



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

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National Outreach and the Percentage Reached by LDS Congregations

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National outreach is defined as the degree to which the Church makes its worship services and proselytism efforts accessible to the population of a country. In other words, national outreach indicates how much progress the Church has achieved establishing a permanent presence accessible to the entire population. National outreach is best expressed as a percentage of the population that resides in locations where LDS congregations operate as ward and branches represent a permanent church presence which also function as a mission outreach centers from which to base proselytism efforts. The percentage of the population reached by LDS congregations and proselytism efforts in a country generally rises over time as the Church experiences natural growth, retains new converts, and the number of full-time missionaries assigned increases. Notwithstanding the growth of the Church to over 14 million nominal members, nearly 29,000 wards and branches, and almost 3,000 stakes, the Church remains accessible only to a minority of the world's population. Approximately one-fifth of the world's population resides in an urban area that has an LDS congregation which they can legally attend.

Several factors influence national outreach expansion such as the frequency and activity status of member families relocating to locations without an LDS unit nearby, mission and area policies on opening additional locations to missionary work, government restrictions on religious freedom, the receptivity of the population, and the availability of mission resources. The interplay between geography, population size and density, urbanization, and political, societal, and economic conditions also factor into the feasibility of outreach expansion and sustainability. Countries experience the most rapid expansion of national outreach if active members relocate in sizable numbers to previously unreached cities, mission and area leaders promote the expansion of the Church into additional locations, laws and government policies do not restrict religious groups from entering new areas and openly proselytizing, receptivity is high, the population is predominantly urban, and sufficient mission resources are available to provide outreach support. The percentage of nominal members in the population also correlates with the percentage of the population reached by the Church in many countries as countries with higher percentages of nominal members are more likely to have membership distributed throughout the entire country. For example, in Oceania nominal church membership constitutes over 10% of the national population in several countries and dependences, and most of these areas with high percentages of Latter-day Saints also experience high national outreach, with 90% or more of the population residing in a location with a ward or branch.

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Calculating the percentage of the population that resides in cities with an LDS congregation offers insight into the degree to which the Church has fulfilled the divine commission to take the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. LDS congregations operate in cities and towns populated by 90% or more of the population in 12 countries and dependencies (Macau - 100%, Nauru - 100%, Niue - 100%, Singapore - 100%, United States Virgin Islands - 96%, American Samoa - 95%, Palau - 95%, Tonga - 95%, Hong Kong - 94%, New Zealand - 90%, Northern Mariana Islands - 90%, and Samoa - 90%). Among countries with at least one independent branch and formal missionary activity, less than 10% of the population is reached by LDS congregations in Ethiopia (4%), Sri Lanka (5%), India (5%), Vietnam (6%), Burundi (6%), Uganda (8%), Tanzania (8%), Rwanda (8%), Malawi (8%), and Kazakhstan (8%). The 10 most populous countries of the world provided with 2012 population estimates and the percentage of the population residing in cities and towns with at least one LDS congregation include China (1.343 billion people, 10-15% reached), India (1.205 billion people, 5% reached), the United States (314 million people, 75% reached), Indonesia (248 million people, 11% reached), Brazil (206 million people, 65% reached), Pakistan (190 million people, 16% reached), Nigeria (170 million people, 23% reached), Bangladesh (161 million people, 8% reached), Russia (138 million people, 33% reached), and Japan (127 million people, 60% reached). Of the ten most populous countries, the Church's national outreach is higher than 50% in only three countries (the United States, Brazil, and Japan). The Church does not engage in formal proselytism in one of the most populous countries (Bangladesh), and performs formal proselytism with full-time missionaries but targets non-Muslims, or is restricted to teaching only non-Muslims, in Indonesia, Pakistan, and Nigeria.

