



# Reaching the Nations International Church Growth Almanac

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.

## Nigeria

Population: 177.16 millions (#8 out of countries)

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### Geography

**Area:** 923,768 square km. Located in West Africa, Nigeria is geographically one of the largest nations in the region and borders Cameroon, Benin, Niger, Chad, and the Gulf of Guinea. Diversity in climate and terrain is high due to Nigeria's latitudinal location. Northern areas stretch into the Sahel and experience of semiarid conditions which gradually transition into Savannah in central areas and wet and tropical conditions in southern areas along the coast. Plains occupy most areas with some plateaus and low mountains in central and eastern areas. The Niger River is the largest river and empties into the Gulf of Guinea at the Niger Delta. Drought and flooding are natural hazards. Environmental issues include soil degradation, deforestation, pollution, desertification, oil spills, and urbanization. Nigeria is administratively divided into 36 states and one territory.

**Population:** 155,215,573 (July 2011)

**Annual Growth Rate:** 1.935% (2011)

**Fertility Rate:** 4.73 children born per woman (2011)

**Life Expectancy:** 46.76 male, 48.41 female (2011)

### Peoples

Hausa and Fulani: 29%

Yoruba: 21%

Igbo: 18%

Ijaw: 10%

Kanuri: 4%

Ibibio: 3.5%

Tiv: 2.5%

other: 12%

Ethnically one of the most diverse nations in Africa, Nigeria has over 250 different ethnic groups. The Hausa and Fulani together constitute the largest portion of Nigerians (29%) and reside in northern states. The Yoruba reside in western states and the Igbo populate the southeast. The Ijaw are concentrated in the Niger Delta, the Kanuri in the extreme northeast, the Ibibio in the southeast, and the Tiv in Benue State.

**Languages:** Nigerian Pidgin English (21%), Yoruba (13%), Hausa (13%), Igbo (13%), Fulani (7%), Kanuri (2%), Tiv (2%), Anaang (1%), Ebira (1%), Edo (1%), Izon (1%), Igala (1%), Nupe (1%), other or unknown (23%). There are 514 languages spoken in Nigeria, approximately 80 of which have over 100,000 speakers. The use of English is widespread in Nigeria as a language of interethnic communication. Native languages with over one million speakers include Nigerian Pidgin English (30 million), Yoruba (18.9 million), Hausa (18.5 million), Igbo (18 million), Fulani (9.32 million), Kanuri (3.2 million), Tiv (2.21 million), Anaang (1.4 million), Ebira (1 million), Edo (1 million), and Izon (1 million).

**Literacy:** 68% (2003)

## History

African peoples have inhabited Nigeria for thousands of years. Hausa kingdoms and the Bornu Empire flourished in northern Nigeria beginning in the eleventh century and were significant trading centers between North Africa and West and Central Africa. In the fifteenth century, the Yoruba founded the kingdom of Oyo in southwestern Nigeria and the kingdom of Benin was founded in south central Nigeria. Islam has historically heavily influenced northern Nigeria. Portuguese explorers were some of the first Europeans who began visiting the area. The British gained control of Nigeria during the late nineteenth century and established colonial rule which led to the unification of several British colonies in the area as Nigeria in 1914. British administration for northern and southern Nigeria was separate as the Muslim north retained Islamic courts and administrative structure whereas the government and societal institutions in the Christian and animist south were greatly influenced by the British. Nigerians experienced greater autonomy during the middle of the twentieth century until independence was ultimately achieved in 1960. A military coup overthrew the government in 1966 but failed to unify ethnic groups and reduce tensions. The military realigned administrative divisions from four regions into 12 states, granting greater autonomy to major ethnic groups. Instability persisted as the predominantly Christian southeast attempted to succeed as the Republic of Biafra, resulting in the Nigerian Civil War between 1967 and 1970. Reconstruction and reconciliation was swift following the civil war although a military coup overtook the government in 1975. During the remainder of the twentieth century, 24 additional administrative states were created. The Nigerian capital was relocated from Lagos to Abuja in 1991. Democratic rule was restored in 1999.<sup>[1]</sup> In recent years, instability continues in the oil rich Niger River Delta between ethnic groups. Violence has periodically targeted non-Nigerians in the area. Christian and Muslim tensions are among the most severe in the world. Focused in states where the population shifts from being predominantly Christian to predominantly Muslim, these tensions have left hundreds dead in single episodes of attack and retaliation.

