



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

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Missionary (full-time)

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A missionary is a member of the Church who is formally called and set apart to serve either within a specific congregation (branch or ward) or in a mission as a full-time missionary. Full-time missionaries obtain a recommend to serve a mission following approval from their local church leader who sends the application to Church Headquarters. A member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles assigns missionary applicants to a specific mission that is approved by the President of the Church and mailed to the missionary applicant. Young missionaries generally get endowed at the temple prior to beginning their missions. In 2007, 80% of full-time missionaries were young unmarried men, 13% were single women, and seven percent were senior missionary couples.^[1] As of April 2014, 64% of full-time missionaries were young unmarried men, 28% were single women, and eight percent were senior missionary couples.^[2]

Prior to October 2012, young men typically served missions between ages 19 and 25 although the Church in 48 countries^[3] lowered the minimum age to 18 due to mandatory military service and educational constraints for up to a decade previously. Young women typically served missions between ages 21 and 30. In October 2012, the Church announced that, after much "study and prayer," that the minimum age for full-time missionary service was lowered to 18 for men and 19 for women in order to expand the opportunities for members to serve full-time missions.^[4] Male members serve missions for a period of approximately 24 months whereas female members serve missions for 18 months. Middle-aged and older single women may serve as senior missionaries whereas their male counterparts cannot serve missions alone. Married members may serve as senior missionaries once they no longer have dependent minor children living in the home. Most senior missionary couples appear to serve between ages 55 and 75. The Church also has church service missionaries who do not engage in proselytism but rather provide humanitarian and development work. Young men who cannot serve a traditional proselytizing full-time mission due to medical, mental, or developmental challenges often serve as church service missionaries as these responsibilities can more easily accommodate their unique needs. Missionaries must finance their own missions and receive no pay or reimbursement for their service. Oftentimes a missionary's family or home congregation assists in financing a mission.

Full-time missionaries receive formal training in one of 15 missionary training center (MTC) scattered throughout the world. MTCs orient new missionaries to worthiness standards and provide training on church doctrine, developing personal gospel study habits, Preach My Gospel, the missionary lessons, and teaching and proselytism skills. For missionaries learning a new language, MTCs provide basic language instruction and lay the foundation for missionaries to acquire competent communication skills in their mission language. Not all missionaries receive language training when designated to speak a new language in the mission field, namely for languages in which the Church has just recently begun to teach in or where there are no qualified teachers available in MTCs.

In the mission field, a young missionary is paired with a companion of the same gender and supervised by various mission leaders - most notably the mission president. The mission president serves with his wife generally for three years over a mission, and acts as the priesthood and ecclesiastical leader for all missionaries within his jurisdiction. The mission president and his assistants arrange missionary companionships, assign missionaries to specific proselytism areas, and take care of logistical issues. In some situations, the Church will often call local members who are considering full-time missionary service on "mini-missions" to serve for six weeks with a full-time missionary companion. This practice generally occurs in locations where there is a shortage of missionaries assigned to a mission but where there are opportunities for growing the number of local members serving missions.

Missionaries are required to meet certain worthiness standards and moral conduct that exceeds that of ordinary members. These standards include rules and guidelines for going to sleep and getting up at specified times, maintaining dress and grooming, avoiding news media and unapproved music and videos, limiting contact with family and friends to once a week by email/letter and twice a year by phone, and following protocol for teaching and fellowshiping investigators and members of the

opposite gender. The primary purpose of these missionary standards centers on reducing worldly distractions and following a lifestyle that fosters a heightened sense of spirituality. Church leaders have implemented some of these standards to reduce the risk of missionaries encountering legal situations, disobeying general membership standards of moral conduct implemented by the Church, and minimizing safety and health hazards. Missionaries who fail to meet these standards or wish to end their missions prematurely may do so and are sent back to their hometowns.

In the early 2000s, the Church raised the worthiness and preparation standards for full-time missionary service. Worthiness issues could constitute a wide range of sins resulting from not following church teachings. However, local church leaders were particularly advised that many of these personal worthiness issues were related to immorality and the Law of Chastity. The heightened standards for missionary service and changes in the average size of an LDS family culminated in a decline of approximately 10,000 missionaries serving within a two year period during the early 2000s.

In 1830 - the year Joseph Smith officially organized the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints - 16 members were called to serve as missionaries. In 1834, the Church for the first time called more than 100 members on a mission in a single year. However, the Church did not regularly call so many missionaries on a yearly basis until the mid 1870s. In 1899, the number of missionaries called a year surpassed 1,000 for the first time. Additional milestones included the first year when more than 5,000 were called (1961), more than 10,000 were called (1975), more than 20,000 were called (1986), and more than 30,000 were called (1996).^[5] In 2007, the Church reported that the number of members who have been called to serve as a missionary reached one million since the organization of the Church in 1830.^[6]

In 1977, the Church began reporting the number of missionaries serving as of the end of the year along with other church statistics in annual general conference sessions. That year the Church reported 25,300 full-time missionaries serving worldwide. The number of full-time missionaries reached 30,000 in 1986, 40,000 in 1990, 50,000 in 1996, 60,000 in 2000, 70,000 in 2013, and 80,000 in 2013. Between 1977 and 2002, the number of full-time missionaries increased an average of four percent a year. In 2003 and 2004, the number of full-time missionaries declined by over 10,000; 17% of the missionary force reported in 2002. Between 2004 and 2010, the number of missionaries fluctuated from a high of 53,164 in 2006 to a low of 51,067 in 2004. In 2011, the number of missionaries increased by six percent to 55,410. Due to the reduced age for missionary service, the number of members serving full-time missions mushroomed from 58,990 at year-end 2012 to 83,035 at year-end 2013; a 41% increase in a single year. In October 2014, there were 88,000 missionaries serving worldwide; a six percent increase from the beginning of the year.

