

LDS Growth Encyclopedia on Missionary Work and Church Growth (Missiology)

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Real Growth

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Real growth is a term that captures several aspects of member activity that increase in number, intensity, or consistency over time. Real growth may be viewed as a composite of active membership increase, testimony development, comprehensive conversion to LDS teachings, and self-sufficiency in local and regional leadership. In February 2012, Second Counselor in the First Presidency Dieter F. Uchtdorf defined real growth in a worldwide leadership training as "growth in the number of active members" and "increased faithfulness" among members but cautioned that measuring real growth is difficult as it "includes things that can't easily be measured, such as daily prayer, scripture study, family home evening, love at home, and personal experiences with the Atonement."[1] Church leaders have observed that tracking increases in nominal church membership is a poor indicator for assessing real growth. Apostle Elder Dallin H. Oaks remarked, "When we speak of real growth, we speak of what follows a person's baptism into the Church...Sometimes we tend just to count the growth of the Church in terms of the number of convert baptisms. But this a very premature and incomplete view of the matter."[2] The application of gospel teachings to daily life is an essential component for achieving real growth in the Church on a micro and macro level ranging from individual families and congregations to countries and church areas.[3]

Missionary work has yielded mixed results in achieving real growth largely due to an overemphasis on reaching arbitrary baptismal goals that compromise adequate prebaptismal preparation and post-baptismal fellowship. This has resulted in many converts failing to apply gospel teachings into their daily lives and experience true, long-term conversion to following Jesus Christ. The disconnect between mission and local church leaders has frequently accompanied low convert retention when full-time missionaries baptize converts found through their own efforts and when these converts fail to socially integrate into their assigned congregations. Many congregations outside the United States lack sufficient local member and leader support to sufficiently keep track of large numbers of children and teenage converts who do not have Latter-day Saint parents. A major frustration for achieving and maintaining real growth has been the large numbers of youth converts. These new members provide opportunities for augmenting the full-time missionary force and serving in leadership but more often than not experience a short period of church activity after their baptism. Low international convert retention for youth converts has also contributed to the lack of full-member families in the Church in most countries. Real growth has been difficult to achieve when many if not most wards and branches outside the United States consist of single members or members married to nonmember or inactive spouses. In recent years, international church leaders have stressed the importance of reactivation efforts to achieving real growth.[4]

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Church leaders have stressed the strong correlation of real growth in the Church and the family.[5] In an April 2012 General Conference Address, LDS Bishop in the Presiding Bishopric Richard C. Edgley related the following account regarding the cost of inactivity to natural growth in the Church:

A few months ago after a meeting with new converts and less-active members, a reactivated gentleman about my age came up to me and said, "I am one who has been less active most of my life. I fell away from the Church early in my life. But I am back now, and I work in the temple with my wife."

To let him know that everything was OK, my response was something like this: "All is well that ends well."

He responded, "No, all is not well. I am back in the Church, but I have lost all of my children and my grandchildren. And I am

now witnessing the loss of my great-grandchildren-all out of the Church. All is not well."

In our family we have an ancestor who joined the Church in Europe in the early days of the Church. One son became inactive. Sister Edgley and I have attempted to track the inactive descendants of this ancestor.

It was easy for my wife and me to conclude that during the following six generations and with reasonable assumptions, there could be a loss of up to 3,000 family members. Now project two more generations. The loss could theoretically approach 20,000 to 30,000 of our Heavenly Father's children.[6]

Statistical figures relating to temples may offer the greatest insight into trends in real growth in the Church. Elder Oaks noted that "the temple is the great final measure of real growth" as members must make and keep temple covenants to achieve real growth.[7] Statistics related to temple attendance such as the number of temple recommend holders, number of ordinances performed in temples, and the frequency of members attending the temple shed light on real growth but are rarely released to the public. Increasing numbers of temples and the renovation of temples to accommodate larger numbers of patrons may also indicate progress in achieving real growth. Some other statistical figures provide insight into real growth trends such as increasing numbers of Melchizedek Priesthood holders,[8] increasing numbers of members serving full-time missions, and increasing numbers of congregations, stakes, districts, missions.

[1] Wrigley, Heather Whittle. "Worldwide Leadership Training Highlights Path to Real Growth," Ensign, March 2012. https://www.lds.org/ensign/2012/03/worldwide-leadership-training-highlights-path-to-real-growth

[2] "What is Real Growth?" Prophets and Apostles, lds.org, retrieved 23 February 2013. http://www.lds.org/prophets-and-apostles/unto-all-the-world/what-is-real-growth

[3] Wrigley, Heather Whittle. "Worldwide Leadership Training Highlights Path to Real Growth," Ensign, March 2012. https://www.lds.org/ensign/2012/03/worldwide-leadership-training-highlights-path-to-real-growth

[4] Edgley, Richard C. "The Rescue for Real Growth," General Conference, April 2012, http://www.lds.org/general-conference/2012/04/the-rescue-for-real-growth

[5] Wrigley, Heather Whittle. "Worldwide Leadership Training Highlights Path to Real Growth," Ensign, March 2012. https://www.lds.org/ensign/2012/03/worldwide-leadership-training-highlights-path-to-real-growth

[6] Edgley, Richard C. "The Rescue for Real Growth," General Conference, April 2012, http://www.lds.org/general-conference/2012/04/the-rescue-for-real-growth

[7] "What is Real Growth?" Prophets and Apostles, lds.org, retrieved February 23rd, 2013. http://www.lds.org/prophets-and-apostles/unto-all-the-world/what-is-real-growth

[8] "Best Way to Rescue Is to Strengthen Faith in Christ," Prophets and Apostles, lds.org, retrieved 23 February 2013. http://www.lds.org/prophets-and-apostles/unto-all-the-world/best-way-to-rescue-is-to-strengthen-faith-in-christ