## Culture

Nigerians have numbered among the most influential African peoples and have significantly contributed to international literature and African music and art. Several prominent West African ethnic groups have large populations in Nigeria or are indigenous to Nigeria, including the Hausa, Fulani, and Yoruba. Cultural customs and traditions differ significantly by ethnic group, with ethnic groups in northern areas generally demonstrating a strong ethno-religious connection with Islam whereas other ethnic groups exhibit a weaker or no clear ethno-religious ties and generally adhere to Christianity, Islam, and indigenous beliefs. Shari'a courts dictate legal matters for Muslims in twelve northern states where polygamy is permitted. Nigerian cuisine is representative of West Africa and heavily utilizes palm oil, yams, vegetables, rice, corn, fruits, breads, and beans. Soccer is the most popular sport. Cigarette consumption rates rank among the lowest in the world whereas alcohol consumption rates are high compared to the world average.

## Economy

**GDP per capita:** \$2,400 (2010) [5.06% of US]

**Human Development Index:** 0.423

**Corruption Index:** 2.4

Past military-backed governments have failed to diversify the economy resulting in continued dependence on Nigeria's vast oil

resources to sustain the economy. Nigeria has the tenth largest proven oil reserves worldwide and the eighth largest natural gas reserves. Over the past decade the government has sought economic reform and debt reduction assistance. Modernizing the banking system and adopting free-market economic policies have been areas of focus in recent years. Inadequate national infrastructure is the primary deterrent to greater growth. 70% of the population lives below the poverty line. Unemployment is low but underemployment is high. Agriculture, industry, and services each roughly account for one-third of the GDP. Agriculture accounts for 70% of the labor force whereas services and industry account for 20% and 10% of the labor force, respectively. Common crops include cocoa, peanuts, cotton, palm oil, grains, cassava, yams, and rubber. Cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, and fish are common livestock and agricultural products. Major industries include petroleum, coal, tin, rubber, wood products, hides and skins, textiles, construction, food processing, printing, and steel. The United States, China, and India are the primary trade partners.

Corruption is perceived as widespread and in all areas of society. Nigeria is a haven for drug traffickers and a significant transshipment point for heroin and cocaine between Europe, East Asia, and North America. Criminal activity is a serious problem and organized crime have exacerbated corruption nationwide. Money laundering has been an ongoing issue but has been receiving increasing awareness and action from the government.

## Faiths

Muslim: 50%

Christian: 40%

indigenous beliefs: 10%

## Christians

### Denominations Members Congregations

Catholic 25,000,000

Jehovah's Witnesses 320,266 5,329

Seventh Day Adventists 281,762 870

Latter-day Saints 98,359 311

## Religion

Muslims are estimated to comprise half of the population but many generally assume that the Nigerian population is essentially half Muslim and half Christian. Most Muslims are Sunnis although the number of Shi'a Muslims is a growing minority. Christians are predominantly Protestant. Northern areas of Nigeria are traditionally Muslim due to the prominence of ethnic groups with strong ethno-religious ties, including the Hausa, Fulani, and Kanuri. Small numbers of Christians reside in the north in separate communities but some have intermarried with neighboring Muslims over the past half century. There are approximately equal numbers of Muslims and Christians in the southeast and the Middle Belt. Some northern, predominantly Muslim, states of Nigeria implemented Sharia law into government, which incorporates Islamic teachings into the legal system. Tension between Christians and Muslims has left hundreds dead in individual attacks against each other. Oftentimes there are retaliation attacks after one group massacres the other, which greatly increases and can spread violence to other areas in the region. One such attack from Christians on Muslims left 700 Muslims dead in 2004.[\[2\]](#) These conflicts are found in states in the Middle Belt such as Plateau and Kano. Christians constitute a strong majority in the southeast and the Niger Delta. Several ethnic groups continue to observe traditional religious beliefs and practices in tandem with Christianity or Islam, such as the Yoruba and Igbo. Pentecostal Christianity is one of the most rapidly growing religious groups in Nigeria today.[\[3\]](#)

