, Spain, and the United Kingdom all boast large populations that are often minimally reached by mission outreach. For example, the average mission in the United Kingdom now has 11.3 million people within its geographical boundaries, whereas the average mission in Spain now has 15.7 million people within its geographical boundaries. However, the Church used to provide greater outreach to both of these nations. For example, the average mission in Spain in the early 1990s had 7.8 million people within its boundaries, and the average mission in the United Kingdom had 8.1 million people within its boundaries in 1987.

3. Expansion of the Church in Sub-Saharan Africa

Many significant developments occurred in Sub-Saharan Africa during 2022 in regard to the expansion of the Church into previously unreached areas and the creation of new congregations, stakes, and districts.

Angola

The Church organized its first branch in the city of Menongue. There are now four cities with an official Church presence.

Benin

The Church organized a member group in Dassa-Zoumè, bringing the total number of groups in the country to three (the other two groups operate in Allada and Bohicon. The Bohicon Branch (organized in 2019) had nearly 200 attending sacrament meetings by the end of the year.

Burundi

The Church organized its fourth branch in Bujumbura—the first time a new branch had been organized in Burundi since 2014.

Cameroon

The Church created a member group in Limbe that operates under the jurisdiction of the Bonaberi 2nd Branch in Douala. This marks the first time the Church has opened a member group outside of Douala or Yaoundé.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo)

Church leaders reported that some missions in the country had approximately 1,000 convert baptisms per month during 2022, particularly the DR Congo Lubumbashi Mission and the DR Congo Mbuji-Mayi Mission. One new stake was created which was the Church's second stake in Mbuji-Mayi. The number of branches in the northern city of Kisangani doubled from three to six. Also, the first branch of the Church in Kisenda was organized.

The Republic of the Congo

Three new branches were organized in the capital and most populous city, Brazzaville, where there are three stakes. The Church organized its first branch in the city of Mindouli. There are now five cities with an official Church presence.

Cote d'Ivoire

The Church organized its third stake outside of Abidjan in the city of Gagnoa, although the new stake also includes congregations in neighboring cities. Also, the Church organized its 15th stake in the Abidjan metropolitan area. There are now 18 stakes and 15 districts in Cote d'Ivoire. In contrast, there were only five stakes and one district in Cote d'Ivoire as of year-end 2012. The Church also created its first branches in two additional cities: Korhogo and Tiassale. The new branch in Korhogo is the Church's first branch to be organized in northern Cote d'Ivoire.

Gabon

The Church organized a third branch in the capital city, Libreville. A branch in the second most populous city of Port-Gentil was also organized, marking the first time the Church has organized an official branch outside of Libreville.

Liberia

The Liberia Monrovia Mission baptized approximately 2,500 converts in 2022. The Church's sixth stake in Liberia was organized in Monrovia—the capital city and most populous city where all six stakes operate. The Church created its first group in the city of Tubmanburg. Nine of the 15 Liberian counties now have an official congregation or a member group. In contrast, only three Liberian counties had an official Church presence five years ago.

Madagascar

The Church organized its first stake outside of the capital city of Antananarivo in the port city of Toamasina. There are now three stakes in Madagascar.

Mozambique

The Church organized its first branches in three cities (Inhambane, Homoine, and Xai Xai). New congregations were also organized in Beira and Maputo.

Nigeria

Six new stakes were organized in Nigeria in 2022, including two in Lagos and three that were organized from districts. There are now 68 stakes and 15 districts in Nigeria, making Nigeria the country with the eighth most stakes in the world. Two cities also had the Church's first branches organized during 2022, including Ifo and

Ikot Etetuk. Lastly, the Church created one new district during the year—the Ugep Nigeria District.

Rwanda

Two new branches were created—one of which was the first branch to be organized outside of Kigali (Nyamata). As of the end of the year, there were six branches in the country.

