

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.



Mexico

Population: 120.29 millions (#12 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 1,964,375 square km. Located south of the United States in northern Central America, Mexico borders the United States, Guatemala, Belize, the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean Sea, and the Pacific Ocean. Several large bodies of water extend inland into Mexico, such as the Gulf of California and the Bay of Campeche. The large land bridge narrows in the south, forming the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. In the southeast, the Yucatan Peninsula extends into the Gulf of Mexico and divides the Caribbean Sea from the Gulf of Mexico whereas in the northwest, the Baja California Peninsula separates the Gulf of California and the Pacific Ocean. The Rio Grande River constitutes the entire length of the Texan border. In the central interior, several large lakes and reservoirs dot the landscape, notably Lake Chapala in Jalisco State. Climate varies by location, with tropical, wet climates in the south, temperate climates in the interior, alpine climates on the highest peaks, and arid desert climates in the north. Terrain is generally flat and consists of plains along most coastal areas, with high, rugged mountains in the interior. Tsunamis, hurricanes, tropical storms, volcanoes, and earthquakes are natural hazards. Environmental issues include inadequate fresh water in the north, proper disposal of waste and hazardous materials, deforestation, desertification, erosion, air pollution in urban areas, and land subsidence in Mexico City. Mexico is administratively divided into 31 states and one federal district.

Population: 111,211,789 (July 2010)

Annual Growth Rate: 1.13% (2010)

Fertility Rate: 2.31 children born per woman (2010)

Life Expectancy: 73.25 male, 79 female (2010)

Peoples

mestizo: 60%

Amerindian: 30%

white: 9%

other: 1%

Mestizos are a compound of Amerindian and European ancestry. Whites primarily reside in the largest cities whereas Amerindians tend to populate rural areas.

Languages: Spanish monolingual (92.7%), Spanish and Amerindian languages bilingual (5.7%), Amerindian languages monolingual (0.8%), unspecified (0.8%). 291 indigenous languages are spoken in Mexico. Languages with over one million speakers include Spanish (109.4 million) and Nahuatl (1.75 million). Other commonly spoken Amerindian languages include Maya, Mixtec, Zapotec, and Tzeltal, Tzotzil.

Literacy: 86.1% (2005)

History

Sophisticated and advanced pre-Colombian ancient Mesoamerican civilizations thrived in Mexico for centuries prior to European contact. The Olmecs, Mayas, Toltecs, and Aztecs occupied large areas of Mexico and some exerted influence into northern Mexico and Central America. In the 1520s, Hernan Cortes conquered the Aztec Empire and established a Spanish colony which endured for 300 years. In 1810, Mexico declared independence which was not internationally recognized until the early 1820s. Struggles between politicians and the public regarding the type of government to administer the country have persisted through much of Mexico's modern history. In 1862, the French military invaded and established a monarchy which was overthrown in 1867. During the 1910s, the Mexican Revolution gripped the nation as a result of major economic and social problems and gave way to the creation of the 1917 constitution. A single political party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), dominated government and politics for the rest of the twentieth century. In 2000, a new political party came to power in government through what the international community regarded as the fairest and freest elections in Mexico's history. In recent years, Mexico has become increasingly integrated into the United States economy through free trade agreements and remittances from Mexican workers in the United States.[1]

