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

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Mission

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A mission is an administrative unit for missionaries and members in congregations not assigned to stakes that services a specific geographic area led by a mission presidency. The First Presidency calls a couple to traditionally serve a three year term (two years in locations with significant safety, transportation, or health concerns) and assigns administrative and leadership responsibilities to the husband. The wife traditionally undertakes other responsibilities such as teaching and looking after the well-being of missionaries. Missions contain administrative structure to help propagate efficient use of resources and accountability for training and supervising missionaries. A mission president calls two counselors among ordinary members within the mission to provide administrative support and delegate resources between the mission and local leadership. The mission president selects two missionaries to serve as assistants in providing support and maintaining communication between the mission president and young proselytizing missionaries. Assistants also aid in missionary transfers, selecting missionaries to staff hierarchal mission leadership, and other logistical issues. Missions are geographically divided into zones; each zone typically consists of 10 to 20 missionaries. Zones are further divided into districts and each district generally has between four and eight missionaries, or two to four companionships.

In 1837, the Church organized its first formal full-time mission called the British Mission. Additional missions created prior to year-end 1850 included the Eastern States (1839), Society Islands [Tahitian] (1844), Welsh (1845), California (1846), Scandinavian (1850), Italian (1850), Swiss (1850), and Sandwich Islands (1850) Missions. The number of missions reached nine in 1850 and 20 in 1900, 43 in 1950, 58 in 1960, 93 in 1970, 188 in 1980, 256 in 1990, 334 in 2000, and 340 in 2010.

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Between 2000 and 2012, the Church created 48 new missions. Provided with the year created in parentheses, these missions include Illinois Nauvoo (2000), Mexico Mexico City West (2001), Washington Everett (2001), Arizona Mesa (2002), Cape Verde Praia (2002), Colorado Colorado Springs (2002), Nigeria Ibadan (2002), Nigeria Uyo (2002), Texas Lubbock (2002), Washington Kennewick (2002), Georgia Atlanta North (2003), Mexico Guadalajara South (2003), Chile Concepcion South (2003), Philippines Laoag (2004), Mozambique Maputo (2005), Ghana Cape Coast (2005), Uganda Kampala (2005), Brazil Cuiaba (2006), Marshall Islands Majuro (2006), Philippines Butuan (2006), Puerto Rico San Juan East (2007), Sierra Leone Freetown (2007), Ukraine Dnepropetrovsk (2007), India New Delhi (2007), Brazil Teresina (2009), Democratic Republic of Congo Lubumbashi (2010), Guatemala Retalhuleu (2010), Mexico Mexico City Northwest (2010), Mexico Villahermosa (2010), New Mexico Farmington (2010), Nicaragua Managua North (2010), Peru Cusco (2010), Peru Lima West (2010), Philippines Iloilo (2010), Utah St. George (2010), Benin Cotonou (2011), Mexico Mexico City Southeast (2011), Peru Chiclayo (2011), Philippines Quezon City North (2011), Zambia Lusaka (2011), Colombia Medellin (2012), Ghana Kumasi (2012), Mexico Puebla North (2012), Mexico Xalapa (2012), Nevada Reno (2012), Vanuatu Port Vila (2012), Utah Salt Lake City Central (2012), and Utah Salt Lake City West (2012). In order to accommodate a massive surge in the number of members serving full-time missions, the Church organized 58 new missions in 2013 alone. These 58 missions include the Angola Luanda, Argentina Comodoro Rivadavia, Argentina Posadas, Arizona Gilbert, Arizona Scottsdale, Australia Sydney North, Bolivia Santa Cruz North, Botswana Gaborone (later renamed Botswana/Namibia), Brazil Curitiba South, Brazil Fortaleza East, Brazil Juiz de Fora, Brazil Natal, Brazil Piracicaba, Brazil Santos, Brazil São Paulo West, California Bakersfield, California Irvine, California Rancho Cucamonga, Chile Santiago South, Colorado Fort Collins, Ecuador Guayaquil West, Ecuador Quito North, El Salvador San Salvador East, Georgia Macon, Ghana Accra West, Guatemala Cobán, Honduras San Pedro Sula West, Idaho Nampa, Idaho Twin Falls, Illinois Chicago West, Japan Tokyo South, Kansas Wichita, Korea Seoul South, Liberia Monrovia, México Cancún, México Ciudad Juarez, México Ciudad Obregón, México México City Chalco, México Pachuca, México Queretaro, México Reynosa, México Saltillo, New Zealand Hamilton, Nigeria Benin City, Ohio Cincinnati, Oregon Salem, Papua New Guinea Lae, Perú Huancayo, Perú Iquitos, Philippines Cavite, Philippines Cebu East, Philippines Legaspi, Philippines Urdaneta, Ukraine L'viv, Utah Salt Lake City East, Virginia Chesapeake, Washington Federal Way, and Washington Vancouver.