Senegal

The Church organized its third branch in the capital and most populous city of Dakar. Also, the Church organized its first branch in the city of Port-Louis, located on the Mauritanian border, with approximately 25 members in attendance. This marks the first time a branch has ever operated in Senegal outside of Dakar. The Church created the Dakar Senegal District in February 2022—the first district in the country.

Sierra Leone

The Church organized a new district, the Moriba Town Sierra Leone District, in the Sierra Rutile region with five branches and two member groups. New branches and wards were also organized in Freetown and Makeni during the year.

Tanzania

Eight new branches were created in Dar es Salaam, bringing the total number of branches in the most populous city of Tanzania to 16. A second district was created in Dar es Salaam in November. The Church created two new branches in Arusha where the number of branches now totals three. The three branches were organized into its own district—the first district of the Church outside of Dar es Salaam. Furthermore, the Church organized a member group in the capital city, Dodoma.

Togo

The first branch of the Church in Taglibgo was organized with approximately 70 attending church meetings on a regular basis. Some congregations had as many as 30 convert baptisms in 2022.

4. Many Countries Reported Significant Membership Growth During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacting missionary work and church activity across the world, many countries reported significant membership growth between 2019 and 2021. The Church did not report country-specific year-end membership and congregational data for 2020. Countries that experienced a biennial membership growth rate of 10% or more are listed below. The number of Church-reported Latter-day Saints as of year-end 2021 is also provided:

1. DR Congo - 29.4% - 89,136
2. Tanzania - 28.8% - 2,309
3. Liberia - 22.6% - 17,823
4. Angola - 19.2% - 4,160
5. Benin - 18.6% - 4,765
6. Republic of the Congo - 15.8% - 9,892
7. Malawi - 14.9% - 3,612
8. Sierra Leone - 14.6% - 26,108
9. Papua New Guinea - 13.7% - 35,033
10. Tuvalu - 13.2% - 335
11. Togo - 12.7% - 5,997
12. Turkey - 11.9% - 573
13. Rwanda - 11.7% - 843
14. Iceland - 10.3% - 331

5. Many Countries Reported Significant Congregational Growth During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Church published statistical information regarding the number of congregations by country as of year-end 2021. See below for the 20 countries with the largest net increases in congregations between year-end 2019 and year-end 2021. The net increase in congregations is provided as well as the percentage increase during this two-year period.

1. United States +217 (1.50% increase)
2. DR Congo +44 (20.9% increase)
3. Nigeria +36 (4.99% increase)
4. Brazil +34 (1.59% increase)
5. Philippines +17 (1.37% increase)
6. Ghana +13 (3.96% increase)
7. Cote d'Ivoire +7 (2.80% increase)
8. Sierra Leone +7 (8.86% increase)
9. Mexico +6 (0.33% increase)
10. Mozambique +6 (13.6% increase)
11. Papua New Guinea +6 (7.41% increase)
12. Colombia +5 (2.01% increase)
13. Dominican Republic +5 (2.55% increase)
14. Kiribati +5 (13.51% increase)
15. Liberia +5 (9.43% increase)
16. Tanzania +5 (62.5% increase)
17. Venezuela +5 (2.19% increase)
18. Malawi +4 (50.0% increase)
19. Zambia +4 (30.8% increase)
20. Zimbabwe +4 (8.75% increase)

6. Language-Specific Outreach in the United States Expands

The Church in the United States continued to organize additional language-specific congregations. Notable examples included the creation of the Church's third Persian-speaking branch in the United States (located in Virginia; the two previously organized Persian-speaking branches were created in California in 2017 and 2019), the Church's second Karen-speaking branch in the United States (located in Minnesota; the first Karen-speaking branch was organized in Utah in 2009), and three additional Marshallese-speaking branches (one in Colorado, one in Indiana, one in Utah; there are now 11 Marshallese-speaking wards or branches in the United States).

