



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

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Self-Sufficiency

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The ability for the Church to meet its own logistical, administrative, and ecclesiastical needs with little to no reliance on nonlocal church resources and manpower constitutes self-sufficiency. The development of self-sufficiency in the Church is paramount to achieving long-term church growth and outreach expansion.

There is no perfect statistic for measuring self-sufficiency. However, there are many different indicators that provide insight into the degree of self-sufficiency achieved by the Church on a congregational, district, stake, mission, country, or regional level, including increases in the number of districts and stakes, increases or decreases in the number of missions and administrative church areas, the frequency and number of members called to international church leadership positions, the number of temples, the presence of a missionary training center (MTC), whether the number of local members serving missions exceeds or fall short of the number of missionaries assigned to a given jurisdiction, and the frequency of Church Education System (CES) employees and other church-employed members serving in local leadership positions.

The creation of new districts generally indicates expansion and growth of the Church into lesser reached areas and the beginning of establishing self-sufficiency in the Church on a local level. Districts require some aspects of local member self-sufficiency and activity in order to staff leadership for both branch and district callings. Increasing numbers of branches in an area often give rise to the need to form a district and increases in the numbers of branches often coincides with sizable numbers of converts joining the Church, remaining active, and holding callings. The creation of stakes in lesser reached areas of the Church is not usually possible as the number of members and congregations is often insufficient, few male members hold the Melchizedek Priesthood, and many active members lack the needed church experience to know how to carry out basic member responsibilities. Local leaders in districts undertake many administrative responsibilities but report to the mission president who acts like the stake president for members in districts. Districts often act as the vehicle for the Church to move from a handful of branches to a stake.

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Stakes provide one of the most reliable and meaningful measures for church growth and self-sufficiency as stakes must meet not only numerical membership requirements but also certain qualifications for gender ratios (i.e. active Melchizedek Priesthood holders to general members), the number of congregations, and the number of active members. Self-sufficiency in church administration, leadership, and ecclesiastical training must be achieved in order for the Church to create a stake in a given location; otherwise mission presidents undertake several of these responsibilities including issuing temple recommends, recommendations for full-time missionary service, and advancements to the Melchizedek Priesthood. Increasing numbers of stakes generally correlate with increasing active membership and improved self-sufficiency of the Church on a local or regional level.

The operation of church areas is less indicative of self-sufficiency in the regional church compared to districts and stakes. Some church leaders report that self-sufficiency problems in leadership appear to prompt the organization of additional areas in many regions of the world. For example, the Church experienced some of the most rapid growth in the number of areas in Latin America during the 1980s and 1990s at a time of rapid church growth which coincided with pervasive local leadership sustainability problems. In 2000, the Europe East Area became the only area of the Church at the time that did not have a stake or an operating temple without its boundaries and also was the area with the smallest church membership. The Church in Eastern Europe has experienced some of the most severe and concerning trends in local leadership sustainability indicated by delays in forming stakes and few active priesthood leaders capable of holding leadership positions. The recent introduction of the Church in Eastern Europe, cultural factors such as low religiosity, and mission policies that rushed baptismal preparation for new converts and yielded in poor convert retention all appear to contribute to these self-sufficiency problems. Church leaders have indicated that the consolidation of areas in Latin America has coincided with strengthening and maturing local leadership.

Regarding the consolidation of the two Brazil areas, Elder Arnold stated that "the consolidation demonstrated the great confidence that our Heavenly Father has in the local leadership of the Church."^[1] Regarding the consolidation of the Chile Area with the South America South Area, former Chile Area President Lawrence E. Corbridge noted that, "as we witness the expansion of the Church and the gospel throughout the world, we see a commensurate expansion of trust extended to local leaders."^[2]

The country of origin of international church leaders sheds insight into the size, strength, and sustainability of leadership. Missiology researchers attend to the country of origin of mission presidents when assessing the self-sufficiency of church leadership for a given location, country, or region. Countries with good self-sufficiency in the Church often have a number of local members called to serve as area authorities, mission presidents, temple presidents, and General Authorities that is commensurate to the size of nominal church membership. The Church oftentimes demonstrates a high degree of local leadership self-sufficiency within countries where the number of members serving as mission presidents equals or exceeds the number of mission presidents serving within a country.

