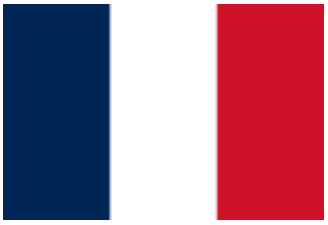
Reaching the Nations

Country reports on the LDS Church around the world from a landmark almanac. Includes detailed analysis of history, context, culture, needs, challenges and opportunities for church growth.



France

Population: 66.26 millions (#22 out of countries)

By David Stewart and Matt Martinich

Geography

Area: 551,500 square km. Geographically the largest nation in Western Europe, France borders Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Monaco, Spain, Andorra, the Mediterranean Sea, the Bay of Biscay, and the English Channel. The Pyrenees Mountains form the Spanish border and together with the Alps near the Swiss border account for mountainous areas in France. Most terrain consists of plains and rolling hills. Corsica, one of the largest Mediterranean islands, is also under French administration. Cool winters and mild summers characterize the climate in most areas. Mediterranean regions of France experience mild winters and hot summers. A recurrent wind known as mistral brings cold, dry air from the north/northwest to Mediterranean areas. Major rivers that travel through or border France include the Rhine, the Rhone, and Seine. Flooding, avalanches, windstorms, drought, and forest fires are natural hazards. Environmental issues include acid rain, air pollution, water pollution, and agricultural runoff. France is divided into eighteen administrative regions, four of which are overseas regions (French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Reunion).

Peoples

French: 80.9%

North African: 9.6%

Sub-Saharan/Black African: 4%

German: 2.5%

Italian: 1.5%

Other: 1.5%

The French are a compound of Celtic and Latin peoples who have mixed for centuries. North Africans constitute the largest minority group and originate from the former French colonies of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. Germans and Italians tend to reside in regions bordering their traditional homeland nations. Other ethnicities account for 1.5% of the population and include

Basque and immigrant groups from Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean.

Population: 62,814,233 (July 2020)

Annual Growth Rate: 0.35% (2020)

Fertility Rate: 2.06 children born per woman (2020)

Life Expectancy: 79.1 male, 85.4 female (2020)

Languages: French (80.0%), German (6.2%), North African Arab dialects (4.7%), Portuguese (1.5%), Alsatian (1.4%), Italian (1.3%), Portuguese (1%), Kabyle (0.9%), Picard (0.8%), Spanish (0.7%), Turkish (0.7%), other (0.8%). French is the official language. As many as 96% of the population speaks French as a first or second language. Languages with over one million native speakers include French (50.3 million), German (3.88 million), and Arab dialects (2.9 million).

Literacy: 99% (2011)

History

Celtic tribes inhabited present-day France anciently and came under Roman rule in the mid-first century BC. Following the demise of the Roman Empire in the following centuries, feudalism and various tribal forces controlled the region. The French formed one of Europe's first nation-states and France become one of Europe's most powerful nations during the seventeenth century. French power began to decline in the eighteenth century as a result of unsuccessful military campaigns and financial problems. The French Revolution occurred from 1789 to 1794 and came primarily as a result of poor economic conditions and a populace that grew weary of privileges granted only to nobles and clerics. Much of the nineteenth century was marked by militaristic, authoritarian governments and leaders including Napoleon, Louis XVIII, Louis-Philippe, and Napoleon III. France was devastated by World War I and suffered heavy military losses and economic degradation. Nazi Germany invaded France and overtook the country by July 1940. Allied forces liberated France in 1944. France struggled to administer its domestic and international affairs following the war, resulting in the formation of the Fifth Republic in 1958 under General de Gaulle. Heavy immigration from North Africa occurred in the 1960s and early 1970s, which changed the demographics of French society. France was one of the European Union's six founding states and maintains one of the strongest influences on the European Union today. France has taken part in international counterterrorism efforts in Afghanistan since 2001 and remains one of the foremost European powers today.[1]

Culture

With one of the world's most influential cultures, France has contributed significantly to the development of culture in the Caribbean, North America, Europe, Africa, and Southeast Asia. French is one of the most commonly spoken second languages in Africa and is the official language of approximately thirty countries. The Roman Catholic Church has traditionally been a dominant influence on society, and Catholicism remains one of the dominant Christian religions in most French colonial possessions. France has produced many famous artists, philosophers, fashion designers, musicians, film makers, and writers. Cuisine differs by region; common foods include bread, wine, cheese, chicken, vegetables, potatoes, mushrooms, eggs, and seafood. Alcohol consumption rates rank among the highest worldwide, whereas cigarette consumption rates compare to the worldwide average.