7. Rapid Membership Growth Returns to Pakistan

The Church in Pakistan has recently experienced a major increase in convert baptisms and Church attendance. Local members report that more than 2,000 members attended the Lahore Pakistan District conference from the five branches in the district. However, the district has generally averaged around 850-900 members attending church meetings in recent months – nearly double what was reported in early 2022. The Lahore Pakistan District is the only district that appears close to becoming a stake. Moreover, some branches have reported significant numbers of convert baptisms in recent months. Additionally, the recently organized Mian Channu Group often has had approximately 200 attending church meetings. It is unclear when the group may become a branch. Pakistan became its own mission in 2021. Much of the recent progress with Church growth in Pakistan has appeared to be due to the increased mission present oversight for the three Pakistani districts.

8. Congregational Growth in Chile

Local members in Chile have noted progress with the creation of new wards and the advancement of branches into wards within the past couple months. For example, two wards were organized from two branches in the Puerto Montt Chile Stake, two new wards were recently organized in Santiago and Antofagasta, and a new branch was organized in the city of Dalcahue in the

Chiloe Chile District. Local members indicate that it is anticipated that the Puerto Montt Chile Stake will divide to reinstate the previous Puerto Varas Chile Stake which operated between 1997 and 2002. Although these developments are encouraging, the Church in Chile has long maintained a trend of stagnant growth or decline during the past two decades. For example, between year-end 2011 and year-end 2021, the number of official congregations (i.e., wards and branches) in Chile declined from 620 to 568 even though the number of members reported by the Church in Chile increased from 570,833 to 602,696. Moreover, the Church has only four temples in Chile (two in operation, one under construction, one announced), whereas Argentina has six temples even though there are more than 100,000 fewer Latter-day Saints in Argentina compared to Chile.

9. New Stakes and Congregations in Mexico

During 2022, five new stakes were organized, and no stakes were discontinued in Mexico. New stakes were created in Merida, Nealtican (town on the outskirts of Puebla), Oaxaca, Queretaro, and San Luis Potosi. Moreover, approximately one dozen new wards/branches were created in 2022, whereas there appeared to be only two congregations discontinued in the country during the year. This stands in contrast to the period between 2016 and 2019 when the number of congregations declined from 2,016 to 1,843 and the number of stakes decreased from 230 to 222. Despite this progress, the Church in Mexico has experienced chronic problems with low convert retention and member activity rates. The 2020 census provided interesting insights into Church membership growth during the period from 2010-2020 as the percentage of self-affiliated Latter-day Saints decreased from 0.24% to 0.22% between 2010 and 2020 and the number of self-affiliated Latter-day Saints increased by 23,066. In contrast, the Church reported a membership increase of 246,985 between year-end 2009 and year-end 2019. Thus, less than 10% of church-reported membership increase was reflected in the census figures.

10. First Branches Created in The Gambia and North Cyprus

The Gambia

The Church organized its first branch in The Gambia on June 10th, 2022. The Banjul Branch is assigned to the Cote d'Ivoire Abidjan West Mission. Full-time missionaries were assigned shortly after the branch was organized. Apostle Elder D. Todd Christofferson dedicated The Gambia to missionary work on February 24th. The Church doubled its membership in The Gambia in February 2022 when 12 new converts were baptized. The Gambia joins several other West African nations where the first branches have been organized in the past decade, including Guinea, Mali, and Senegal.

North Cyprus

The Church organized its first branch in the de facto country of North Cyprus in July 2022 with approximately 100 people in attendance. The branch meets in its own meetinghouse in Lefko?a—the northern half of the city of Nicosia that is within North Cyprus. The new branch in North Cyprus appears to mark the first time when an official congregation has been organized in a de facto country. Only Turkey recognizes North Cyprus as a sovereign nation.

