

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

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Countries with the Most Members without a Stake

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Provided with year-end 2013 membership figures published by the Church, the 10 countries with the most members without a stake as of July 2014 were mainland China (estimated at approximately 10,000), Malaysia (9,259), Liberia (8,081), Mozambique (6,900), Vanuatu (6,103), Guyana (5,198), Belize (4,502), Pakistan (estimated at approximately 3,700), Romania (2,990), and Zambia (2,758). All of these countries have the minimal number of members needed to organize a stake (1,900) but due to other factors the Church has been unable to create stakes in these countries such as low member activity rates, not enough active members concentrated in a single district to form a stake, and an insufficient number of local church leaders to staff both ward and stake callings.

In mainland China, government restrictions on religious freedom and large geographic distances between branches create many challenges that have prevented the organization of a stake. Due to government regulations, foreign members and Chinese nationals cannot meet in the same congregations. The segregation of members requires the Church among foreigners and the Church among Chinese nationals to each work towards establishing stakes independently. The Church has established branches in many of China's most populous cities but most cities do not have the minimum number of congregations needed to organize a stake. The Church also faces challenges finding adequately-large buildings to hold church services due to government restrictions on religious assembly. It may be many more years before any districts reach the needed threshold for a stake to operate, namely 1,900 members and five ward-sized congregations that each have between 15 and 20 active, full-tithe paying Melchizedek Priesthood holders.

In Malaysia, church membership is widely dispersed throughout the country as indicated by the operation of eight districts. In July 2014, only three districts had the minimum number of congregations needed for a stake to function (Kuala Lumpur, Kuching, and Sibu). Missionaries report that the number of active Melchizedek Priesthood holders is often less than five in many branches - one-third of the minimum number needed for a ward to be organized. Member activity rates are moderate to low throughout the country. The recent establishment of the Church in some areas such as in East Malaysia is another challenge for establishing stakes due to few experienced leaders. However, missionaries and local church leaders remain optimistic that stakes will be organized within the foreseeable future, especially in Kuala Lumpur.

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In Liberia, the Church once operated a stake in Monrovia between 2000 and 2007 but discontinued the stake. The stake appeared to be discontinued due to inadequate numbers of active, tithe-paying Melchizedek Priesthood holders, administration and leadership challenges, and low member activity rates. Causal cultural attitudes regarding church attendance and the disruption of church functioning due to war also appeared to influence the Church's decision to discontinue the stake and divide it into two districts. In 2009, missionaries serving in Liberia reported that some local priesthood leaders were mishandling church finances. In the early 2010s, the Church created several new branches and missionaries reported that some past challenges had been rectified, improving the likelihood of the reorganization of a stake in Monrovia sometime in the near future. In 2014, the Church organized a third member district in Monrovia in order to accommodate large numbers of new converts and organize additional branches to reduce travel times. Prospects appear favorable for the Monrovia Liberia Bushrod Island District to become a stake within the foreseeable future.

In Mozambique, church membership is primarily divided between the Church's two districts in Beira and Maputo. The Church experiences low to moderate member activity rates nationwide and has struggled to develop sizable numbers of adequately trained and committed local church leaders. In 2012, missionaries were optimistic about the potential for a stake to be created in Maputo within the near future as the six branches in the district all appeared close to meeting the qualifications to become wards. However, these plans appear on hold as mission leaders have focused on organizing additional branches to help improve accessibility to congregations. Multiple member districts will likely begin operating in Beira and Maputo before stakes

are organized.

In Vanuatu, member activity rates are moderate to high and steady membership growth has occurred. Church membership dispersed on several different islands has resulted in most islands possessing an inadequate number of nominal members for a stake to function Missionaries report that prospects for creating the first stake appear most favorable in Port Vila as it is the only island with several ward-sized branches and a sufficient number of members on church records for a stake to operate. The Church has had many local members serving full-time missions, improving prospects for the creation of the first stake in the near future.

In Guyana, missionaries reported that the Church was close to creating its first stake in Georgetown in 2009 and 2010. Rapid membership growth and the organization of new branches made prospects for creating the first stake promising as the Church came closer to reaching the minimal standards for a stake to function in the late 2000s. However these trends were not sustained as a result of dependence on foreign missionaries to properly function. Low member activity rates and local leadership sustainability problems continue to prevent the organization of a stake and may continue to do so for many more years to come.

In Belize, the Church has attempted to organize a stake for many years as there have been a sufficient number of members and congregations, and the small geographic size of the country would simplify administrative needs. However, the Church has struggled with modest member activity and convert retention rates. Distance from mission headquarters in El Salvador has also resulted in fewer mission resources and attention given toward organizing a stake. Missionaries serving in Belize during the early 2010s indicated that the first stake may be organized within the coming decade due to some progress made with local leadership development.

In Pakistan, the Church has established highly self-sufficient local leadership manpower capable of staffing three member districts headquartered in Islamabad, Karachi, and Lahore. Although the Church in Pakistan as a whole likely exceeds the qualifications to function as a stake at present due to good member activity and convert retention rates, only the Lahore Pakistan District appears to come close to meeting the standards for a stake to operate in regards to the number of congregations and members in the district. The organization of the first stake in the country may occur within the next decade. However, government and societal abuses on religious freedom and missionary activity occurring only among Pakistani Christians pose challenges for growth.

In Romania, the Church's Bucharest Romania District appears close to reaching the minimal standards for a stake to operate in regards to the number of congregations and number of active members. However, the Church in Romania struggles with local leadership development problems, essentially stagnant active membership growth within the past decade, and disappointments with consolidating smaller branches to create ward-sized units as many active members have been lost in the process. Receptivity to LDS outreach has dramatically declined within the past decade resulting in very few convert baptisms year to year. It may take many more years or even decades before the Bucharest Romania District maintains the minimal standards for a stake to operate due to these challenges.

In Zambia, the Church's Lusaka Zambia District has a sufficient number of congregations and nominal members for a stake to function. The Church in Zambia did not have the minimal number of members on its records for a stake to operate (i.e. 1,900) until 2006, and likely did not reach the minimal number of members in its largest district in Lusaka for a stake to operate until 2009 or 2010. District and mission leadership have recently made goals for organizing a stake in Lusaka sometime in 2014 or 2015 due to moderate member activity rates in the district and the number of active, full-tithe paying Melchizedek Priesthood holders nearing the minimal standards for a stake to operate in 2013.