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

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Every Nation, Kindred, Tongue, and People

Author: Matt Martinich

Posted: March 3rd, 2014

Latter-day Saints believe that missionary activity will one day occur among every nation, kindred, tongue, and people according to scriptural mandate.[1] In other words, Latter-day Saints believe that missionary work will one day occur among all countries, among all living languages, and among all ethnic groups; including all clans, tribes, or other subdivisions within each ethnic group.

In early 2013, the Church had a presence in 173 of the 206 sovereign countries of the world. At the time there were 34 sovereign countries without an LDS presence; 16 in Sub-Saharan Africa (Burkina Faso, Chad, Comoros, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, the Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Somalia, and Sudan), seven in the Middle East and North Africa (Algeria, Iran, Libya, Palestinian Territories, Syria, Western Sahara, and Yemen), four in Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), four in East Asia (Bhutan, Maldives, North Korea, and Timor-Leste [East Timor]), and three in Europe (Liechtenstein, Monaco, and San Marino). In early 2013, all six de facto countries recognized by 10 or fewer sovereign nations had no LDS presence including Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Northern Cyprus, Somaliland, South Ossetia, and Transnistria (Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic).

Ethnologue.com lists 7,105 living languages worldwide. Of these languages, the Church reported that there were 177 languages which had at least one LDS material translated[2] and 109 languages that had select passages or the entire Book of Mormon translated as of year-end 2013. Only 2.49% of the world's living languages have a translation of at least one LDS material and only 1.53% of the world's living languages have a translation of the Book of Mormon (full book or select passages). In 2012, the Church Directory of Organizations and Leaders (CDOL) listed over 700 languages spoken by Latter-day Saints worldwide, although it is unclear whether all these languages have Latter-day Saint speakers or whether these languages are part of a generic list of potential languages members and converts may speak. In 2006, the Church reported that its members spoke "hundreds of languages."[3] In 2012, there was at least one LDS material translated into the first language of approximately two-thirds of the world population.

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The estimated number of peoples or ethnic groups in the world widely varies among experts. Some ethnographers estimate there are 7,000 distinct people groups whereas others estimate there may be as many as 27,000.[4] Determining what factors distinguish ethnic groups from one another is the primary reason for the large discrepancy in estimates. It is important to note that peoples who belong to the same ethnic group but live in different countries may be termed as separate peoples due to differences in culture and language resulting from political, geographical, and societal differences. For example, the Fulani people of West Africa have indigenous communities in at least 17 African nations but exhibit cultural differences between different countries relating to occupation, integration into society, language, and the status of religious freedom. The Church may have baptized a convert among as many as 1,000 different ethnic groups in the world. However, it is uncertain what is the exact number due to differing definitions for identifying people groups and the Church not collecting or reporting demographic data pertaining to ethnicity.

Kindred refers to tribes, clans, and kin groups that share the same ancestry within particular ethnic groups. Kindred can be interpreted as the smallest unit of the divine mandate to take the gospel to the world as individual ethnolinguistic groups can be subdivided into dozens or scores of different clans. The concept of kindred is especially pertinent among native peoples in the Americas, Southeast Asia, and Africa. For example, the Wayuu Amerindians of Colombia and Venezuela are divided into approximately 30 clans.[5] The Aukan people of Suriname and French Guiana number approximately 22,000 but are divided into 12 clans.[6] The Rawang people of Burma and India are divided into five clans.[7] The Bena people of Nigeria number approximately 100,000 and are divided into 17 clans.[8] The concept of kindred may also apply to the caste system in India and

other countries in South Asia. The number of individual clans in the world likely numbers in the tens of thousands. Reaching all the various tribes, clans, and kin groups of the world is the most daunting task as many have few members and live in locations with a small LDS presence, if any presence is established at all.

[1] Doctrine and Covenants 133:37

[2] "Facts and Statistics," www.mormonnewsroom.org, retrieved 3 March 2014. http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/facts-and-statistics/

[3] Beahm, Brittany. "News of the Church - Church Works to Meet Members' Needs," Liahona, October 2006. http://lds.org/liahona/2006/10/news-of-the-church/church-works-to-meet-members-needs

[4] "How Many People Groups Are There?," Joshua Project, retrieved 26 January 2013. http://www.joshuaproject.net/how-many-people-groups.php

[5] "Guajiro - Kinship," Countries and Their Cultures, retrieved 19 November 2012. http://www.everyculture.com/South-America/Guajiro-Kinship.html

[6] "Aukan," www.ethnologue.com retrieved 28 January 2013. http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=djk

[7] "Rawang," www.ethnologue.com, retrieved 28 January 2013. http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=raw

[8] "Bena," www.ethnologue.com, retrieved 28 January 2013. http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=yun