Since 2000, the Church has discontinued 36 missions in France Bordeaux (2001), Germany Dusseldorf (2001), Japan Kobe

(2001), Austria Vienna (2002), Netherlands Amsterdam (2002), England Bristol (2002), Italy Padova (2002), Portugal Lisbon North (2002), Germany Leipzig (2003), Spain Las Palmas (2006), Japan Tokyo South (2007), Brazil Belo Horizonte East (2009), California San Francisco (2009), Nigeria Lagos East (2009), Pennsylvania Harrisburg (2009), Taiwan Kaohsiung (2009), Australia Sydney North (2010), Australia Melbourne West (2010), Germany Hamburg (2010), Illinois Chicago South (2010), Illinois Peoria (2010), Ireland Dublin (2010), Italy Catania (2010), Japan Hiroshima (2010), Korea Seoul West (2010), New Jersey Cherry Hill (2010), Ohio Cincinnati (2010), Puerto Rico San Juan East (2010), Spain Bilbao (2010), Switzerland Zurich (2010), Canada Toronto East (2011), Connecticut Hartford (2011), Georgia Macon (2011), Portugal Porto (2011), Switzerland Geneva (2011), and Russia Moscow West (2012).

The number of stakes, districts, and independent branches not assigned to a stake or district (also called "mission branches") significantly varies mission to mission. On average, a mission in the United States services 12 or 13 stakes and no districts. On the other hand, the average mission outside the United States services five or six stakes and two districts. The reason for the discrepancy is attributed to the density of LDS populations, the self-sufficiency of local leadership, and receptivity. The Church in the United States has a smaller missionary-to-member ratio than outside the United States due to higher densities of Latter-day Saints, more self-sufficient local leadership, and lower receptivity. Missions outside the United States often serve as a vehicle for local leadership support and training, requiring greater numbers of missionaries to service areas with comparatively fewer Latter-day Saints. In late 2014, there were five missions that had no stakes or districts within their geographical boundaries, including the Bulgaria Sofia, Russia Rostov-na-Donu, Russia Vladivostok, Russia Yekaterinburg, and Ukraine Dnepropetrovsk Missions. Only independent mission branches operated in these missions at the time due to few active members and large geographical distances preventing the organization of stakes and districts.

The geographic size of missions also significantly vary. On average, a mission encompassed 344,000 square kilometers as of 2012, or an area the size of Germany. The smallest missions (less than 500 square miles or 1,300 square kilometers) operate in urban areas where there are sizable LDS populations and moderate to high numbers of convert baptisms per LDS missionary such as in Utah (Utah Salt Lake City Temple Square [only a few city blocks], Utah Salt Lake City Central [less than 50 square miles] and Utah Salt Lake City West Missions), southern California (California Anaheim, California Long Beach, and California Los Angeles Missions), Mexico City (Mexico Mexico Northeast Mission), and Lima, Peru (Peru Lima Central). The largest missions (more than 772,000 square miles or two million square kilometers) operate in countries where there are small LDS populations, a recent church establishment, few convert baptisms per missionary, and vast, sparsely populated or uninhabited areas such as in Australia (Australia Perth Mission), Canada (Canada Montreal), Russia (Russia Moscow, Russia Yekaterinburg, Russia Novosibirsk [includes most of Siberia and Kazakhstan], and Russia Vladivostok Missions), India (India New Delhi Mission [includes northern India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and Pakistan), Uganda (Uganda Kampala Mission [includes Djibouti, Ethiopia, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda), and Denmark (Denmark Copenhagen Mission [includes Denmark, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and Greenland]).

The number of people within the boundaries of a mission significantly varies. In late 2012, the average mission serviced 14.6 million people. The missions that service the fewest people (less than half a million) are located in Oceania (Marshall Islands Majuro, Micronesia Guam, Samoa Apia, Tahiti Papeete, and Tonga Nuku'alofa Missions) and the Intermountain West of the United States. For example, all nine missions based in Utah appeared to have fewer than half a million people within their boundaries. The missions that service the largest populations (over 100 million people) operate in locations with a recent church establishment or government restrictions on religious freedom. These missions generally operate in Sub-Saharan Africa (Nigeria Enugu and Uganda Kampala [includes Uganda, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Rwanda, South Sudan, and Sudan] Missions) and Asia (Cambodia Phnom Penh [includes Cambodia and Vietnam], India Bangalore [includes southern India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives], India New Delhi [includes northern India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and Pakistan], Indonesia Jakarta [includes Indonesia and Timor-Leste], and Thailand Bangkok [includes Thailand, Burma, and Laos] Missions).