Culture

As the most populous Spanish-speaking country, Mexico has strongly influenced the culture of many other American nations for centuries. Local culture reflects a fusion of Mesoamerican and Spanish customs, language, art, and practices. Many cities and place names originate from Amerindian civilizations such as the Aztec. Aztec city and temple ruins dot the landscape of central Mexico, with impressive architectural structures such as the pyramids of Teotihuacan. The Maya civilization also left behind many ancient cities which are popular tourist destinations, especially Tulum and Chichen Itza. Mexico's tropical beaches and vacation hotspots have attracted North Americans for decades. Spanish colonization introduced Catholicism, the Spanish language, and Western ideas and philosophies. Catholicism remains one of the primarily societal influences with a growing Protestant minority. The Day of the Dead (El Dia de los Muertos) originated through the blending of indigenous religious beliefs and Catholicism and is widely celebrated from October 31st to November 2nd. Due to highly unequal distribution of wealth, socioeconomic classes and divides are found in many urban areas like Mexico City, which is the largest urban agglomeration in the Western Hemisphere. Rural areas tend to be poor, not modernized, and heavily dependent on agriculture. Cuisine consists of beans, rice, corn, beef, and vegetables. Mexican food ranks among the most popular ethnic foods in the United States and has significantly contributed to the diet and dishes of many other nations as Chocolate and corn both originated from Mexico and are common international foods. Rates of violent crime are higher than most nations, primarily due to violence along the United States border, illicit drug trafficking, and governmental corruption at all levels that has limited progress at fighting drug traffickers . Cigarette and alcohol consumption rates are lower than the United States and are representative of rates of substance abuse found in other Latin American countries.

Economy

GDP per capita: $13,200 (2009) [28.4% of US]

Human Development Index: 0.854

Corruption Index: 3.3

Mexico has one of the world's large economies and has signed free trade agreements with over 50 countries. Nationwide infrastructure improvements have facilitated growth and investment from overseas and in the United States. However, income inequality is highly unequal despite Mexico's vast natural resources, competitive geographic location, and access to both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The government continues to struggle to adequately improve the country's infrastructure, the education system, labor conditions, and gain more foreign investment. Abundant natural resources include oil, natural gas, silver, copper, gold, zinc, lead, and timber. Unemployment rates are reportedly less than six percent, but underemployment rates are as high as 25%. Services account for 63% of the work force and GDP. Industry employs 23% of the work force and generates 33% of the GDP. Primary industries include food processing, tobacco, chemicals, metals, oil, mining, clothing, cars, and tourism. Agriculture employs 14% of the population and produces 4% of the GDP. Corn, wheat, soybeans, rice, beans, cotton, coffee, fruit, and vegetables and primary crops. Imports originating from the United States account for 57% of all imports whereas 81% of all Mexican exports are destined for the United States.

Corruption is one of the major reasons for why Mexico lags so far behind income and prosperity levels of its neighbor, the United States. The United States-Mexico border is a major area for illegal activity regarding human trafficking, illicit narcotic transshipment, and violence. Nearly all United States-bound illegal drugs are trafficked through Mexico. Drug production is a major issue, with large scale opium cultivation and ecstasy manufacturing. Marijuana, heroin, and methamphetamine from Mexico are frequently trafficked into the United States.

Faiths

Christian: 82.8%

other: 0.3%

unspecified: 13.8%

none: 3.1%

Christians

Denominations Members Congregations

Catholic 85,077,019

Latter-Day Saints 1,197,573 2,005

Jehovah's Witnesses 689,705 12,119

Seventh-Day Adventists 476,394 1,690

Religion

As many as 88% of Mexicans are Catholic. Non-Catholic Christians constitute less than five percent of the population and are primary concentrated in the south. Many larger non-Catholic Christian groups report higher church memberships than self-identified members on the census, such as Seventh Day Adventists and Latter-day Saints. Nominalism is prevalent in most religious groups. There are approximately 50,000 Jews and a few Muslims. Some syncretism between Catholicism and indigenous Amerindian beliefs occurs in areas of southern Mexico.[2]

Religious Freedom

Persecution Index:

The constitution protects religious freedom which is upheld by the government. There is no state religion. The influence and power of religious figures on politics and government is limited by the constitution in order to maintain separation of church and state. Discrimination and legislation favoring or prohibiting a religious group is prohibited. Religious groups do not need to register with the government to operate, but must register in order to participate in legal matters such as purchasing real estate. Only registered religious groups may assemble outside of their places of worship, but must notify the government. Government permission is required for religious groups to broadcast on radio and television. Religious education may occur in private schools. Some instances of persecution and religious intolerance have been reported in southern Mexico, where the Catholic majority has at times discriminated against and persecuted Evangelical Christians.[3]

Largest Cities

Urban: 77%

Mexico City, Guadalajara, Monterrey, Puebla, Toluca, Tijuana, León, Ciudad Juárez, Torreón, San Luis Potosí, Querétaro, Mérida, Aguascalientes, Tampico, Cuernavaca, Acapulco, Chihuahua, Morelia, Saltillo, Veracruz, Mexicali, Villahermosa, Hermosillo, Reynosa, Culiacán, Cancún, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Xalapa-Enríquez, Oaxaca.

