

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

>

Countries and Dependencies with the Most Members without Stake or District

Author: Matt Martinich

Posted: July 28th, 2014

Countries and dependencies with the most members without a stake or district generally experience challenges in various activity indicators. Nations on this list have generally experienced slow or stagnant membership growth for decades. Common reasons for why no districts operate in these locations include an insufficient number of branches to form a district, few priesthood holders, low member activity and convert retention rates, and dependence on full-time missionaries for administrative responsibilities. Most of the countries and dependencies with over 250 members without a stake or district report several of these conditions, thereby hampering efforts to organize and maintain a stake or district. Historically, the Church has generally had at least one district organized in every country or dependency with at least 1,000 members and in most countries and dependencies with at least 500 members. There do not appear to be any minimal membership or congregational standards for a district to be organized, whereas stakes require at least 1,900 members on church records to operate.

Based on year-end 2013 membership data, there were 27 countries or dependencies with over 250 members and no stake or district functioning as of July 2014. Two of these countries or dependencies had over 1,000 members (Bulgaria and Macau), whereas 11 had between 500 and 999 members (the Bahamas, Lesotho, Northern Mariana Islands, Namibia, Greece, United States Virgin Islands, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Curacao, Qatar, Aruba, and Belarus), and 14 had between 250 and 499 members (Palau, Mauritius, Burundi, Luxembourg, French Guiana, Grenada, Turkey, Jersey, Isle of Man, Niue, Iceland, Kuwait, Saint Lucia, and Georgia).

//

There are 12 countries and dependencies currently without a stake or district where the Church once had a district operating, including Bulgaria, the Bahamas, Greece, Namibia, Curacao, Aruba, Palau, Mauritius, French Guiana, Turkey, Niue, and Iceland. Branch consolidations are the primary reason for why most of these countries and dependencies no longer have a district, namely Aruba, Bulgaria, Curacao, French Guiana, Iceland, Namibia, Niue, and Palau. At times mission and area leaders have advocated for organizing districts notwithstanding few branches and extremely low levels of self-sufficiency in anticipation of future church growth. Overtime, the district is closed resulting in the country or territory numbering among the list of countries and dependencies without a stake or district as few converts are baptized and little to no "real growth" occurs. This has been one of the primary factors leading the closure of districts in Greece and Namibia. In other locations, large geographic distances between only two or three branches have prompted the closure of a district such as in the Bahamas. Many countries and dependencies that once had a stake or district serviced other nearby island nations and dependencies. At times, transferring stake or district headquarters to another island nation or dependency that services multiple countries or dependencies has been the cause for a location no longer having a stake or district. This occurred in Mauritius when district headquarters was relocated to Reunion in the late 1980s at a time when the district administered both islands.

In addition to member activity issues, close geographic proximity to a country with a larger LDS presence is primarily responsible for no stake or district in operation in some locations. In Kuwait and Qatar, wards pertain to the United Arab Emirates-based Abu Dhabi Stake. In Lesotho, all branches pertain to the Bloemfontein South Africa Stake.

Many locations without a stake or district have membership concentrated in a single city or small island where only one or two units operate such as Macau, the Northern Mariana Islands, Namibia, Curacao, Aruba, Palau, Luxembourg, Jersey, Isle of Man, and Grenada. Ward-sized branches or wards pertaining to stakes based in a neighboring country or dependency operate in many of these locations. For example, in mid-2014 wards functioned in the Northern Mariana Islands, Luxembourg, Jersey, and Isle of Man as these locations were include in the geographic boundaries of a stake headquartered in a nearby country.

In mid-2014, prospects appeared favorable for the Church to organize stakes or districts in several countries, namely Bulgaria,

Greece, Lesotho, and Burundi. A few countries and dependencies appear vulnerable toward the closure of the Church's sole district due to activity issues and few branches, namely Guadeloupe, Moldova, Serbia, and Slovenia.