

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

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Melchizedek Priesthood Holders

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Posted: July 21st, 2014

The Church requires Melchizedek Priesthood holders to staff virtually all local, regional, international, and general church leadership positions aside from auxiliary organizations. Only male members may receive the Melchizedek Priesthood after they have been ordained to the Aaronic Priesthood and meet specific worthiness requirements for a sufficient amount of time. Male members must to be at least 18 years old in order to be ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood.[1] Elder and high priest constitute the two offices in the Melchizedek Priesthood to which adult male members are ordinarily ordained. In stakes, the stake presidency supervises the ordination of both elders and high priests. In districts, the mission presidency oversees the ordination of elders. No high priests are called outside of stakes, although high priests may reside outside of a stake if they were ordained to this office prior to relocating outside the boundaries of a stake.

The number of active, full-tithe paying Melchizedek Priesthood holders is a valuable statistic for church growth researchers to assess local leadership sustainability and the involvement and devotion of adult male members. A ward usually can only function if there are at least 15 worthy Melchizedek Priesthood holders and a stake generally must have at least 120 worthy Melchizedek Priesthood holders. The Church does not report data on the number of Melchizedek Priesthood holders or the worthiness status of its members. However, changes in the number of wards and stakes acts as a barometer in ascertaining the numbers of active, worthy Melchizedek Priesthood holders as these type of units and organizations require certain numbers of Melchizedek Priesthood holders to operate. There are also ratios of active Melchizedek Priesthood holders to ordinary membership that must be met in order for wards and stakes to function. Church leaders indicate that this ratio is approximately one active Melchizedek Priesthood holder per 15 to 20 ordinary church members. The Church requires this ratio of active Melchizedek Priesthood holders to ordinary church membership in order to ensure that there is enough priesthood manpower in a ward to meet all of the administrative needs.

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Increasing the number of active, full-tithe paying Melchizedek Priesthood holders generally occurs from natural growth or youth converts. Many of these members are active high-school graduates who live worthiness standards when they reach the minimum ordination age of 18 years old. Adult male converts comprise another significant source of Melchizedek Priesthood holders. Recent converts are generally ordained elders in the Melchizedek Priesthood between six months and a year after baptism. Prospective elders, or male members that do not hold the Melchizedek Priesthood who are 19 years old or older or who are under 19 but are married,[2] are another significance source for increasing in the number of active Melchizedek Priesthood holders. Many prospective elders are recent converts who have not demonstrated a sufficient period of church activity or lack consistent following of worthiness standards in order to be ordained as elders. Reactivation efforts among prospective elders can significantly increase in the number of active, full-tithe paying Melchizedek Priesthood holders as these members meet the activity and worthiness qualifications to advance in the Melchizedek Priesthood. New move-ins also constitute a significant source for active Melchizedek Priesthood holders in many areas of the world.

A decrease in the number of active, full-tithe paying Melchizedek Priesthood holders can also occur due to member move-outs, worthiness relapses among newer converts, members becoming inactive, and apostasy. Missionaries and members around the world report that move-outs and members becoming inactive are the most common reasons for why the Church experiences a decline in the number of active, full-tithe paying Melchizedek Priesthood holders. Large decreases in the number of active, full-tithe paying Melchizedek Priesthood holders in an area may result in the consolidation of wards and stakes if minimal operational standards are no longer met.

The self-sufficiency and stability in the number of active, worthy Melchizedek Priesthood holders in the Church significantly varies around the world. The greatest stability is found in most areas of the western United States, Oceania, and areas of Sub-Saharan Africa where multiple stakes operate within the same metropolitan areas, whereas the least stability is found in

many areas of Latin America and Eastern Europe. Returned missionaries report significant challenges attaining the needed number of active, full-tithe paying Melchizedek Priesthood holders to operate wards and stakes in most areas of the world. The Church has been unable to organize stakes, or has had to significantly delay the organization of stakes, in many countries because there have been not enough active Melchizedek Priesthood holders to meet operational standards. Rushed pre-baptismal preparation pressured by full-time missionaries in order to reach sensationalized, quick-fix goals set by mission leaders lay at the root of most Melchizedek Priesthood holder inactivity problems as these practices erode local self-sufficiency and do not augment the number of active Melchizedek Priesthood holders for the long-term. Increased emphasis on prebaptismal preparation, post-baptism fellowship, and member-missionary participation in the conversion process will be requirements for the Church to achieve greater increases in the number of active Melchizedek Priesthood holders in the years to come.

[1] "Melchizedek Priesthood," Church Handbook of Instructions: Handbook 2, https://www.lds.org/handbook/handbook-2-administering-the-church/melchizedek-priesthood

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