All 29 cities with over half a million inhabitants have a stake and multiple LDS congregations. Every city with over 60,000

inhabitants has an LDS congregation. 49% of the national population resides in the 29 largest cities.

LDS History

LDS Church President Brigham Young called six missionaries to begin proselytism in Mexico with recently translated Spanish church materials in 1875. Missionaries first baptized converts in Hermosillo in 1876.[4] The Church began missionary work in Mexico City in 1879.[5] In 1880 and 1881, missionaries dedicated Mexico for missionary work on two occasions in Mexico City.[6] In 1885, 400 Latter-day Saint colonists settled in northern Mexico.[7] The Church discontinued the Mexican Mission in 1889 and reopened the mission in 1901.[8] The LDS colonies were evacuated in 1912 due to the Mexican Revolution; only Colonia Juarez and Colonia Dublan were resettled and continue today.[9] LDS missionaries returned to Mexico in 1922.[10] Missionary efforts in central Mexico were not reestablished until 1930 when six local missionaries were called.[11] In 1936, many local members debated about Mexican church leadership under the Third Convention and were excommunicated. Nearly a decade later, many of these members who separated themselves from the Church returned and stabilized local membership and leadership.[12]

Seminary and institute began in the late 1950s. In 1964, the Church opened a preparatory church school in Mexico City called Benemérito de las Américas. In 1976, the Church announced the first temple in Latin America in Mexico City.[13]

The LDS Church was formally recognized by the government in 1993. In 2004, Mexico became the first nation outside the United States to have over one million nominal members. In the past 130 years, international Church leaders have repeatedly suggested or declared that indigenous Mexican peoples have some ancestry from Book of Mormon peoples.[14]

Missions

In 1956, the Church divided the Mexican Mission to create the Northern Mexican Mission which was later renamed the Mexico Monterrey Mission. In 1960, the West Mexican Mission was organized and later renamed the Mexico Hermosillo Mission. In 1963, the Church created the Southeast Mexican Mission which was later renamed the Mexico Veracruz Mission. In 1968, the Northern Mexican Mission divided again to create the Mexico North Central Mission, later renamed the Mexico Torreon Mission.

Two new missions were created in 1975 in Guadalajara and Villahermosa; the latter was relocated to Merida in 1978. Additional missions were organized in Mexico City North (1978), Mexico City East (1987), Mazatlan (1987) [relocated to Culiacan in 1995], Chihuahua (1988), Tuxtla Gutierrez (1988), Puebla (1988), Tampico (1988), Queretaro (1989) [relocated to Leon in 1992], Oaxaca (1990), Tijuana (1990), Monterrey South (1992), Mexico City West (2001), Guadalajara South (2003) [renamed Guadalajara East Mission in 2009], Cuernavaca (2006), Mexico City Northwest (2010), and Villahermosa (2010). Missions increased from one in 1950 to five in 1970, eight in 1980, 17 in 1990, 18 in 2000, and 23 in 2010.

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: 1,197,573 (2009)

In 1942, there were 5,300 Latter-day Saints.[15] In 1947, there were less than 5,000 members, half of whom resided in the Mormon colonies.[16] By 1961, membership totaled 25,000.[17] Membership reached 100,000 in 1972,[18] 150,000 in 1976,[19] and 240,000 in 1983.[20] There were over 500,000 Latter-day Saints in 1989.[21]

By year-end 2000, there were 884,071 members. Membership steadily increased during the 2000s, reaching 980,053 in 2003, 1.044 million in 2005, and 1.158 million in 2008. Annual membership growth rates varied from a low of 2.8% in 2003 to a high of 3.95% in 2001. Membership generally increases arithmetically by approximately 40,000 per year. In 2009, one in 93 was nominally LDS.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 1,542 Branches: 463

Stakes and Districts

The Church created its first stake in Colonia Juarez in 1895. The first native Mexican-majority stake was organized in 1961in Mexico City. By the beginning of 1970, there were three stakes, two of which were in Mexico City.