Economy

GDP per capita: $44,100 (2017) [73.7% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.891 (2018)

Corruption Index: 69 (2019)

With a developed, modern economy, France has taken steps to reform its economy in recent years by reducing government ownership and increasing privatization while simultaneously maintaining tax policies, social spending, and laws that promote the equalization of wealth. France endured the global financial crisis of the late 2000s better than many other European nations but nonetheless faces many economic problems originating from the crisis, including increased unemployment and declining GDP. In the 2010s, the economy had largely recovered from the global financial crisis; however, unemployment among youth remains high and public debt has steadily increased. Services employ 77.2% of the labor force and generate 78.8% of the GDP, whereas industry employs 20.0% of the labor force and generates 19.5% of the GDP. Tourism is a major industry, as eighty-nine million foreign tourists visit France a year, making France the most popular tourist destination in the world. Other primary industries include machinery, chemicals, cars, metallurgy, aircraft, electronics, clothing, and food processing. Agriculture accounts for less than 5% of the GDP and labor force. Grains, sugar beets, potatoes, grapes, beef, dairy products, and fish are common agricultural goods. Natural resources include coal, iron ore, bauxite, zinc, uranium, antimony, arsenic, potash, feldspar, fluorspar, gypsum, timber, and fish. Germany, Italy, Belgium, and Spain are the primary trade partners.

Corruption is perceived at rates slightly lower than most Western European nations. The level of perceived corruption in metropolitan France has been unchanged for the past decade. France is a transshipment point for illicit drugs from South America, Asia, and Europe. In recent years, the government has pledged greater effort to reduce corruption.

Faiths

Christian: 44%

None: 43%

Muslim: 8%

Buddhist: 1%

Jewish: 1%

Other: 3%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Roman Catholic – 25,753,381

Evangelicals – 603,192

Lutherans – 600,000

Orthodox – 370,000

Jehovah’s Witnesses – 131,078 – 1,610

Latter-day Saints – 39,930 – 108

Seventh Day Adventists – 15,532 – 174

Religion

France is a traditionally Catholic country, but the percentage of the population who identify as Catholic has precipitously declined in the twenty-first century. In late 2009, a poll conducted by a Catholic organization estimated that 64% of the population identified as Catholic. [2] However, by 2018, the percentage of the adult population who identified as Catholic had fallen to 41%.[3] Religious attendance is extremely low, as only 4.5% of the population regularly attends a religious service.[4] France boasts Europe's largest Muslim and Jewish populations. Muslims consist of North African and Sub-Saharan immigrants and account for the largest religious minority group but report lower religious observance in France than in their home countries. Jews number approximately 460,000 to 700,000. There are approximately two million Protestant Christians. Evangelicals number more than 600,000 and include many Africans and immigrants from the Caribbean. Buddhists number approximately one million and are principally Vietnamese and Chinese immigrants. The number of Sikhs is estimated at 30,000.[5]

Religious Freedom

The constitution protects religious freedom, which in general is upheld by the government. Separation of church and state occurred in 1905. Religious organizations may register with the government as an association of worship or as a cultural association. Associations of worship may only organize religious activities, whereas cultural associations grant religious organizations the right to make profits, receive government subsidies, and are not tax-exempt. Foreign missionaries may serve in France but are required to obtain a long-duration visa if their home country is not exempted from French visa entry requirements. Some religious minority groups are labeled sects or cults by the government, such as Scientologists, and these groups have been monitored and restricted in some religious freedoms. The government monitors many Muslim groups and debate is ongoing in regards to the government's ban of full-face coverings in public and wearing religious symptoms in public school. Societal abuses of religious freedom are primarily directed toward Christian property and Muslims and Jews and have included death threats, vandalism of religious buildings, and harassment. Tensions are high between Muslims and the general population. Government, religious, and civic leaders have urged greater tolerance toward these groups. Religious education does not occur in public schools with the exception of Alsace-Moselle.[6]