TOP TEN DISCOURAGING CHURCH GROWTH AND MISSIONARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. World Membership Growth Rates Reach Historic Lows

The Church reported 16,805,400 members on its official records as of year-end 2021.There was a net increase of 141,737 members during 2021—a 0.85% increase. Although extremely low compared to historical numbers, Church membership increased slightly more in 2021 than in 2020 when there was a net increase of only 98,627 members (a 0.60% increase). In contrast, the Church reported a net increase of 251,301 members in 2019 (a 1.54% increase) and annual membership growth rates of usually 1.5-2.0% from 2014-2017, 2-3% from 2000-2013, and 3-4% from 1992-1999. The decelerating rate of membership growth in the past several decades is not attributed to fewer full-time missionaries serving. For example, the average number of converts baptized per missionary was a mere 2.43 in 2020 and 3.09 in 2021, whereas the average number of converts baptized per missionary generally ranged from 6-7 per year in the late twentieth century.

Recently published in the Journal of the Mormon Social Science Association, The End of Growth? Fading Prospects for Latter-day Saint Expansion by David Stewart provides a thorough examination of the factors that have led to decelerated Latter-day Saint membership growth around the world during the past several decades. The article can be accessed here: http://jmssa.org/stewart/.

2. Church Membership Declines in 48 Countries/Territories between 2019 and 2021

The Church reported a decrease in the number of members on official records in 48 countries/territories during the two-year period from year-end 2019 to year-end 2021. These nations include Armenia, Austria, the Bahamas, Bahrain, Belgium, Bosnia

and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, the Cayman Islands, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, French Guiana, Germany, Greece, Grenada, Guam, Guernsey, Hong Kong, Isle of Man, Japan, Jersey, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Latvia, Lithuania, Macau, Malaysia, Mauritius, the Federated States of Micronesia, Montenegro, New Caledonia, Norway, Reunion, Serbia, Singapore, South Korea, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Maarten, St. Vincent, Sweden, Trinidad and Tobago, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and Uruguay. In contrast, there were only 15 countries where the Church reported a net decline in the number of members on the records during the year 2011. Disrupted missionary efforts and church services due to the COVID-19 pandemic appears to best explain this significant increase in the number of countries/territories where there was a decline in Church membership, particularly in nations where membership growth rates have generally been slow or stagnant. Provided with the percentage change in membership and the total numbers of members as of year-end 2021, the Church reported the most rapid membership decline in the following 10 nations during the two-year period from 2019 to 2021:

1. Montenegro - decrease of 16.7% - 30
2. Reunion - decrease of 12.2% - 841
3. Kazakhstan - decrease of 10.9% - 205
4. Grenada - decrease of 9.59% - 396
5. Bosnia and Herzegovina - decrease of 8.22% - 67
6. Guernsey - decrease of 8.06% - 57
7. Saint Kitts and Nevis - decrease of 7.83% - 212
8. Bahrain - decrease of 6.94% - 228
9. France - decrease of 4.33% - 38,200

10. Sint Maarten - decrease of 3.70% - 286

3. Slow Year for New Stake Creations

Few new stakes were organized in 2022 despite generally steady numbers of new stakes being created in recent years. Thirty-two (32) stakes were created in 2022, whereas there were 10 stakes that were discontinued during the year. Thus, there was a net increase of only 22 stakes—the smallest net increase in the number of stakes since 2003. Approximately half of the new stakes created in 2022 were organized in the United States, and four out of the 10 discontinued stakes during the year were in the United States. The ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on missionary work and member activity, slow rates of membership growth in countries with the most members on Church records, and slow congregational growth rates in 2022 have likely contributed to slow stake growth during the year. The annual number of new stakes created since 2012 is provided below:

- 2021 – 43
- 2020 – 30
- 2019 – 59
- 2018 – 56
- 2017 – 81
- 2016 – 100
- 2015 – 67
- 2014 – 64
- 2013 – 48
- 2012 – 65

The number of discontinued stakes by year during the past decade is as follows:

- 2021 – 9
- 2020 – 3
- 2019 – 5
- 2018 – 14
- 2017 – 6
- 2016 – 8
- 2015 – 7
- 2014 – 1
- 2013 – 2
- 2012 – 6