The number of stakes has increased by between 21 and 45 every five years since the late 1970s.. The number of sakes

increased to eight by early 1975, 53 in 1980, 77 in 1985, and 106 by 1990. At year-end 2000, there were 188 stakes and 41 districts. There were 200 stakes in 2005 and 221 stakes and 34 districts in September 2010.

Wards and Branches

There were 1,133 congregations by year-end 1989 (531 wards, 602 branches) which increased to 1,383 (780 wards, 603 branches) in 1993 and 1,547 (1,059 wards, 488 branches) in 1997. In 2000, Latter-day Saints met in 1,772 congregations (1,297 wards, 475 branches). The total number of congregations increased to 1,852 in 2002, 1,903 in 2005, and 1,977 in 2008. Between year-end 2000 and late September 2010, the number of wards increased by 245 (19% increase) and the number of branches declined by 12 (2.5% decrease). The summation of total congregations increased by 13% during this period. To meet the needs of members meeting in small groups in remote areas, 10 mission branches function throughout Mexico, none of which are in the Mexico City area.

Activity and Retention

In 2008, 87,000 attended a cultural night preceding the dedication of the Mexico City Mexico Temple in what is believed to be the largest live audience to be addressed by a Church president.[22] 47,089 were enrolled in seminary and institute during the 2008-2009 school year.

The average number of members per congregation increased from 499 in 2000 to 597 in 2009. Member activity rates widely vary by congregation. Many wards have over 150 active members and others fewer than 80 active members. Most appear to have over 125 active members. Some branches have well over 100 active members or fewer than 20 active members but most seem to have 60 to 80 active members. In the 2000 census, only 205,229 persons identified as a Latter-day Saint,[23] just 23% of the number of members reported by the LDS Church at year-end 2000. Current nationwide active membership is estimated at between 250,000 and 300,000, or 20-25% of total membership.

Language Materials

Languages with LDS Scripture: Spanish, Mam, Maya, Tzotzil

All LDS scriptures are available in Spanish. The Church recently translated a version of the Bible into Spanish with full LDS footnotes, bible dictionary, and topical guide. Only select passages of the Book of Mormon have been translated into Mam, Maya, and Tzotzil. Translated materials in Mam are limited to the sacrament prayers, Gospel Principles, The Prophet Joseph Smith's Testimony, and hymns and children's songs. Mayan Church materials include The Prophet Joseph Smith's Testimony, hymns and children's songs. Tzotzil church materials consist of a family guidebook and select passages of the Book of Mormon in print and on audiocassette.

Meetinghouses

In 2010, there were approximately 1,300 meetinghouses in Mexico. Most congregations meet in church-built chapels. Some smaller branches, dependent branches, or groups meet in rented spaces or renovated buildings.

Health and Safety

Mexico experiences lower homicide rates nationwide than most countries in Central America. However, areas along the United States border experience high rates of violent crime, often related to the illegal drug trade, which pose a safety threat.

Humanitarian and Development Work

Since 1985, the Church has conducted at least 20 humanitarian or development projects which included donations of clothing, medical equipment, wheelchairs, emergency relief, school supplies, home appliances, and providing neonatal resuscitation training.[24] The Church has frequently provided emergency assistance in the wake of many natural disasters. For example in 2008, the Church provided assistance to over 15,000 flood victims in the Mexican state of Chiapas.[25]

Opportunities, Challenges and Prospects

Religious Freedom

Latter-day Saints enjoy full religious freedom and face no legal obstacles for proselytism or assembly. The Church did not receive the right to own land until 1993.[26] Local Church members report few instances of discrimination and harassment. Missionary activity in some United States border towns like Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez has been interrupted on a local level periodically due to perceived threats of violence from organized crime. Criminal activity does not appear to target LDS Church members or missionaries. The arrival of some new North American missionaries is occasionally delayed due to visa issues.