## Religious Freedom

### Persecution Index:

The constitution protects religious freedom which is upheld by the government. There are no laws which prohibit individuals from changing their religion, proselytizing, teaching about religion, or observing religious customs and laws. There is no state religion. Major Muslim and Christian holidays are recognized national holidays. Shari'a law is instituted in twelve northern Nigerian states for determining criminal and civic affairs for Muslims whereas customary law is applied to non-Muslims in these

states. There have been some controversies in recent years determining whether additional states may institute Shari'a law for Muslims and whether non-Muslims may chose to adjudicate to Shari'a courts. Customary practices related to Shari'a law have often been implemented into society in northern states such as the separation of males and females in public schools which has affected non-Muslims. In order to protect its citizens and maintain law and order, the government at times limits religious activity. The legal status of Nigerian citizens as native to the location in the country where they reside (known as "indigenes") or as foreign to the location in the country where they reside (known as "settlers") has significantly affected the status of religious freedom in some Nigerian states as indigenes benefit from greater privileges for holding government positions and employment and lower school fees. Religious groups must register with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) to obtain permits for building or renovating religious buildings. Some northern states have refused permits for Christian groups constructing or renovating churches. Students in public schools may only receive religious instruction for their own religion but there are reports from government officials that Christian education is required for all students in predominantly-Christian southern states. There have been comparatively few instances of governmental abuses of religious freedom whereas societal abuses of religious freedom have been ongoing and widespread. Recent instances of societal abuse of religious freedom include religiously-motivated communal killings, job discrimination, the destruction of religious buildings, and physical intimidation.[\[4\]](#)

## Largest Cities

**Urban: 50%**

Lagos, **Kano**, Ibadan, Kaduna, Port Harcourt, Benin City, **Maiduguri**, **Zaria**, Aba, Jos, Ilorin, **Oyo**, Enugu, Abeokuta, Abuja, **Sokoto**, Onitsha, Warri, Calabar, **Katsina**, Akure, Bauchi, Ebute Ikorodu, **Makurdi**, **Minna**, **Effon Alaiye**, Ilesa, **Owo**, Umuahia, Ondo, **Damaturu**, Ikot-Ekpene, **Iwo**, **Gombe**, **Jimeta**, **Gusau**, **Mubi**, **Ikire**, Owerri, **Shagamu**, Ijebu-Ode, **Ugep**, **Nnewi**, **Ise-Ekiti**, **Ila Orangun**, **Saki**, **Bida**, Awka, **Ijero-Ekiti**, **Inisa**, Abuja, **Sapele**, **Kishi**, **Gbongan**, **Ejigbo**, **Funtua**, **Igboho**, **Buguma**, **Ikirun**, Abakaliki, Okrika, **Amaigbo**, **Lafia**, **Gashua**, **Modakeke**, **Bama**, **Ilobu**, **Jalingo**, **Okigwi**, **Offa**, **Esuk Oron**, **Nsukka**, **Nguru**, **Hadejia**, **Ijebu-Igbo**, **Uromi**, **Birnin Kebbi**, **Pindiga**, **Azare**, **Nkpor**, **Ikerre**, **Lafiagi**.

Cities listed in **bold** have no LDS congregations.

28 of the 82 cities with over 100,000 inhabitants have an LDS congregation. 26% of the national population resides in the 82 most populous cities.

## LDS History

In the mid-twentieth century, interested Nigerians sent letters inquiring about the LDS Church and requested additional information. Self-identified members organized congregations patterned after the LDS Church and registered with the Nigerian government under the Church's official name. Visa problems prevented the visit of LDS leaders at the time however. Likely precipitated by the June 1978 revelation extending the priesthood to all males regardless of race or color, a fact-finding trip headed by Elder Cannon and Merrill Bateman of Brigham Young University occurred in August 1978 and recommended that an official LDS Church establishment occur. The first LDS missionaries called to West Africa were sent to Nigeria in November 1978 and organized the first barnch in Ikot Eyo called the Aboh Branch. In March 1979, 184 converts were baptized in a two-day period in Ikot Eyo. A single branch operated in Nigeria in Ikot Eyo and up to 15 groups were under the administration of the branch in 1979. An additional group of prospective Latter-day Saints meeting under the name "L.D.S. Nigerian Mission" nearby the city of Owerri were discovered by church representatives shortly thereafter. International church leaders began making their first visits to Nigerian Latter-day Saints in 1979 including regional representatives and apostles.[\[5\]](#) Many large Nigerian cities had their first LDS congregations organized in the 1980s. Seminary and institute commenced in 1988. LDS Church president Gordon B. Hinckley visited Nigeria in 1998.[\[6\]](#)

