

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

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Countries with the Most Members without a Temple

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Posted: July 28th, 2014

Provided with year-end 2013 membership figures published by the Church, the 10 countries with the most members without a temple announced, under construction, or in operation as of mid-2014 were Nicaragua (84,405), Zimbabwe (25,001), Cote d'Ivoire (22,576), Russia (22,039), Papua New Guinea (21,983), Puerto Rico (21,363), Haiti (19,216), Thailand (18,071), Kiribati (16,659), and American Samoa (15,727). Examining why these countries do not have temples sheds insight into what characteristics coincide with temples. Member activity rates, the self-sufficiency of the church, political stability, and geographical distance to the nearest temple comprise some of the major factors for why there are no temples in some countries with sizable numbers of Latter-day Saints.

In Nicaragua, the Church has publicly proposed constructing a temple in Managua but has not made a formal announcement. In early 2012, LDS apostle Elder Russell M. Nelson spoke to members in Managua and counseled them to prepare themselves so that a temple could be announced.[1] Returned missionaries have also reported that the Church began searching for land to construct a temple in the Managua area although no official reports have been made that this has been the case. Historically low member activity rates, the relatively recent establishment of stakes, and poor self-sustainability of local leadership appear the primary reasons why the Church has not already announced a temple for Nicaragua. The Church in Nicaragua numbers among the countries with the lowest member activity rates in the world as approximately 16% of nominal church membership appears to attend church regularly. The Church discontinued its first stake in Managua in 1989 and did not organize a stake in Nicaragua until 1998 at which time there were over 25,000 members. Low member activity rates and few active male members prevent the organization of additional stakes at present and may continue to delay the announcement of a temple for many more years to come.

In Zimbabwe, prospects for the Church announcing a temple have improved within the past decade as the Church currently operates six stakes and two districts, the political situation has become more stable, travel to the closest temple in Johannesburg, South Africa is costly and difficult, and there are three stakes that function in the capital city, Harare. Missionaries report efforts by current and past mission presidents to help prepare membership for the responsibilities of staffing a temple.

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In Cote d'Ivoire, the vast majority of church membership and congregations are concentrated in Abidjan where there are six stakes. Reasonably close proximity to the Accra Ghana Temple and political instability may deter the announcement of a separate temple for Cote d'Ivoire for many more years to come. Prospects will improve for the announcement of a temple in Cote d'Ivoire once political conditions stabilize and the Accra Ghana Temple is better utilized by West African members who currently reside in the temple district.

In Russia, the construction and operation of a temple faces many significant challenges. No temple would be centrally located for church membership as there are no cities with more than one stake. The two cities with stakes (Moscow and St. Petersburg) are distant from member districts and mission branches scattered from Rostov to Vladivostok. Travel to the Kyiv Ukraine Temple would be not much further for many members than traveling to Russian cities where stakes currently operate. Within the past five years, the Church has experienced nearly stagnant membership growth and congregational decline suggesting that Russian membership would likely be unable to support a temple for many more years to come.

In Papua New Guinea, the need for a temple is great due to the recent acceleration of church growth in remote areas and long distance to the nearest temple in Brisbane, Australia. Currently Papua New Guinea has two stakes and 11 districts that are scattered throughout the country. A temple in Port Moresby does not appear likely until there are multiple stakes in the Port

Moresby area. Political instability, corruption, and few endowed members present challenges for the Church to build and staff a temple.

In Puerto Rico, the Church has experienced stagnant growth within the past decade as indicated by declining numbers of congregations and fewer members on church records in 2001 than in 2011. Puerto Rico is one of the only countries in the world where the Church experienced a period of congregational and membership decline within the past decade. Prospects for a temple in Puerto Rico may be forthcoming once the currently assigned temple for Puerto Rico - Santo Domingo Dominican Republic Temple - reaches capacity and the number of temple recommend holders in Puerto Rico is large enough to independently staff and utilize a temple.

In Haiti, corruption and poverty are significant challenges for the Church to construct a temple. Many live in destitute conditions and the Church has engaged in humanitarian and development resources to meet basic needs. Oftentimes these conditions delay the construction of temples due the Church's focus on meeting temporal needs prior to spiritual ones, the lack of financial self-sufficiency of the Church in these area, and low levels of local leadership sustainability due to economic hardship. Prospects for a temple in Haiti appear likely in the medium term as the Church has four stakes in Port-au-Prince area, challenges for Haitian members to access the Santo Domingo Dominican Republic Temple, and good utilization of the Santo Domingo Dominican Republic Temple by Dominican membership.

In Thailand, the Church has publicly proposed a temple but has not made a formal announcement. In 2000, LDS Church President Gordon B. Hinckley promised members that if they were faithful that the Church would construct a temple in their country one day.[2] Missionaries and members in Thailand have reported for many years efforts to establish multiple stakes in Bangkok with the ambition of improving the prospects for a temple announcement. In 2014, the Church organized a second stake in the Bangkok area and created a new member district; milestones that improve the likelihood of the Church announcing a temple for Bangkok one day. However, the Church has historically struggled with self-sufficiency problems in stake leadership in Bangkok since 1995. At times the mission president has provided support and assistance to stake leadership. Consequently there may be challenges for local members staffing and attending the temple once one is constructed. Distance from the closest temple in Hong Kong and Thailand boasting the largest church membership in the region suggest that prospects for a temple in Thailand are likely but will not come to fruition until local members can adequately meet temple responsibilities with a reasonable amount of self-sufficiency.

In Kiribati, the Church has a significant presence as indicated by nominal membership comprising approximately more than 15% of the national population and the operation of two stakes on the main island of Tarawa. Geographic isolation from other temples in Oceania may prompt the announcement of a small temple that could potentially service other nations in Micronesia. Low member activity rates and relatively few members may dissuade church leaders from announcing a temple until there are additional stakes organized and a sufficiently-large body of temple recommend holders.

In American Samoa, the Church has a significant presence as indicated by nominal church membership constituting approximately one-quarter of the population. The Church operates five stakes on the main island of Tutuila and appears to have enough manpower for a temple to function. The announcement of a separate temple for American Samoa may not occur within the foreseeable future due to close proximity to the Apia Samoa Temple.

[1] Peña, Jose. "Elder Nelson Concludes Visit to Central America," Church News and Events, February 2012. http://www.lds.org/church/news/elder-nelson-visits-central-america

[2] "'We have been on a long journey - but it was a great occasion," LDS Church News, 1 July 2000. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/38065/We-have-been-on-a-long-journey--but-it-was-a-great-occasion.html