Cultural Issues

The high correlation of family and religious affiliation appears one of the greatest cultural obstacles encountered by LDS missionaries. Many Catholic families do not regularly attend mass or other religious meetings, which challenges full-time and local missionaries in their efforts to develop regular church attendance among former Catholic investigators and new LDS converts. States in central Mexico appear the most resistant toward LDS mission outreach as these are among the most Catholic. High underemployment rates in many areas are added stressors to families and create economic challenges for Latter-day Saints to faithfully pay tithing.

National Outreach

Mexico experiences some of the most far-reaching national outreach in nations with over 100 million inhabitants. 60% of the national population resides in cities with LDS mission outreach centers populated by over 20,000 inhabitants. Every state has a stake organized. 53 of the 428 cities (12%) over 20,000 inhabitants have no LDS mission outreach center and account for 1.4% of the national population. Most unreached cities have fewer than 40,000 inhabitants. The states with the most unreached cities over 20,000 people are Jalisco (13) and Guanajuato (10). Several states have a congregation established in every city with over 20,000 inhabitants, mainly in states in northern and southern Mexico.

The percentage of Latter-day Saints by Mexican state varies substantially, with the percentage of members in Estado de Mexico, the lowest percentage in Mexico, accounting for just one-seventh the percentage of members in Yucatan State, the state with the highest percentage of members. Additional states with the smallest percentages of members in the population are in central Mexico and include Guanajuato, Michoacan, Queretaro, and Aguascalientes. States with the highest percentages of members in the population are in northern and southern Mexico, namely Yucatan, Coahuila, Jalisco, and Tamaulipas. Five Mexican administrative divisions have over 100 LDS congregations: Jalisco, Veracruz, Puebla, Oaxaca States, and the Federal District. In the 2000s, the Church created three new missions in central Mexico to better administer this highly populated area which has been receptive to recent mission outreach.

With a continual church presence since the 1930s and a nominal church membership of 1.2 million, active and less active Latter-day Saints can be found in many if not most cities which currently have no mission outreach centers. Establishing greater numbers of groups and dependent branches in these locations is warranted in order to achieve greater outreach in these areas and help spur local leadership development. Many such congregations have been created in recent years as a means of preparing local leadership until leadership becomes independent enough to maintain the administrative duties required by a fully functioning congregation. Some areas have had such groups or dependent branches established recently which have become independent branches, such as the Anton Lizardo Branch just south of the city of Veracruz. Missionaries stationed in cities closest to unreached populated areas can periodically travel to cities without LDS congregations, hold cottage meetings, and prepare the area for a group or dependent branch to be organized. It is unclear how many such starter-congregations function in Mexico as such unofficial congregations are not reported by the Church.

The majority of Mexicans unreached by the Church reside in rural areas. Organized missionary activity and multiple mission outreach centers in rural areas are found only in a handful of locations, mainly in areas of Yucatan State, northwestern Mexico, and a few small communities in Puebla and Estado de Mexico States, like San Pedro Nexapa and Nealticán. Migrant workers from the southern states and rural areas seek for employment in central Mexico in the larger cities. Outreach to lesser reached rural areas may be accomplished when the relatives of migrant workers being invited to learn about the Church. Small groups of members function in many small towns, but lack sufficient active membership and mission resources to become mission outreach centers. Some urban areas are also lesser reached by Latter-day Saint missionary efforts and have few members, such as in central Mexico. For instance, the city of Leon has 1.4 million inhabitants but only one stake. Some of this more limited outreach in urban areas has come as a result of a less receptive population to LDS proselytism.