Temples provide important data on self-sufficiency as the announcement of new temples correlates with local leadership capable of meeting temple responsibilities, various measures of member activity like the number of temple recommend holders, and increasing numbers of stakes in a particular area. Increases in the number of temples correlates with increases in the number of stakes; another indicator of self-sufficiency. In 2012, LDS Apostle Elder Dallin H. Oaks noted at the creation of the first stake in India that, "every stake created improves the probability that there will be a temple."^[3] The construction of the first temple in a country often signifies one of the most meaningful and permanent milestones in the longitudinal church growth process that testifies to the strength and maturity of local church membership. There are also many temple-related statistics that provide insight into self-sufficiency and member activity rates, including the number of days a temple is open, the number of endowment sessions scheduled a day, the presence or dependence of senior missionary couples to adequately staff temple ordinance workers, and the frequency of members serving as temple presidents from within the temple district or the same country. Some countries do not have a temple or are underserved by temples due to a low degree of self-sufficiency in the Church and poor member activity rates such as in Nicaragua or Brazil.

The presence of a MTC in a country or region is an indicator of self-sufficiency in the Church as the Church can train members bound for missions within their country or region without relying on MTCs elsewhere. MTCs provide a sense of LDS community within a particular country or area similar to the sense of community present on church colleges and universities in the United States, Mexico, and Oceania. International MTCs reduce the logistical challenges of obtaining needed visas and documentation to permit members in other countries to enter the United States for training at the Provo MTC. The establishment of additional MTCs places more responsibility on local church leaders to prepare youth for full-time missionary service and helps make opportunities more accessible.

The number of members serving missions from a particular country correlates with some aspects of self-sufficiency. When assessing self-sufficiency, missiology researchers examine whether the Church in a country has enough members serving missions at a time to staff the current full-time missionary force present in the country. The Church appears self-sufficient in staffing its full-time missionary force in North America, Central America, most of Oceania, several countries in South America such as Peru and Venezuela, and a few countries in Sub-Saharan Africa such as Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and a few countries in South Asia such as Pakistan and Haiti. The Church appears partially self-sufficient in staffing its full-time missionary force (local members serving missions constituting between one-third and three-quarters of the missionary force assigned to the nation or region) in most of South America, the Philippines, industrialized East Asian countries, the British Isles, a few Southeast Asian countries like Cambodia and Indonesia, a couple countries in the Caribbean like the Dominican Republic and Trinidad and Tobago, and in most Sub-Saharan African countries. The Church appears almost totally reliant on foreign missionaries (local members serving missions constituting less than one-quarter of missionaries assigned) to staff the full-time missionary force in Central and Eastern Europe, most countries in the Caribbean, and virtually all countries opened to missionary work within the past decade due to only handfuls of members serving missions and low member activity rates. The oversaturation of full-time missionaries to medium-sized or small congregations has eroded any previously developed self-sufficiency in leadership, thereby resulting in increased member dependence on missionaries to accomplish ordinary church callings and tasks like serving as a Sunday School teacher or blessing the sacrament.

The prominence of CES employees in congregational, stake, or district leadership sheds light onto the self-sufficiency of the Church. Returned missionaries have observed that CES employees act somewhat like an unofficial paid clergy for the Church in locations where self-sufficiency problems occur. This finding has been correlated with a disconnect between CES employees serving in leadership and lay members and leaders who are not employed by the Church.

Some conditions or outreach expansion approaches improve prospects for achieving self-sufficiency, including government and societal restrictions on religious freedom, church planting, church schools and programs like the Perpetual Education Fund (PEF), and reasonably high standards for convert baptisms.

Government and societal restrictions on religious freedom appear to have fostered self-sufficiency in the Church in several countries as foreign missionaries generally do not serve in these countries, contact with mission and area leadership is limited, and ordinary members must assume responsibility for administering their congregations with no other individuals to fall back upon. Natives constitute the majority of church membership in Burma, mainland China, Laos, Nepal, Pakistan, and Vietnam. These six countries offer unique and interesting insights into LDS growth as government and societal restrictions on religious freedom limit interaction with international LDS membership and leadership. These conditions generally spur self-sufficiency in leadership and church growth, with the greatest growth occurring in mainland China and Pakistan notwithstanding restrictions

on religious freedom and moderate to low levels of receptivity to Christianity. The Church may only assign local members to serve as full-time missionaries in two of these nations (Pakistan and Vietnam) whereas no proselytizing missionaries serve in mainland China, Laos, and Nepal. Only permitting local members to serve full-time missions in these countries has encouraged healthier and more commensurate growth in these nations as there is little if any dependence on full-time missionaries for administrative tasks and there tends to be more accountability for preparing investigators for baptism and retaining new converts. Social and governmental restrictions on religious freedom also require higher levels of commitment from converts to join the Church compared to converts in countries where no such restrictions exists.