4. Lack of Progress in India and Indonesia

There were no significant developments for the Church in India or Indonesia during 2022 in regard to the creation of new branches or wards or the advancements of districts into stakes. India is poised to eclipse China as the world’s most populous nation with approximately 1.4 billion people, yet there were a mere 14,866 Latter-day Saints as of year-end 2021. Similarly, the Church in Indonesia has maintained a continuous presence for half a century but reports only 7,564 members out of a population of 277 million. India and Indonesia number among some of the most critical nations to target with missionary efforts given their immense populations and sufficient religious freedom in most areas to permit the expansion of the Church into previously unreached areas.

5. Stagnant Year for Congregational Growth in the United States

Few new wards and branches were organized in the United States as a whole during 2022, and there were many wards and branches that closed during the year. It is probable that there was no significant change in the number of wards and branches in the United States in 2022, although the official statistics for year-end 2022 will probably not be available until April 2023. Annual membership growth rates in the United States have precipitously fallen from approximately 1.5-2.0% from 1999 to 2008 to 1.0-1.5% from 2009 to 2015, and 0.50-1.0% since 2006. Thus, it is likely that slower membership growth has impacted slower rates of congregational growth. The Church reported 14,676 wards/branches in the United States as of year-end 2021. The Church in the United States has usually reported annual growth rates of approximately one percent for the number of congregations, although there was no net change in the number of congregations in 2017. Annual congregational growth rates in the United States tend to be more variable than membership growth rates in the country, although these have typically ranged from 0.5-1.3% since the late 2000s. There was a 1.5% increase in the number of congregations in the United States between year-end 2019 and year-end 2021. Congregational growth trends provide insight into changes in the number of active members who regularly attend Sunday meetings as new congregations are usually created to better accommodate increases in attendance. Church membership figures do not take into account whether the member regularly attends church or identifies as a Latter-day Saint.

6. Canadian 2021 Census Numbers Suggest Decline in the Number of Self-Affiliated Latter-day Saints since 2011

The 2021 Canadian Census tallied 85,315 self-affiliated Latter-day Saints in Canada, or 0.23% of the total population and 42.8% of official Church-reported membership for year-end 2021. The percentage of self-affiliated Latter-day Saints compared to Church-reported membership was 56.9% in 2011. The 2021 census figure for Latter-day Saints nationwide is 20,050 less than the number of self-affiliated Latter-day Saints tallied in the 2011 census (105,365) - a 19.0% decline in one decade. This marks one of the most significant percentage declines in the self-affiliation of Latter-day Saints ever noted on a national census. The percentage decline in the number of self-affiliated Latter-day Saints between 2011 and 2021 is similar to the percentage decline of self-affiliated Christians in the Canadian population during this same time period. However, it is important to note that Latter-day Saint figures on the 2021 census were extrapolated from sample data—not the entire data set. Moreover, metrics reported by official Church statistics (i.e., the number of stakes and congregations) have not supported a significant decline in the number of active members in Canada. Thus, it is unclear whether the significant decline in self-affiliated members on the 2021 census may be due to higher rates of inactive members who no longer claim membership on the census or whether there has been a significant decline in active membership in the country.

7. Three Stakes and Two Districts Discontinued in Japan

The Church underwent significant restructuring of stakes and districts on Honshu and Hokkaido. Two stakes and one district were discontinued in the Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto metropolitan area in May, and one stake and one district were discontinued on Hokkaido in April. The Church has previously consolidated stakes and congregations in the Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto metropolitan area, as there used to be six stakes and two districts in 2000. Today, there are now only three stakes in the same geographical area. Approximately a dozen congregations closed in the Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto area as part of these changes. In Hokkaido, the Church underwent its first major restructuring of congregations and stakes in 2022, as there were approximately the same number of congregations in Hokkaido 20 years ago as there were at the beginning of 2022. The Church dedicated the Sapporo Japan Temple in 2016, and although it is possible the temple may have prevented some Latter-day Saints from leaving the area, the construction of the new temple did not reverse the decades-long trend of stagnant growth or decline that has persisted in the area and in Japan as a whole since the early 2000s.