Radio, television, and Internet outreach have not been actively pursued by Latter-day Saints in Mexico. The Church does maintain a website for Mexico at http://www.sud.org.mx/lds. The website primary consists of links to Spanish-language church information and materials, with few resources tailored to the Church in Mexico, such as local church news and history. Meaningful opportunities in improving Internet and media outreach exist which can help to supplement the activities of local member-missionary and full-time missionaries.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Membership growth far outpaced congregational growth during the 2000s, indicating of poor convert retention nationwide and a shortage of capable local priesthood leaders. The traditional focus on baptismal numbers and nominal membership growth as key indicators of progress are less meaningful due to decades of poor convert retention perpetuated by quick-baptize tactics in many areas. Most converts on the records appear to have only attended church once or twice prior to baptism and never

developed meaningful habitual church attendance. Poor convert retention does not appear correlated with rapid membership growth unless such growth is spurred by mission policies to pressure investigators into baptism without receiving adequate pre-baptismal teaching and habitual church attendance. Low member activity has been apparent since as early as the late 1980s since Mexico at this time had one of the highest numbers of members per congregation on average of over 500 in 1989. Low member participation in missionary work with full-time missionaries appears to a major source of convert attrition. In the late 2000s, increases in seminary and institute enrollment appear positive signs of improving member activity among youth, which will strongly affect long term growth prospects. Emphasis on church education programs like seminary, creating opportunities for youth to participate in wholesome activities designed to strengthen testimonies and in-church peer relations, and temple excursions to perform baptisms for the dead appear fruitful methods to improve member activity and address low member participation and activity issues prevalent in many areas.

Creative activities and special events sponsored by the church on a local and regional level have provided opportunities to find those interested in learning about the gospel. During the open house held prior to the rededication of the Mexico City Mexico Temple in 2008, 10,000 teaching referrals were obtained by missionaries.[27] Meetinghouse open houses, seminary/institute graduations, and community service projects all appear to be positive methods of finding people to teachand improving the perception of the church among the general population.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Few ethnic integration issues have been encountered in Mexico as a whole. Socio-economic differences among members in some congregations may prevent greater fellowshipping and unity. Rural areas appear more ethnically heterogeneous and may present some challenges to the church regarding inter-ethnic congregations speaking multiple languages. Whites and mestizos account for the majority of the population reached by current LDS mission outreach.

Amerindian groups have receive low levels of national outreach in Mexico as only Maya, Tzotzil, and Huave have had specific mission outreach programs. Lower levels of national outreach to Amerindian groups comes largely as a result of these groups populating remote rural areas which are difficult to access and have limited local infrastructure. Health and safety issues may also pose concerns. Prospects for improving outreach in areas populated primarily by Amerindian groups appears uncertain due to the reluctance of many mission leaders to place missionaries in areas distant from established church centers with few known members and low living standards. Outreach to these areas may be most efficiently accomplished through member-missionary activity or periodic investigative visits by full-time missionaries and mission leaders.

Language Issues

Approximately 98% of the population speaks languages with church materials translated. Widespread use of Spanish simplifies mission outreach in most areas, especially cities and rural areas in northern Mexico. Few areas have non-Spanish language designated units. A Huave-speaking branch in San Francisco del Mar, Oaxaca State is one of the only LDS congregations which provides church services in an Amerindian language with less than 100,000 speakers. One English-speaking ward operates in Mexico City and another in the Mormon colonies. Branches in some rural areas use indigenous languages at church, such as Maya in the Yucatan Peninsula and Tzotzil in the highlands of Chiapas State. Missionaries seldom learn Amerindian languages. In recent years, some missions have taken a more active approach in reaching Amerindian speakers, namely the Mexico Tuxtla Gutierrez Mission in Chiapas State among Tzotzil speakers. In 2010, Mexican Amerindian languages with LDS materials do not appear to have ever had past General Conference translations.

Three million speak Nahuatl, Mixtec, Zapotec, and Tzeltal, yet all these languages remain without LDS language materials. Use of Spanish as a second language among most Amerindian groups reduces the need for church materials in these languages. Few Amerindian speakers who do not speak Spanish are literate in their own language, limiting the need for translated materials in these language. However, there may be some potential for the translation of church materials in these languages, especially Nahuatl, which may elicit a greater response to LDS mission outreach from the 30% of Mexicans who are Amerindian. The Church has developed the needed infrastructure to extend outreach to these Amerindian populations without church material translations as several mission outreach centers have been recently established in regions where these languages are spoken. These locations include medium-sized cities in Mixteco-speaking areas of western Oaxaca, small cities in pockets of Nahualt-speaking populations in central Mexico, larger cities in the highlands of the Tzeltal-speaking areas of Chiapas. Some members appear capable of translating church materials into additional indigenous languages, but may lack the English language skills needed in scripture translation projects. Returned missionaries from these areas who learn English on their missions may be a vital link in expanding the list of indigenous languages with church materials available.