Largest Cities

Urban: 81% (2020)

Paris, Lyon, Marseille, Lille, Toulouse, Nice, Bordeaux, Nantes, Toulon, Grenoble, **Douai-Lens**, Rouen, Strasbourg, Avignon, Montpellier, Saint-Étienne, **Béthune**, Tours, Valenciennes, Rennes, Nancy, Metz, Orléans, Clermont-Ferrand, Mulhouse, Dijon, Bayonne, Le Havre, Angers, Reims, Le Mans, Brest, Perpignan, Caen, Pau, Chambéry, Nîmes, Annemasse, Limoges, Dunkerque, Annecy, Amiens, Saint-Nazaire, Troyes, Besançon, **Thionville**, Valence, Poitiers, La Rochelle, **Creil**, Lorient, **Maubeuge**, Angoulême, **Montbéliard**.

Cities in **bold** do not have congregations of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Forty-eight of the fifty-four cities with over 100,000 inhabitants have a Latter-day Saint congregation. Forty-seven percent (47%) of the national population resides in the fifty-four largest cities.

Latter-day Saint History

The first unofficial visit by a Latter-day Saint to France occurred in 1845.[7] A Welsh missionary named William Howell was the first Latter-day Saint to officially visit France in 1849. Missionary work progressed rapidly initially, as forty-eight converts were baptized in a four-week period the same year,[8] and a branch was organized in Paris.[9]

Elder John Taylor became president of the French Mission in 1850 and dedicated France for missionary work. Local members and full-time missionaries organized four small branches, produced a French-language Church magazine, and translated the Book of Mormon into French by 1852. Political conditions worsened by 1855, resulting in poor receptivity to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and persecution. Most converts after this period were foreigners. By 1864, the Church closed the French Mission. The mission was reestablished in 1912 and closed again two years later due to World War I. The Church reestablished the French Mission again in 1924, but receptivity remained poor, as by 1930 there were only forty-seven French members in France, but nearly 650 members in French-speaking areas of Belgium and Switzerland. The French Mission closed in 1939 as the Church withdrew missionaries at the outbreak of World War II. The French Mission was reestablished a fourth time in 1946, but full-time missionaries were severely limited in numbers shortly thereafter due to the outbreak of the Korean War. Remaining Latter-day Saint scriptures were translated in 1958. Seminary and institute commenced in the early 1970s. By 1976, there were two missions based in France (France Paris and France Toulouse) and two additional missions headquartered outside of France that served regions of France (Belgium Brussels and Switzerland Geneva Missions).[10] Two additional missions were organized in France in Bordeaux (1989) and Marseille (1991). In 1989, the France Bordeaux Mission was organized in part due to increases in convert baptisms at the time in France but primarily to reduce administrative demands over large geographic areas.[11] In 1991, the Europe Mediterranean Area began administering France and was headquartered in Thoiry, France.[12] President Thomas S. Monson visited France in mid-1997 and held several meetings with local members.[13] The Mormon Tabernacle Choir held concerts in France in the early 1990s and again in the late 1990s. In 2000, France became part of the Europe West Area[14] and in the late 2000s was assigned to the Europe Area. Missions based in Bordeaux and Marseille were consolidated into neighboring missions 2001. In 2011, the France Toulouse and Switzerland Geneva Missions were consolidated into the France Lyon Mission. The Church announced plans to construct its first temple in metropolitan France, the Paris France Temple, on July 15th, 2011 after a lengthy search for property in Paris which appeared to begin as early as 1998.[15] The Church dedicated the Paris France Temple in 2017.

