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

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**Comparative Growth Research**

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The LDS Church is not the only religious group that emphasizes worldwide proselytism with the aim to reach every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. Other denominations and religious groups such as Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, and the Baha'i Faith have pursued fervent outreach expansion efforts throughout the world since their initial organization. The founding of the LDS Church predates many other proselytism-focused groups but Latter-day Saints nonetheless have experienced less worldwide growth than most of these denominations. Church growth researchers conduct comparative growth analyses between the LDS Church and other missionary-focused religious groups to ascertain the receptivity of local populations to nontraditional religious groups and how differing strategies for outreach have impacted growth trends among these denominations.

Church growth and sociology researchers frequently compare the growth of the LDS Church with the Seventh Day Adventist Church and Jehovah's Witnesses as all three denominations engage in fervent proselytism activity; possess beliefs, practices, and organizations distinct from mainstream Protestantism but within the realms of Christianity; experience frequent discrimination and marginalization by traditional Christian groups; and maintain current headquarters in the United States during the nineteenth century. Additionally, all three denominations were founded in the nineteenth century within the northeastern United States.

In 1830, the LDS Church was formally organized and reported 280 members by the end of the year.[1] At year-end 2013, there were nearly 15.1 million members on church records and 29,253 congregations. Approximately 30% of worldwide membership appeared to regularly attend church at the time accounting for approximately 4.5 million active members. Within the past decade, the Church has generally reported an annual increase of approximately 300,000 members, 250,000 converts, 100,000-120,000 children of record, and 200-400 congregations. At year-end 2013, Latter-day Saints report the most nominal members in the United States (6.40 million), Mexico (1.34 million), Brazil (1.25 million), Philippines (688,117), Chile (583,359), Peru (543,869), Argentina (421,971), Guatemala (247,708), Ecuador (220,247), and Canada (190,265). In early 2013, there were 36 sovereign countries and approximately a dozen dependencies without an LDS presence. The LDS Church reported that there were 176 languages which had at least one LDS material translated as of year-end 2011.[2]

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In 1863, the Seventh Day Adventist Church was formally organized in the United States with 3,500 members.[3] By 2012, Adventists reported 17.6 million members worldwide assembling in 73,526 churches[4] and over 65,000 companies. Most members counted on Adventist records attend church regularly. Within the past decade, Adventists have generally reported an annual increase of approximately 500,000 to 700,000 members, 2,000 churches, 1,000-2,000 companies, and one million baptisms.[5] Adventists report that as many as 25 to 30 million attend church services weekly; approximately twice as many as on church records.[6] Adventists report that if inactive members were not removed from church records, there would currently be as many as 24 or 25 million Adventists worldwide.[7] In 2011, Adventists reported more than half a million members in 10 countries including, India (1.56 million), Brazil (1.29 million), United States (1.06 million), Zambia (747,539), Philippines (734,929), Kenya (695,153), Mexico (689,816), Zimbabwe (679,849), Democratic Republic of the Congo (539,228), and Rwanda (505,235).[8] In 2012, all countries and dependencies of the world have an Adventist presence except 14 locations including Brunei, Djibouti, the Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Greenland, Guernsey, Jersey, Maldives, Saint Barthelemy, Saint Pierre et Miquelon, San Marino, Somalia, Wallis and Futuna, and Western Sahara. In 2012, Adventist leaders reported that only 11% of worldwide membership was Caucasian.[9] In 2010, Adventists published materials into 377 languages and performed oral work in 921 languages.[10]

In the 1870s, the first Jehovah's Witness congregations were organized in New England.[11] Witnesses began proselytism efforts outside the United States around 1900.[12] In 2012, Witnesses reported 7.78 million proselytizing members, 111,719

congregations, and a memorial attendance of 19 million.[13] In 2012, all countries and dependencies in the Americas, Europe, Oceania, and Sub-Saharan Africa had a Witness presence except Comoros, Djibouti, the Pitcairn Islands, Somalia, and Tokelau. Witnesses were either banned or did not have a reported presence in Afghanistan, Brunei, mainland China, Iran, Laos, most countries in the Middle East and North Africa, and Singapore. The 10 countries with the most active Jehovah's Witnesses in 2011 included United States (1.2 million), Brazil (742,425), Mexico (739,954), Nigeria (330,316), Italy (245,657), Japan (218,057), Philippines (176,001), Democratic Republic of the Congo (173,416), Russia (165,447), and Germany (165,387). In late 2012, Jehovah's Witnesses published Bibles and Bible-based literature in 540 languages.[14]

The number of countries and dependencies with an LDS presence is slightly less than Adventists and Witnesses, but the latter two denominations have extended significantly greater penetration of outreach compared to the LDS Church in most countries. In Latin America, Adventists and Witnesses operate in approximately the same number of cities, towns, and villages as the LDS Church in many countries. However, Adventists and Witnesses maintain a significantly more widespread presence than the LDS Church in several countries such as Brazil and Colombia. In the United States and Canada, Latter-day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh Day Adventists operate in approximately the same number of locations although the distribution of congregations in these two countries significantly varies by denomination, with Latter-day Saints extending significantly more widespread outreach in the Intermountain West than Adventists and Witnesses. In Sub-Saharan Africa, Witness and Adventist outreach completely overshadows the extend of LDS outreach in virtually every country. In Europe, Adventists or Witnesses extend more penetrating outreach than the LDS Church in every country. Most countries in Asia have a more widespread Adventist and Witness presence than Latter-day Saints. Oceania is the only world region where the LDS Church generally extends outreach in more locations than Witnesses or Adventists. However, their remain a few countries where these two denominations have established congregations in more locations than the LDS Church such as Australia, Fiji, and the Solomon Islands.