The Church creates new missions based on the receptivity of the population, status of religious freedom in regards to the government and society, availability of full-time missionary manpower, and church growth as indicated by increasing numbers of congregations, stakes, and districts. Prior to 2000, the Church frequently organized new missions that originally administered areas with fewer than 1,000 members. For example, the Church opened most of its missions in Eastern Europe before there were 200 members in an entire country. Since 2000, the Church has only created new missions to service areas with 1,000 or more members on church records. Decreasing geographical distances between locations with full-time missionaries assigned has also contributed to the creation of new missions such as in Russia. In recent years, the Church has focused on creating new missions in regions where there are increasing numbers of members serving full-time missions such as in some countries in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa. The creation of new missions has also proceeded renewed outreach expansion efforts in some locations as larger numbers of missionaries are needed to open additional areas to proselytism.

The Church consolidates missions for many reasons including the population exhibiting low receptivity to the LDS Church, declining numbers of missionaries assigned to a mission, insufficient numbers of missionaries to staff current missions simultaneously open additional missions in more favorable locations, and improved local leadership self-sustainability. For example, the Church closed several of its European missions in the early 2010s largely due to improved self-sufficiency of local leadership requiring less intervention from the mission president and missionaries, and a growing need to redistribute limited missionary manpower to more needy areas. Changing political conditions and societal abuses of religious freedom have prompted the closure of some missions. For example, in 1992 the Church established two missions in central Nigeria in Jos and Ilorin. However, a year later the Church closed the Nigeria Ilorin Mission and relocated the Nigeria Jos Mission to Enugu primarily due to religious violence between Christians and Muslims, and subsequent political instability.

In late 2014, there were 40 countries not assigned to a mission that comprised 29.57 million square kilometers, or one-fifth of the world's land area. The combined population of these countries totaled 1.95 billion in mid-2012, or 28% of the world's

population. Of these countries not assigned to a mission, 18 were in Africa (Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Egypt, Eritrea, Guinea , Guinea-Bissau, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Senegal, Seychelles, Somalia, The Gambia, Tunisia, and Western Sahara), 15 were in the Middle East (Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen), four in Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) , two in East Asia (mainland China and North Korea), and one in South Asia (Afghanistan). The Church does not engage in any formal proselytism activity in these 40 nations and has not assigned these countries to a mission due to government restrictions on religious freedom, societal abuses of religious freedom in some countries, or few or no known native Latter-day Saints. At least 15 of the 40 countries have at a minimum one branch or group functioning. Any church activity in countries not assigned to a mission is supervised by the area presidency.

The Church limits the missionaries it assigns to some missions based on nationality, gender, and language skills. These limitations can change over time due to changes in security and safety conditions. Staffed by female "sister missionaries," the Utah Salt Lake City Temple Square Mission solely provides for the Church's visitor sites around Church Headquarters and includes a diverse missionary population from scores of countries around the world to help meet language needs of visitors, and to provide visitors with a glimpse of the Church's international membership. The Church does not assign sister missionaries to some missions due to security concerns. The full-time missionary force is restricted to just local members in some missions like the Haiti Port-au-Prince Mission where only Haitians serve as full-time missionaries due to security concerns and low living standards. Low living standards and safety concerns have contributed to the Church restricting the country of origin when assigning missionaries to some other missions, such as in Papua New Guinea and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Church has traditionally only assigned missionaries to East Asian countries who speak English as a first language or who speak the language of the country as a native language such as South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan due to limited resources available for foreign language instruction.

There has generally been a positive correlation between the number of missionaries serving and the number of new missions created or discontinued. For example, between 1970 and 1980 the number of missions more than doubled from 93 to 188 (102% increase) and the number of missionaries called to serve a year more than doubled from 7,590 to 16,600 (119% increase). However, between 1981 and 1986 the number of missions increased from 188 to 192 (2.1% increase) and the number of missionaries called a year increased 17,800 to 20,798 (16.4% increase). Between 2000 and 2010 the number of missions increased from 334 to 340 (1.8% increase) and the total number of missionaries serving decreased from 60,784 to 52,225 (14% decrease). With the recent surge in the number of members serving full-time missions, the Church will likely organize many new missions within the next decade if this trend continues.