

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

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Online Meetinghouse Locator

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Posted: January 30th, 2014

The Church has maintained an online meetinghouse locator providing information of meeting times and locations for wards and branches since 2004. The international meetinghouse locator website has undergone several upgrades that integrate ward and branch meeting times and locations with maps that at permit users to determine what individual addresses or communities a congregation services by placing a marker on a map or entering an address. These data provide the names and locations of LDS congregations, the boundaries for stakes, districts, and missions; and the assignment of congregations to districts, stakes, missions, or areas has facilitated the development of many missiology resources by the Cumorah Foundation such as the LDS International Atlas that uses Google Maps. The Church keeps the meetinghouse locator website current and updates changes in congregations on a daily basis. In addition to providing data on boundaries, unit names, and unit assignment, the online meetinghouse locator also provides information on temple districts, the name and contact phone number of bishops and branch presidents for most congregations, and contact information and location for Deseret Industries, employment resource centers, historical places, home storage centers, institutes, LDS Family Services, temples, seminaries, and visitors' centers.

The online meetinghouse locator provides a wealth of extensive geographical data for missiology research. The website provides the names and locations for all wards and branches that do not operate in sensitive countries. Information on which mission, stake, or district each congregation is assigned to has more recently become available in 2009 and the early 2010s. Mission, area, stake, district, ward, and branch boundaries are visible for church members if they sign in with their LDS account user name. These data have facilitated researches in assessing various indicators of church growth and missiology such as identifying the most populous cities without an LDS presence, the status of LDS outreach among the world's approximately 7,000 ethnolinguistic groups, assessing national outreach, and the saturation of congregations on a macro-level (regions and countries) and a micro-level (cities and towns).

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Use of an online meetinghouse locator complements the Church's efforts to spread the gospel on the internet and to provide the general public with data for where and when church worship services are available. No other major Christian denomination appears to maintain as comprehensive and detailed of a meetinghouse locator as the LDS Church. The relatively recent development of a resource for finding meetinghouses and determining what congregation an individual or family pertains to helps alleviate confusion on which ward or branch one is assigned to and simplifies locating the Church for many members that move to a new area. The website also aids investigators in obtaining information on meetinghouse locations and worship service times and displays information in many commonly spoken languages by church members. The Church has developed the meetinghouse locator in a timely manner that complements the rise in worldwide internet usage.

Not all congregations are displayed and reported on the online meetinghouse locator. Branches in sensitive countries are not reported. The lack of data on the locator website for sensitive countries can create the illusion that there is no LDS presence in these nations. There is no easily accessible information online regarding the status of the Church in sensitive countries like mainland China (for non-foreigners) and Pakistan notwithstanding thousands of members in these countries and sizable numbers of converts and members originally from these nations living abroad. The Church does not publish information on dependent congregations such as dependent branches and member groups on the meetinghouse locator. Consequently individuals without personal connections or access to contact information with the appropriate local or regional church leaders can be unaware of a church presence in these locations. For example, the Church operates groups in many cities that recently opened for missionary work or where the first active Latter-day Saints have recently relocated such as Astana, Kazakhstan and Tamale, Ghana. However, interested individuals who research about the Church online and desire to learn more and attend church services cannot obtain information from the online meetinghouse locator regarding whether there is a group meeting in their city if no ward or branch is reported. The online meetinghouse locator also does not include information on the language use of individual congregations in many countries and whether language-specific Sunday school classes operate within

individual congregations.

The Church could maximize the potential of its online meetinghouse locator by including additional information on the meeting locations and times for dependent congregations and language-specific Sunday school classes or translation services offered in ordinary wards and branches. This functionality may accelerate growth in newly-opened cities to proselytism by providing information on meeting locations and times. The publication of translation services or the operation of language-specific Sunday school classes could also aid in the Church's online proselytism efforts by motivating nonnative speakers to attend church. The informal operation of some of these congregations and services, lack of communication between local church leaders and Church Headquarters on the operation of dependent units, and the transient and temporary nature of some of these services and congregations stand as a major challenge for maintaining up-to-date, accurate information. The lack of information on a church presence in many sensitive countries stands as a major barrier to strengthening the Church and maintaining a line of communication between the Church in these countries and elsewhere. Providing a phone number or email address of a local or area church leader to those searching for congregations in sensitive countries could help meet this need without compromising the Church' s interest in keeping detailed information on meetinghouse locations private.