Membership Growth

Church Membership: 39,930 (2019)

French-speaking Latter-day Saints numbered 400 in 1912, most of whom resided in Belgium and Switzerland.[16] 1,909 Latter-day Saints were on church records in France in 1959. Membership increased to 9,853 in 1974[17] and 21,000 in 1991.[18] The most rapid membership growth occurred in the 1980s. For example in 1987, there were 211 converts just in the Lille France District.[19]

Membership reached 30,912 at year-end 2000. During the 2000s, membership grew slowly, numbering 31,971 in 2002, 32,780 in 2004, 33,828 in 2006, and 35,427 in 2009. Annual membership growth rates ranged from a low of 0.8% in 2008 to a high of 2.4% in 2001 and 2007 but generally averaged between 1% and 1.5%. Annual membership increases typically varied from 300 to 800 during this period. In the 2010s, Church membership totaled 36,968 in 2012, 37,996 in 2015, and 39,930 in 2019. Annual membership growth rates in the 2010s ranged from 0.5-1.7%. A large number of Latter-day Saint converts since the early 1980s have been immigrants or temporary foreigner workers from Africa.

In 2019, one in 1,666 was nominally a Latter-day Saint.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 68 Branches: 40 Groups: 1+ (June 2020)

There were sixty-three branches in France in 1972. In 1973, the Church operated branches in approximately sixty cities: Paris (5), Aix-en-Provence, Angers, Angoulème, Arras, Bayonne, Beauvais, Belfort, Besançon, Béziers, Bordeaux (2), Brest, Caen, Calais, Cannes, Chalon-en-Champagne, Clermont-Ferrand, Colmar, Dijon, Dunkerque, Epinal, Grenoble, La Rochelle, Le Creusot, Le Mans, Lille, Limoges, Lyon, Marseille, Metz, Montauban, Montpellier, Mulhouse, Nancy, Nantes, Nice, Nîmes, Orleans, Pau, Perigueux, Perpignan, Poitiers, Reims, Rennes, Roubaix, Rouen, St. Etienne, St. Nazaire, St. Raphael, Strasbourg, Tarbes, Thionville, Toulon, Toulouse, Tours, Troyes, Valence, and Versailles.[20] In 1974, France had eleven districts.[21]

The first stake was organized in Paris in 1975 followed by additional stakes in Nice (1980), Nancy (1983), and Lille (1988). In 1989, there were four stakes and seven districts in France. Districts operated in Bordeaux, Dijon, Languedoc, Limonges, Nantes, Rouen, and St. Etienne.[22] Three new stakes were organized in the 1990s in Lyon (1990), Paris East (1992), and Bordeaux (1992). In 1994, the Church created a new district in Metz with four branches.[23] In 1995, there were seven stakes and seven districts.[24] By year-end 2000, there were seven stakes and five districts. In the 2000s, three of the five French districts were organized into new stakes in Toulouse (2002) and Angers (2003). In early 2011, there were nine stakes and two districts. The Paris France South Stake was organized in 2013. Districts in Lorient (organized in 1978) and Caen (organized in 1979) were discontinued in 2013 and 2011, respectively. By year-end 2013, there were ten stakes and no districts.

There were sixty-five branches in 1974.[25] By 1995, there were 110 congregations (32 wards and 78 branches),[26] increasing to an all-time high of 128 congregations in 1999 (44 wards, 84 branches). The number of congregations declined during the latter half of the 2000s to 124 in 2006, 117 in 2007, 113 in 2008, and 111 in 2009. However, the number of wards increased to fifty in 2002, sixty in 2004, and sixty-one in 2006 before declining to fifty-eight in 2008 and fifty-seven in 2009. The number of branches declined from eight-two in 2000 to seventy-five in 2002, sixty-five in 2004, sixty-three in 2006, and fifty-five in 2008. Congregations discontinued in the 2000s included the Antibes Ward, Boulogne-sur-Mer Branch, Bourg-en-Bresse Branch, Chalon-en-Champagne Branch, Dax Branch, Evreux Branch, Luneville Branch, Marseille Saint Just Ward, Martigues Branch, Mouscron Ward, Niort Branch, Rodez Branch, Salon-de-Provence Ward, Sarcelles Branch, Schiltigheim Ward, and Thionville Branch.

In the 2010s, the Church reported essentially stagnant congregational growth as the total number of congregations numbered 107 in 2013, 109 in 2017, and 108 in 2019. The number of wards increased from fifty-seven in 2010 to sixty-four in 2015 and sixty-eight in 2019. During the 2010s, the Church created three new official congregations including the Val de Saône Ward in Lyon (2014), Saint Genis Branch (2015), and Le Chesnay Ward (2018). A group also began to function in Ajaccio in Corsica during the 2010s. However, the Church discontinued seven official congregations during this same period including the Belledoone Branch in Grenoble (2011), France Toulouse Mission Branch (2012), Forbach Branch (2012), Coutances Branch (2013), Soissons Branch (2014), Brest Branch (2018), and Saint Nazaire Branch (2019). Some of these cities where the only branch closed in the 2010s may continue to have member groups that operate under the supervision of a nearby ward or branch.