There are several limitations when using the percentage of the population residing in locations with LDS congregations as a

measurement of national outreach. One barrier is that many populous cities with only one congregation are considered reached but in actuality are largely untouched by missionary activity as most live long distances away from the meetinghouse. For example, the entire population of Mumbai, India would be considered reached under this definition as the Church maintains one branch in this metropolis. However, as of 2014 this small branch serviced a city inhabited by 20.9 million people, met in a location on the outskirts of the city, and had had full-time missionaries assigned for less than two years. Although most of the population in Mumbai could access the meetinghouse if they had the desire to attend church, the Church's presence in Mumbai is unnoticed due to its extremely limited presence. Another limitation to gauging national outreach through cities with LDS congregations is that legal or societal restrictions on proselytism among certain groups like Muslims isolate these groups from missionary activity. In many areas the Church has policies for missionary activity among Muslims that require special baptismal interviews with the mission president, mission president approval to begin missionary lessons, or total refusal to teach interested individuals out of safety concerns for Muslim investigators and maintaining good relations with government officials, civil authorities, and community leaders. Pakistan has LDS congregations located in cities populated by 16% of the national population, but considering the Church only pursues proselytism among the tiny Christian minority only two percent of the national population can be accurately depicted as "reached" by the Church. Another barrier to ascertaining national outreach through city population and LDS congregational data is that transportation plays a major factor in accessibility to congregations. The Church in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and many Western European countries can adequately reach many suburban and rural areas within tens of kilometers of an LDS meetinghouse as most members have cars, roadways are developed and in good condition, and people in these locations are used to regularly traveling these distances commuting for work, purchasing supplies and groceries, and attending social gatherings and community functions. Full-time missionaries often travel to nearby communities and rural areas to teach investigators and visit less-active members, providing some missionary outreach. Although approximately three-quarters of the population of the United States resides in a city or town with an LDS congregation, as much as 85% or more of the national population may be considered reached by congregations and proselytism efforts due to these high living standards.

The popularization of the internet has provided many of those residing in countries with a high percentage of the population with access to the internet the opportunity to learn and study about the Church regardless of whether a ward, branch, or group operates in their area. Theoretically the Church can reach as many people in a country as have access to the internet. However internet-based national outreach has many limitations. First, the Church has relied on people who independently learn about the Church instead of actively seeking converts. While it may be viewed as an advancement in missionary work to let interested individuals search out the Church and ask to be baptized than full-time missionaries street proselytizing and tracking, the number of self-referring investigators are relatively insignificant in comparison to those baptized through other means. The Church also lacks vision, initiative, and compliance to the scriptural mandate to take the gospel to all the world. Second, the Church's online proselytism efforts are limited to the languages into which it has translated materials available on the internet. Many major languages continue to have no translations of LDS materials, such as Javanese, Gujarati, and Azerbaijani.

The worldwide Church continues to struggle to expand national outreach into rural areas due to small populations spread over large geographical areas that are often difficult to access. Reliance on full-time missionaries to open unreached cities to proselytism has been a major deterrent in outreach expansion efforts in rural areas as it is often unfeasible to assign limited numbers of missionaries to sparsely populated areas considering missionaries frequently have to travel to missionary meetings, transporting missionaries to and from rural areas can be difficult and time consuming, and there are few people for missionaries to teach in comparison to urban areas. The Church has achieved the greatest success establishing a widespread presence in rural areas only in locations where there are high percentages of Latter-day Saints in the national population, such as in areas of Oceania and the western United States. For example, in Tonga only 23% of the population is urbanized but 56.5% of the islands' population is nominally LDS and wards and branches are established in locations populated by 95% of the population.

Comparative growth between the national outreach of Latter-day Saints and other missionary-focused groups offers insight into growth potential. For example, the LDS Church pursues active missionary work with full-time missionaries and operates congregations in locations populated by less than 10% of the population in Ethiopia, Sri Lanka, India, Vietnam, Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Malawi, and Kazakhstan – countries that together account for 22% of the world's population. However, Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses appear to reach 50% or more of the population in most of these countries.

Recent trends in national outreach expansion indicate that the Church is most likely to experience slow, steady increases in the percentage of the population inhabiting cities, towns, and villages with LDS congregations primarily in Sub-Saharan Africa, more populous countries in Oceania, and some countries in South and Southeast Asia, but virtually no increase in the percentage of the population reached by the Church in North America, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Europe. Due to ongoing congregation consolidations, the Church may experience a decrease in national outreach in industrialized countries in East Asia.