Missionary Service

In 2010, between 3,000 and 4,000 full-time missionaries appeared to serve in Mexico. Approximately two-thirds of the full-time missionary force is staffed by local members, with most of the remainder filled by North Americans. The Mexico Missionary Training Center receives only local missionaries, which usually number over 100 at a time. In the past decade, Mexico appears to have increased self-sustainability in supplying full-time missionaries. A missionary training center has operated in Mexico before the late 1980s.[28] Adverse weather conditions have affected missionary work at times. In 2010, missionaries serving in smaller cities and rural areas around Juchitán were temporarily relocated to the main city due to flooding concerns.

Leadership

Mexico benefits from capable local leadership which supports over 220 stakes and many of its 12 temples. Large numbers of local members have served as international church leaders as mission presidents, area authorities, members of area presidencies, and seventies. Local members have at times taken the forefront in leading missionary work on a regional or national level. In 2004, Adolfo Avalos Rico from Puebla became the Mexico Missionary Training Center president.[29] Church membership from the Mormon colonies in northern Mexico were overrepresented in leadership positions, especially in the early 2000s.

In 2010, almost half of Mexico's 12 temples had Mexican temple presidents and many local members served as mission presidents in Mexico and abroad. During the 2000s, Mexican members served as temple presidents for the Ciudad Juarez Mexico Temple (2010),[30] Guadalajara Mexico Temple (2010),[31] Merida Mexico Temple (2010),[32] Monterrey Mexico Temple (2010),[33] Tuxtla Gutierrez Mexico Temple (2010),[34] Guayaquil Ecuador Temple (2010),[35] Tuxtla Gutierrez Mexico Temple (2007),[36] Villahermosa Mexico Temple (2006),[37] Merida Mexico Temple (2004), Monterrey Mexico Temple (2004), Tampico Mexico Temple (2004),[38] Colonia Juarez Mexico Temple (2004),[39] Oaxaca Mexico Temple (2003), Villahermosa Mexico Temple (2003),[40] Mexico City Mexico Temple (2002),[41] Tampico Mexico Temple (2000),[42] Oaxaca Mexico Temple (2000),[43] and Hermosillo Mexico Temple (2000).[44]

Many smaller cities and areas with districts report challenges with inadequate numbers of active priesthood holders preventing the creation of stakes or additional congregations. Created in 2009, the Colima Mexico Stake reported significant challenges preparing to become a stake for over a decade as missionaries and local leadership did not retain many converts and faced challenges with shortages of full tithe paying priesthood holders. More than half of the districts currently operating in the country have enough congregations to become stakes, but do not meet the active membership standards for stakes to be created. Progress toward helping districts become more self-sustaining and increasing member activity has been experienced recently. In 2009, six districts matured into stakes. In September 2010, many stakes had over 11 wards and appeared close to dividing. Delay in the creation of additional stakes may be linked to inadequate numbers of active adult male members.

The Church has organized few new districts in Mexico since 2005. Only one new district was created in Pinotepa in 2008. Several years in the late 2000s experienced slow congregational growth, an indicator of insufficient qualified local leadership to create additional wards and branches. Many new branches have been established in smaller cities, but remain part of distant stakes which may indicate challenges developing new indigenous leadership. Missionaries serving in some areas report that local Mexican church leaders have expressed little interest in opening additional congregations in lesser reached population centers, such as in the Yucatan Peninsula. Missionaries report challenges motivating local leaders in some areas to become actively involved in member-missionary activity.