The Church in Japan closed its only ward or branch in more than a dozen cities during 2022—many of which had continuously operated for 40-50 years. Small numbers of active members per congregation, few convert baptisms, and low birth rates in the Church have all appeared to contribute to the decision to close these congregations and stakes. For example, many of the wards closed in the Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto area have had 50 or fewer active members for at least the past 5-7 years. The Church in Japan has struggled to reverse a decades-long trend of consolidation and decline in terms of the number of congregations and the stability of active membership. Another significant iteration of stake and congregation consolidations occurred in the greater Tokyo metropolitan area in 2021 where three stakes were discontinued, although only approximately half a dozen congregations closed. The Church reported an all-time high of 31 stakes and 19 districts in Japan in 2000, whereas there were only 22 stakes and 11 districts in Japan as of the end of 2022.

8. Many Branches Close in Russia

A significant contraction of national outreach in Russia occurred during 2022 as the Church's only branches in many cities closed. The Church in Russia closed its only branches in eight Russian cities nearby Moscow, including Kaluga, Lipetsk, Lotoshino, Ryazan, Smolensk, Tula, Tver, and Yaroslav, Moreover, the Church's only branches closed in an additional 10 cities, including Astrakhan, Izhevsk, Kurgan, Novgorod, Novokuybishevsk, Orenburg, Pskov, Tyumen, Ulianovsk, and Volzkskiy. Most of these cities had branches organized within the past 20 years and have never been able to become self-sustaining in terms of local leadership. Most, if not all, branches that closed in 2022 appeared to have less than 20 active members, and it is likely that member groups continue to operate under the jurisdiction of a ward or branch in a neighboring city. Local Russian leadership appears now responsible to care and oversee missionary work and administrative needs given the current war. The Church's English-speaking ward in Moscow closed shortly after the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Despite the outbreak of the war and the withdrawal of foreign missionaries and church leaders, none of the Church's six Russian missions have closed. Moreover, all three Russian stakes continue to operate.

9. Stake Discontinued in the United Kingdom

The Church discontinued the Lichfield England Stake (originally organized in 1977), marking the first time a stake was ever discontinued in the United Kingdom. There has not been a significant decline or change in the number of congregations in the Birmingham/Coventry area during the past two decades until the closure of three wards when the stake was discontinued in June 2022. Stagnant membership growth rates combined with probable decreases in member activity in the area during the past couple decades appear the primary culprits for these changes.

10. Australia 2021 Census Numbers Suggest Decline in Self-Affiliated Latter-day Saints since 2016

The Australian government released 2021 census data which indicated the number of self-identified Latter-day Saints decreased between 2016 and 2021 from 60,864 to 57,868. In contrast, official membership totals for Australia increased from 148,862 to 155,383. Thus, these data suggest that the number of active Latter-day Saints may have decreased during this period, albeit it is also possible that fewer less-active or inactive members on Church records self-affiliated as Latter-day Saints in 2021 versus 2016. Moreover, the Church in Australia discontinued the Gosford Australia Stake in June, marking only the second time a stake has been discontinued in Australia. The only other time the Church has discontinued a stake in Australia was in 2011 when the Sydney Australia Parramatta Stake was discontinued (which, coincidentally, is in approximately the same location as the Gosford Australia Stake). During the past decade, new stakes have been organized in Australia in 2019, 2018, 2016 (2), 2015 (1), 2013 (3), and 2012 (2). Only one district in Australia has been discontinued in the past decade (Mildura in 2015).

LIMITATIONS

The subjective nature of determining which missionary and church growth developments numbered among the most significant for 2022 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 2022 will likely not become available until April 2023 shortly after General Conference. Some 2022 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 2022.