Activity and Retention

Large meetings and conference have been moderately attended by local members in the past. Four thousand ten members attended a regional conference held in Paris for members in northern France and Belgium, and 3,200 attended a similar conference in Lyon for members in southeast France and French-speaking Switzerland.[27] In 1998, President Hinckley spoke to 2,400 members in Paris from the two Paris stakes and districts in Caen, Tours, and Rennes. Another meeting occurred in Geneva that was attended by 4,200 members from stakes in Nice, Lyon, Geneva, Zurich, and Bern.[28] One thousand, four hundred, and seventy-four were enrolled in seminary and institute during the 2008–2009 school year. The U.S. Department of State reported that 30% of French Latter-day Saints were observant in 2010.[29]

Latter-day Saint member activity and convert retention rates have been mediocre in France for decades. In 2010, full-time missionaries in the France Toulouse Mission reported that they sometimes spent more time on reactivation work than finding and teaching new investigators. Retention rates have recently improved over the short-term. Full-time missionaries serving in the France Paris Mission in 2010 reported that over 80% of converts baptized in the past year continued to attend church. In the 2010s, approximately half of new converts continued to attend church one year after baptism, and approximately 60% of new converts remained active one year after baptism by the late 2010s per reports from returned missionaries. French missions have generally baptized between 100 and 300 new converts annually during the past decade.

The average number of members per congregation increased from 152 in 1974 to 216 in 1989, 239 in 1999, 319 in 2009, and 370 in 2019. The number of active members is relatively constant for most congregations in France with some slight increases in wards in the most populous cities. In late 2005, seventy-five of the 250 members in the Valence Ward attended regularly.[30] The Perigueux Branch had nearly fifty active members in late 2010, and the Carcassonne Ward had almost seventy active members in mid-2010. In the 2010s, some wards had as many as 170 active members (Toulouse Capitole Ward), whereas some wards had as few as fifty (Annemasse Ward). Most branches appear to have 25-50 active members, whereas most wards

tend to have seventy to 130 active members. Nationwide active membership is estimated at 8,200, or 21% of total LDS membership.

Finding

In 1988, local members and full-time missionaries in Strasbourg took turns portraying Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds in a Nativity scene presented on the Latter-day Saint meetinghouse lawn. One thousand five hundred visited the Nativity scene over a six-day period, and 1,000 entered the meetinghouse to talk with members and missionaries.[31] The Church organized a traveling exhibit on families and genealogy in the Rouen area that traveled to half a dozen large cities in the area. Over a seventeen-day period, the exhibit had 1,670 viewers.[32] Although only ten Latter-day Saints lived in Brest in 1988, 1,500 attended a Church exposition on family history. Member and missionaries held gospel-related conversations with many of those in attendance.[33] In 1989, the Church conducted a media missionary campaign in newspapers advertising the video “Our Heavenly Father’s Plan,” which resulted in 1,700 requests for the video in France.[34] In 1992, a documentary detailed Latter-day Saint history and genealogy work aired,[35] and 9,800 attended a Paris exhibition representing various religious traditions featured a display on Latter-day Saints.[36] France was included in the Church’s European tour of the Dead Sea Scroll exhibit in 2005.[37] A total of 47,561 people attended the Paris France Temple open house in 2017.[38]

Language Materials

Languages with Latter-day Saint Scripture: French, German, Arabic, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian.

All Church scriptures and most church materials are available in French, German, Arabic, Italian, Portuguese, and Romanian. Gospel Principles and the Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith are translated into Comorian, and several African languages spoken in former-French colonies.

Meetinghouses

The first Church-built meetinghouse was completed in 1962 in Nantes. By 1976, there were nine church-built meetinghouses and twelve remodeled buildings that served as meetinghouses.[39] In early 2011, there were approximately one hundred meetinghouses, most of which were built by the Church. Some smaller branches meet in renovated buildings and rented spaces, such as the Vannes Branch.