Adventists and Witnesses have not only been more successful than the LDS Church in expanding outreach but have also achieved higher convert retention and member activity rates. Adventists periodically audit membership records and remove the names of individuals who no longer affiliate as members or who cannot be located.[15] However, there are no precise data available on Adventist activity rates. Worldwide Adventist activity rates may be as high as 80% considering inactive members are eventually removed from church records. Witnesses only publish data on active membership but activity rates appear substantially higher than Latter-day Saints. Adventists and Witnesses emphasized member-missionary participation, generally lack a full-time missionary staff, rapidly open additional areas to proselytism, and require prospective members to prepare for several months prior to officially joining these denominations.

Other religious groups provide insight into comparative growth issues with the LDS Church. The Baha'i Faith was founded in the mid-nineteenth century in present-day Iran. In 2012, the Baha'i Faith had an active presence in every sovereign country with the exception of North Korea and Vatican City.[16] There are approximately five million Baha'i worldwide from over 2,000 ethnic and cultural backgrounds.[17] Pentecostalism originated in the early 1900s in Topeka, Kansas. Today Pentecostals and Charismatic Christians number approximately 584 million, or one-quarter of the worldwide Christian population.[18] Evangelicals number approximately 286 million worldwide, or 13% of Christians worldwide.[19] These groups have aggressively opened additional areas to missionary activity and some have professional clergy to orchestrate church planting efforts. Additionally, members in these denominations number among the most outspoken in sharing their beliefs with others.

There are limitations to comparing the growth of the LDS Church to other religious groups when assessing receptivity and outreach approaches. Some religious groups do not publish precise data or lack the organizational structure to report membership statistics due to little, if any, centralization of leadership such as Pentecostals and Charismatic Christians. The method of counting membership depends by religious group. Some groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses report only active members who engage in weekly proselytism activity in membership totals. Adventists report the number of individuals who join the church in each country, but audit records and eventually remove the names of those who are no longer active or cannot be located. Consequently, these differences in determining membership results in an "oranges to apples" comparison when researches conduct comparative growth studies between these denominations.

The outlook for the growth of other outreach-centered religious groups appears comparable to the LDS Church as most denominations will likely experience steady, linear growth within the foreseeable future. The recent surge in the LDS full-time missionary force may accelerate LDS growth for several years, especially if these increases are sustained. However, growth trends for religious groups generally depend on the speed and timeliness of mission resource allocation when previously unreached or lesser-reached locations open to proselytism. The proactive efforts of religious leaders in all of these denominations to open new areas to missionary activity, maintain high membership qualifications, and emphasize self-sufficiency in local administration are key to propagating growth regardless theological differences.

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[4] "General Conference," www.adventistyearbook.org, retrieved 11 February 2013. http://www.adventistyearbook.org/default.aspx?page=ViewAdmField&AdmFieldID=GC

[5] "General Conference (1901-Present)," www.adventiststatistics.org, retrieved 11 February 2013. http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldID=G10001

[6] "Adventist Church Membership Audits Planned, Revised Figures Contemplated," www.adventistreview.org, retrieved February 11th, 2013. http://www.adventistreview.org/article/4791/archives/issue-2011-1527/2011-ac-update-3-adventist-church-membership-audits-plann

[7] "Adventist Church Membership Audits Planned, Revised Figures Contemplated," www.adventistreview.org, 9 October 2011. http://www.adventistreview.org/article/4791/archives/issue-2011-1527/2011-ac-update-3-adventist-church-membership-audits-plann

[8] www.adventiststatistics.org

[9] "The World Church," www.adventist.org, retrieved 19 September 2012. http://www.adventist.org//world-church/facts-and-figures/history/index.html

[10] "Statistical Report for 2010," http://docs.adventistarchives.org/docs/ASR/ASR2010.pdf?q=docs/ASR/ASR2010.pdf

[11] 1975 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses, Watch Tower, pages 38–39

[12] Holden, Andrew (2002). Jehovah's Witnesses: Portrait of a Contemporary Religious Movement. Routledge. p. 18.

[13] "2013 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses," http://www.jw.org/en/publications/

[14] "About Jehovah's Witnesses," www.jw.org, retrieved 20 September 2012. http://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/

[15] "Adventist Church Membership Audits Planned, Revised Figures Contemplated," www.adventistreview.org, retrieved February 11th, 2013. http://www.adventistreview.org/article/4791/archives/issue-2011-1527/2011-ac-update-3-adventist-church-membership-audits-plann

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[17] "Quick History of the Baha'i Faith," www.bahai.us, retrieved 11 February 2013. http://www.bahai.us/welcome/founders-and-history/history/

[18] "Global Christianity," Pew Research Forum, December 2011. http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedFiles/Topics/Religious_Affiliation/Christian/Christianity-fullreport-web.pdf

[19] "Global Christianity," Pew Research Forum, December 2011. http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedFiles/Topics/Religious_Affiliation/Christian/Christianity-fullreport-web.pdf