Church planting provides a dynamic method to opening more areas to proselytism and establishing congregations that become self-sufficient centers of strength. Reliance on fortuitous events and the assignment of full-time missionaries for church planting has many limitations for church growth. First, the Church relies on a series of uncontrollable events such as members relocating to unreached cities to fulfill the divine commission to take the gospel to the entire world. The speed and consistency of these unintentional and happenstance situations is wholly inadequate to expand outreach in a timely manner. Consequently, there remain dozens of countries that have only a few LDS congregations that operate in just one or two cities resulting in only a tiny percentage of the population reached. Second, full-time missionaries are limited in numbers. Although the number of members serving missions may increase or decrease based on worldwide LDS demographics, reliance on full-time missionaries to expand outreach restricts the pace and breadth of progress. Third, full-time missionaries provide no sense of enduring community and leadership base to allow for the development of self-sufficiency. Missionaries seldom stay assigned to the same congregation for longer than six to nine months. The rapid cycling of missionaries through transfers culminates in reduced accountability for converts baptized and problems sustaining continuity in meeting investigator needs. Furthermore, mission leaders often assign multiple missionary companionships to a single fledgling congregation. Fourth, there are some countries that exhibit good opportunities for church planting that prohibit the assignment of foreign full-time missionaries. Dependence on full-time missionaries for church planting results in little to no progress opening units in additional locations. Fifth, ordinary members experience a reduced sense of duty and responsibility in the church planting process as full-time missionaries unduly accomplish this feat. This results in the reinforcement of the expectation that overt missionary activity and opening unreached areas to the Church lays on the shoulders of full-time missionaries. As discussed in relation to the limited numbers of full-time missionaries serving worldwide, the expansion of the Church is dramatically halted and little growth occurs overall.

PEF has numerous implications for missiology and church growth regarding the development of LDS community, member activity rates, and the financial self-sufficiency of the Church in individual countries. The program has experienced good success among young adults who would be unable to obtain better-paying employment under ordinary circumstances. Improved prospects for attaining higher salaries and stable employment in their home countries may reduce the rate of emigration of returned missionaries to the United States for vocational purposes. The Church has struggled for decades in most countries to keep younger active members who have served missions to remain within their home countries. It is unclear whether PEF has had any noticeable influence on emigration trends of active members to the United States and may take until the year 2020 to determine whether there is any improvement in reducing emigration rates. Countries with LDS institutions number among the most self-sufficient in meeting their own ecclesiastical and administrative needs by reducing the emigration of active members and creating a stronger sense of LDS community.

Reasonably high standards for convert baptisms is also frequently found in locations with high levels of self-sufficiency. This has occurred due to the bidirectional effect of high convert retention resulting in greater availability of church resources and leadership manpower. This results in improved self-sufficiency and fewer converts that become inactive who become a long-term burden.

The outlook for improving the self-sufficiency of the Church on a regional or country level appears good for many countries and regions as indicated by congregational, stake, and district growth and the continued increase in the number of temples worldwide. The opening and expansion of additional MTCs, steady increases in the full-time missionary force, and reduced reliance on nonlocal leadership and missionary manpower to meet local needs will be the greatest indications of developing greater self-sufficiency in most locations. The Church in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Oceania, and Western Europe appears most likely to experience improved self-sufficiency of the Church, whereas there is little indication for improvement in self-sufficiency for the Church in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and the Caribbean.

[1] "First Presidency Announces Consolidation of South America South and Chile Areas," Church News and Events, 14 November 2011.

<http://www.lds.org/church/news/first-presidency-announces-consolidation-of-south-america-south-and-chile-areas>

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<http://www.lds.org/church/news/first-presidency-announces-consolidation-of-south-america-south-and-chile-areas>

[3] Kellerstrass, J., Kellerstrass, P. "First Stake in India Organized," Liahona, October 2012.

<https://www.lds.org/liahona/2012/10/first-stake-in-india-organized>