Humanitarian and Development Work

The Church has conducted twenty-three humanitarian and development projects in France since 1985—most of which have been refugee response initiatives.[40] Local members have sent aid to the poor and needy internationally since as early as the late 1980s. Members organized a special fund in the Paris France Stake for medicine and other supplies for Zaire and Madagascar in 1988.[41] Local members have taken part in volunteer work cleaning and beautifying their communities.[42] In 2005, Latter-day Saint institute attendees and instructors in Lyon purchased and assembled hygiene and education kits to send to orphans in Laayoune, Western Sahara.[43] In 2006, an eleven-year-old boy in the Lyon France Stake collected 1,350 eyeglasses to send to the needy in Cameroon.[44]

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints experiences full religious freedom in France, and local members and missionaries may proselyte, worship, and assemble freely. The Church maintains two associations that are registered with the government: an association of worship for its ecclesiastical affairs and a cultural association for its scholastic and cultural operations.[45] Foreign full-time missionaries regularly serve in France, and report few difficulties obtaining needed visas.

Cultural Issues

The philosophical and intellectual nature of many French has disinterested them in religious matters.[46] Negative stereotypes and misinformation perpetuated about Latter-day Saints since the mid-nineteenth century continue to create barriers for missionaries to overcome today.[47] The growing atheist and nonreligious population has exhibited very low interest in the Latter-day Saint gospel message. High alcohol consumption rates challenge efforts for many investigators and less active members to following Church teachings to abstain from alcoholic beverages. Most of the European population has a Christian background but are unfamiliar with basic religious habits such as church attendance, personal scripture reading, and developing faith and testimony of specific doctrines and teachings. Latter-day Saint missionaries face the challenge of instilling these practices and convictions in the highly nominal Catholic population when teaching investigators. Many Latter-day Saints are less active as a result of failure to gain a solid testimony of the Church and develop daily religious habits and practices. The Muslim population is virtually unreached by mission outreach efforts. In 2010, missionaries reported that they were not permitted to teach Muslims out of safety concerns for any prospective converts among Muslim immigrant groups pending their return to their home country. Some proselytism and exposure to the Church does occur among some Muslim populations in France, but strong ethno-religious ties to Islam and perceived intimidation by the culturally Catholic-French majority render efforts among Muslim groups largely unfruitful at present.

National Outreach

Forty-eight percent (48%) of the national population resides in a city with a Latter-day Saint congregation. Thirty of the sixty-seven cities with between 50,000 and 100,000 inhabitants have a Latter-day Saint congregation. No cities with fewer than 35,000 inhabitants appear to have a Church congregation. There are approximately 140 cities with over 20,000 inhabitants that have no LDS mission outreach centers. All thirteen administrative regions in metropolitan France have at least one mission outreach center. The average Latter-day Saint congregation in France includes over 580,000 people within its geographical boundaries. Taking the ratio of population to Latter-day Saint congregations by administrative region offers insight into how the extent of mission outreach and Latter-day Saints percentages differ by region. Regions that appear to have the highest percentage of Latter-day Saints (fewer than 400,000 people per congregation) include Corse, Aquitaine, Basse-Normandie, Limousin, and Lorraine, whereas Auvergne, Haute-Normandie, and Ile-de-France appear to have the lowest percentage of Latter-day Saints (greater than 800,000 people per congregation). Overall, the Church appears to have a higher percentage of members in southern France than in northern France.

Opportunities for future growth appear highest in the most populous cities without currently operating Latter-day Saint congregations, such as Lens, Bethune, Thionville, Montbeliard, and Creil, as well as medium-sized cities with greater than 50,000 inhabitants. Local leadership and member-missionary resources appear too limited in many areas for French members to undertake the responsibility of extending outreach to these cities at present. Cooperation between full-time missionaries and local leaders in arranging public affairs, cottage meetings, and creative proselytism approaches will be needed to reverse the ongoing trend of congregation consolidations and declining national outreach since the mid-2000s.