The percentage of young men from North America who serve full-time missions fluctuated for most of the twentieth century. Over a period of several decades, the Priesthood Executive Committee surveyed 10,000 young men in the United States and Canada on various indicators of member activity and missionary service. Researchers found that in the early 1940s approximately five percent of young men served missions and that this statistic increased to 20% in the late 1940s and 30% in the early 1960s. Between the early 1960s and early 1980s the percentage of young men serving missions varied from 25-35% and was 32% in 1981.^[7] In the early 2010s, it was unclear what percentage of young men served missions. However, this percentage had appeared to noticeably decline in the 2000s from that of the 1970s and 1980s.

The Church has heavily relied on North American members to staff its worldwide missionary force from the 1830s to present day. In 1990, the Church reported that 70% of its worldwide missionary force were Americans or Canadians.^[8] In early 2012, North American missionaries appeared to constitute approximately 80% of the Church's worldwide missionary force^[9] notwithstanding church membership in the United States and Canada constituting only 44% of the world total. In 2010, two-thirds of missionaries were trained in the Church's Provo Missionary Training Center (MTC) in Utah notwithstanding 14 other MTCs operating in other areas of the world.^[10]

The number of members serving full-time missions strongly correlates with the creation of new missions and consolidation of less-productive ones. 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). In 2013, the number of missions increased by 16.7% to help accommodate the massive surge in the number of members serving full-time missions at the time.

The number of members serving missions from a particular country provides excellent insight into church growth and other member activity indicators. Missiology researchers ascertain the self-sustainability of the Church within individual countries by assess whether the Church has enough members serving missions at a time to staff the current full-time missionary force present in a particular 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, a few countries in Sub-Saharan Africa such as Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 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 Church remains highly dependent on foreign missionaries in order for branches and even wards to properly function in many countries due to inadequate numbers of active, knowledgeable priesthood leaders among local membership. Missionaries have periodically served as branch presidents in many Eastern European, Sub-Saharan Africa, East Asian, Caribbean, and Latin American countries as no local priesthood holder is available to serve in this capacity. 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.

Upon completion of missionary service, returned missionaries provide valuable manpower to staff local congregations due to their experience, dedication, testimony, and practical application of church teachings within and outside a church setting. The increase in returned missionaries has fueled congregational growth and the maturation of districts into stakes in many locations. Returned missionaries constitute the majority of language instructors in MTCs as many languages in which the Church conducts proselytism work have few speakers in the local population to serve as instructors.

The percentage of members who serve a mission varies by country depending on member activity rates, cultural conditions, and the duration of an LDS presence. The Church in Mongolia is the country with the largest percentage of nominal membership serving a full-time mission. Church leaders report that approximately 10% of members have served a full-time mission and that they know of no other country that has as high of a percentage of returned missionaries among nominal membership. The Church in some countries in Southeastern Europe, the Lesser Antilles, and Asia has had only a few members - if any - serve full-time missions.

Prospects appear favorable for increasing the number of members serving full-time missions worldwide due to the recent increase in the number of members serving missions in the early 2010s, increasing numbers of members serving missions in many countries with a small LDS presence, and the lowering of the minimum mission age to 18 and 19 for men and women, respectively. The decreased LDS family size in North America over the past few decades and the increasingly influence of secularism on American culture will continue to pose challenges for the Church to consistently increase the number of members serving missions from the United States and Canada.

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[2] "Church Provides Additional Missionary Statistics," news.lds.org, 5 April 2014.
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[3] Nelson, Russell M. "Church lowers age requirements for missionary service," www.mormonnewsroom.org, 6 October 2012.
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[4] "President Thomas S. Monson Announced Lower Age Requirement for Missionary Service," www.mormonnewsroom.org, 6 October 2012.
<http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/president-thomas-s-monson-announced-lower-age-requirement-for-missionary-service>

[5] Deseret News 2012 Church Almanac, p. 202

[6] "One Million Missionaries, Thirteen Million Members," www.mormonnewsroom.org, 25 June 2007.
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[7] "News of the Church," Ensign, December 1984. <http://www.lds.org/ensign/1984/12/news-of-the-church>

[8] "Policy equalizes missionary expenses," LDS Church News, 1 December 1990.
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[9] Stewart, David G. Jr. Law of the Harvest: Practical Principles of Effective Missionary Work, p. 349.
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