Temple

The Church has established temples within a day's journey of most areas with large populations of Latter-day Saints. Of the nine metropolitan areas with over one million people, four (Mexico City, Guadalajara, Monterrey, and Ciudad Juarez) have a temple. Despite boasting 12 operating temples in 2010, many temples are underused by local members, especially on weekdays. In recent years, only the Mexico City Mexico Temple operated at or near capacity day to day. Three or fewer endowment sessions per weekday were scheduled in 2010 for temples in Ciudad Juarez, Colonia Juarez, Guadalajara, Merida, Monterrey, Tampico, and Tuxtla Gutierrez. Temples in Hermosillo, Merida, Monterrey, and Tampico each held six or more endowment sessions on Saturdays in 2010 and appeared to be among the most utilized of the smaller temples recently constructed. Temples in Oaxaca, Veracruz, and Villahermosa appear to hold endowment sessions and other temple ordinances on an appointment basis and did not publish their endowment session schedules online. In the foreseeable future, temples appear likely to be constructed in several more Mexican cities where temples are difficult to access or where nearby temples are well-utilized. Potential candidate cities include Cuantla/Cuernavaca, Puebla (which has eight stakes in the immediate metropolitan area), and Tijuana.

In 2008, 91,000 attended the open house for the Mexico City Mexico Temple prior to the rededication. Following the dedication, President Monson told the media that more temples will be built in Mexico in the coming years.[45]

Comparative Growth

Mexico has the third most missions, second most temples, and second most members after the United States. Mexico is one of only three nations with over one million nominal Latter-day Saints. Mexico was one of the only Latin American nations in the past decade to not experience mass congregation consolidations and has achieved greater congregational growth during the 2000s than most Latin American countries with over 100,000 members. Member activity rates are low and appear comparable to much of Latin America, but due to the size of total church membership, there appear to be well over three-quarters of a million inactive Mexican members. In September 2010, Brazil boasted less than 100,000 fewer Latter-day Saints than Mexico, but had 10 more stakes and 16 more districts whereas Mexico operated 98 more congregations than Brazil. In 2010, Mexico had 53 cities with over 20,000 inhabitants without a mission outreach center whereas Brazil had over 400. No other country outside the United States has as many temples as Mexico. Church growth among the Amerindian population lags behind the significant progress of neighboring Guatemala, but is stronger than most Latin American nations due to progress made among the Maya on the Yucatan Peninsula.

Low to moderate church attendance and member activity rates have been experienced by many missionary-oriented Christian

denominations in Mexico. Close proximity to the United States has generated significant interest and dedication of mission resources by many churches based across the border. Evangelicals report robust growth in many areas. Seventh Day Adventists reported between 600,000 and 700,000 adherents in 2000 but the census counted only 489,000 - nonetheless, more than twice as many as identified themselves as Latter-day Saints, notwithstanding much smaller nominal membership.[46] There were more than twice as many nominal Latter-day Saints as Seventh Day Adventists in 2009, yet Adventists maintained just 15% fewer congregations than Latter-day Saints during this period. There are nearly twice as many nominal Latter-day Saints than Jehovah's Witnesses, yet Witnesses operate six times as many congregations as Latter-day Saints and have far more active members. Latter-day Saints appear to have one of the lowest convert retention rates among the major missionary groups, in large part due to quick-baptize and the historical role of foreign LDS mission and area leaders and missionaries primarily interested in baptismal numbers without vested interest or incentive for quality and sustainable local growth . Other Christian groups appear more successful in member-missionary efforts, contributing to higher convert retention and member activity rates.

Future Prospects

Mexico offers some of the most immediate and far-reaching church growth prospects for Latter day Saints due to established church infrastructure in most areas, moderate levels of self-sustainability in local church administration, and growth of the number of native full-time missionaries over the past several decades. Abundant opportunities exist for continued LDS Church growth in Mexico due to the high receptivity of the population, but competition with Evangelicals and other Protestant churches is high. Mexico remains reliant on the United States and other nations to finance LDS church operations. Programs like the Perpetual Education Fund may help increase the financial independence of Mexican Latter-day Saints over the long term as long as members obtain specialized employment, remain active in the church, and pay tithing. Dozens of stakes appear close to dividing and missionaries report many currently unreached areas which may receive mission outreach in the near future. Prospects for the construction of additional temples is high but may not come to fruition until currently operating temples are more utilized. Currently unreached cities with over 20,000 inhabitants appear likely to have mission outreach centers established in the coming years.

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