France served as a springboard for Latter-day Saint growth in French-speaking African nations in the 1980s and 1990s as African immigrants joined the Church and returned to their homelands. The first Latter-day Saint converts from most French-speaking African nations with a current Church presence were taught and baptized in France during this period. Prospects remain high for the continued involvement of missions in France in the process of converting French-speaking Africans in reached and unreached Francophone nations.

The Church has participated in Internet-based proselytism approaches primarily through the Church's official website for France at http://www.eglisedejesuschrist.fr/ and French Church language materials online. France ranked among the top twenty countries with the most visitors to the Church's official website shortly after it was launched in 1997.[48] Member-missionary efforts online remain uncoordinated and limited. Use of French-language materials available online by missionaries and

members in France may help improve receptivity and church growth prospects over the medium term.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Full-time missionaries and local members participated in member reactivation efforts in the mid-1990s.[49] The Annemasse Ward was one of the highest baptizing congregations in France in the mid-2000s. Success appears strongly linked to missionary firesides held on a monthly basis, the immediate assignment of members to mentor and support new converts before their baptismal service, and a strong member-missionary program that emphasizes local members supplying full-time missionaries with investigators to teach.[50] Local leaders and members have participated in reactivation efforts, such as holding ward or branch activities and inviting less-active members.[51] Full-time missionaries reported that the Vitrolles Ward had only seven convert baptisms between 2005 and 2010, and only one of those converts was active in early 2011.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Full-time missionaries report most congregations of native French and French-speaking Africans encounter few ethnic integration challenges. African immigrants have demonstrated greater receptivity and greater member activity rates in the Church than their European French counterparts, resulting in the demographics of many congregations not representing those of the general population. North Africans present the greatest challenge to integrate into Latter-day Saint congregations at present due to the lack of Muslim and Arabic language outreach resources, poor integration of North Africans into French society, and lack of cultural traditions of church service.

Language Issues

Nearly the entire population speaks French as a first or second language, reducing the need for translations of scriptures and materials into indigenous minority languages with declining numbers of speakers such as Occitan and Breton. Sizeable numbers of non-French speakers in some congregations may necessitate the establishment of Sunday School classes and language translations of sacrament meeting services meeting specific language needs.

Missionary Service

Eighty full-time missionaries were serving in France by 1948, increasing to 334 by 1972.[52] The number of French members serving full-time missions in the French Mission increased from three in 1971 to twenty-nine full-time missionaries and fifty stake missionaries in 1974.[53] At the peak, there may have been over 500 Latter-day Saint missionaries serving in France, but missionary complements were reduced starting in the mid-1990s due to mission realignments and overall cuts to the Western European missionary force. The France Toulouse Mission had approximately eighty full-time missionaries in early 2010. In early 2011, France appeared to have no more than 200 full-time missionaries. France remains dependent on the international church to staff its two full-time missions despite the massive reduction in the full-time missionary force from the mid-1990s through the 2000s. Nonetheless, French members frequently serve missions abroad, such as in Africa, the Caribbean, and North America. Organizing youth-focused mission outreach and stressing seminary and institute attendance as part of missionary preparation may increase the number of French members serving full-time missions over the medium term.

Leadership

The number of active priesthood leaders has generally increased year to year in France over the past several decades, allowing for stakes to operate in all areas of the country by the early 2010s. The French Mission had ninety-six Melchizedek Priesthood holders in 1959 and 345 in the France Paris Mission by year-end 1974.[54] The number of active priesthood holders remains too limited in most areas to provide leadership sufficient to organize additional congregations and even to maintain some currently operating wards and branches, resulting in consistent congregation consolidations since the mid-2000s. The quality of local leaders is generally good and has resulted in several French Latter-day Saints serving in international leadership positions. In 1988, Christian Euvrard from Nogent was called as a regional representative.[55] Gerard Giraud-Carrier from Torcy was called as the first mission president of the Mascarene Islands Mission in 1988.[56] In 1991, Pierre H. Euvrard from Nogent was

called to preside over the Mascarene Islands Mission.[57] In 1992, Jacques Faudin from Vitrolles was called as a regional representative.[58] In 1995, Alain Andre Petion from Truchtersheim was called as an area authority.[59] In 2006, J. Michael Paya from Mougins was called as an Area Seventy.[60] In 2007, Gerald J. Causse from Seine was called as an Area Seventy.[61] In 2005, Alain Andre Jean-Baptiste Petion from Torcy was called as the Canada Montreal Mission President in 2005.[62] In 2011, Franck André Poznanski from Lorient was called as the France Paris Mission President.[63] In 2015, Gérald Caussé from Bordeaux was called as the Presiding Bishop of the Church, becoming the first Presiding Bishop of the Church who spoke English as a second language. He had previously served as second counselor in the Presiding Bishopric since 2012.[64] That same year, Herve Jean-Claude Baehrel from Aix-En-Provence was called as the Democratic Republic of the Congo Kinshasa Mission President.[65] In 2016, Gérard Séraphin Gilbert Giraud-Carrier from Grenoble was called as the first temple president for the Paris France Temple.[66] In 2018, Christophe Gérard Giraud-Carrier from Lyon was called as the France Lyon Mission President,[67] and Jean-Marc Bourroux from Paris was called as the Paris France Temple Visitors' Center director.[68] Leadership in the Church in France has also begun to transition from converts who hold executive leadership positions (i.e. stake presidency members) to members who were raised in the Church. For example, in 2019 all the members of the Bordeaux France Stake Presidency grew up in the Church, whereas the original stake presidency organized in 1992 was solely comprised of converts.[69]

Temple

The Paris France Temple required significant planning and preparation, particularly due to community opposition and misinformation about the Church. Prior to the completion of the temple in 2017, French members attended the Bern Switzerland Temple, Frankfurt Germany Temple, Madrid Spain Temple, and London England Temple. French temple attendance rates have historically appeared low to moderate among active members despite logistical and financial burdens to attend the temple regularly. The number of endowments performed by French-speaking members at the Bern Switzerland Temple increased from 462 in 1960 to 7,744 in 1974. In the mid-1990s, the Frankfurt Germany Temple alternated weeks for German and French-speaking members in the temple district.[70] In 1998, President Hinckley addressed the topic of a potential future temple in France, stating that French membership had reached the maturity and activity required for a temple to operate in France but that the Church was unable to find land to construct a temple at the time.[71] In 2010, full-time missionaries reported that in addition to tithing, many local members contribute to a fund to finance the building of a temple in France.

Comparative Growth

The Church in France boasts the fourth most Latter-day Saints and ties with the Church in Italy for the third most stakes in continental Europe. Membership growth rates in France have been higher than many Western European nations, but like most of Western Europe, France experienced a decline in the number of congregations during the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Member activity rates and the percentage of members in the general population are low but comparable to most Western European nations.

Some outreach-oriented Christian groups have experienced steady growth in France over the past half century, namely Evangelicals and Jehovah's Witnesses due to their church planting and member-missionary intensive programs. Evangelicals number among the largest Protestant denominations today and continue to experience steady growth. Jehovah's Witnesses claim over 131,000 active members meeting in more than 1,600 congregations and baptized over 3,000 converts in 2019. Seventh-Day Adventists report steady growth both in the number of members and total congregations. However, few converts join the Seventh-Day Adventist Church a year. For example, there were fewer than 200 new members added to Adventist membership records for the entire country in 2019.

Future Prospects

The outlook for future Latter-day Saint growth in France is mediocre due to low levels of member activity, inconsistent mission practices regarding the baptism of new converts, persistent congregation consolidations, reduction in the number of full-time missionaries assigned, few local members serving full-time missions, and mission policies isolating Muslims from mission outreach. Emphasizing seminary and institute attendance, developing youth-directed mission outreach, and stronger member-missionary participation may alleviate some of these issues. Emigration of French members continues to frustrate greater long-term self-sufficiency and development of a strong French Latter-day Saint community. France will likely continue its role in facilitating the establishment of the Church in unreached and reached Francophone nations in West Africa by immigrants from these nations joining the Church and returning to their homelands or referring friends and family to study about the Church. Mission outreach centers are established in most major cities, allowing for continued outreach to half the population. The reduction in the full-time missionary force in the past two decades has increased the efficiency of missionary activities, resulting

in a slight increase in convert baptisms. Time will only tell whether these modifications will continue to yield increases in convert baptisms without reducing convert retention rates in a nation that has become highly secularized with a significant Roman Catholic minority.

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