## Missions

The West Africa Mission was created in 1980 and renamed the Nigeria Lagos Mission in 1985. Additional missions were organized in Aba [relocated to Port Harcourt in 1995] (1988), Ilorin [discontinued in 1993] (1992) and Jos [relocated to Enugu in 1993] (1992). Religious violence and instability appear the primary reasons for the closure of the Nigeria Ilorin Mission and the relocation of the Nigeria Jos Mission. Additional missions were organized in 2002 in Ibadan and Uyo [relocated to Calabar in 2008]. In 2007, the Nigeria Ibadan Mission was relocated to Lagos and renamed the Lagos Nigeria East Mission and was discontinued in 2009. The number of missions increased from two in 1990 to three in 2000, five in 2005, and four in 2011.

## Membership Growth

**LDS Membership: 98,359 (2010)**

In the 1960s, there were approximately 16,000 self-identified Nigerian Latter-day Saints meeting in over 60 congregations.[\[7\]](#) In 1983, there were 2,255 Latter-day Saints. Membership reached 8,000 in 1987, 22,000 in 1993, 33,000 in 1997, and 49,935 in 2000. There were 60,087 Latter-day Saints in 2002, 68,777 in 2004, 79,482 in 2006, 88,374 in 2008, and 98,359 in 2010. During the 2000s, LDS annual membership growth rates decreased from 6-11% between 2001 and 2006 to 5-6% from 2007 to

2010. In 2010, one in 1,578 was LDS.

## **Congregational Growth**

**Wards: 139 Branches: 176**

There were 50 LDS congregations in Nigeria in 1987. The number of congregations increased to 126 in 1993, 148 in 1997, and 194 in 2000. Moderately high rates of congregational growth were sustained in the 2000s as LDS congregations numbered 220 in 2002, 237 in 2004, 254 in 2006, 260 in 2008, and 306 in 2010. By June 2011, there were 311 LDS congregations. During the 2000s, congregational growth occurred throughout Nigeria but was slowest in Ibadan and surrounding cities. The most rapid congregational growth occurred in Rivers, Edo, Imo, and Akwa Ibom States. The number of wards increased from 17 in 1993 to 79 in 2000, 109 in 2005, and 139 in June 2011.

The first districts were organized in the 1980s. In 1988, the first stake in Nigeria was organized in Aba. At the time there were seven districts functioning in Benin City, Calabar, Etinan, Ikot Ekong, Lagos, and Uyo.<sup>[8]</sup> Additional stakes were organized in Port Harcourt (1990), Benin City Ihogbe (1993), Eket (1996), Etinan (1996), Umuahia (1996), Lagos (1997), Benin City Ikpokpan (1997), Owerri (1998), Ikot Akpaden (1999), Nsit Ubium (1999), Uyo (2001), Calabar (2002), Port Harcourt West (2003), Lagos West (2005), Aba Ogbor Hill (2006), Benin City New Benin (2007), Lagos South (2011), and Port Harcourt East (2011). In 2005, the Umuahia Nigeria Stake was discontinued and divided into two districts. The number of stakes increased from three in 1993 to eight in 1997, 11 in 2000, 14 in 2005, and 17 in mid-2011. The number of districts in Nigeria increased from eight in 1998 to 15 in 1993, 11 in 1997, 12 in 2000, 13 in 2005, and 21 in mid-2011. In mid-2011, districts were operating in Enugu (1988), Onitsha (1988), Ibadan (1991), Jos (1993), Ijebu-Ode (1993), Abeokuta (1993), Umuahia (1995), Abuja (1997), Akamkpa (1998), Warri (1999), Ile-Ife (1999), Okpuala Ngwa (2005), Asaba (2006), Ibiono (2008), Oron (2009), Ikot Ekpene (2009), Okrika (2009), Abak (2010), Ekpoma (2010), Mbaise (2010), and Ibesikpo (2010). In 2009 one district was discontinued in Akure. The district at the time only had two branches in Akure and Ondo. Several mission branches operate in Abakaliki, Afikpo, Ilorin, Okposi, and Yenagoa (2).

## **Activity and Retention**

The LDS Church in Nigeria experiences high rates of member activity and convert retention. Sacrament meeting attendance in the Aba Nigeria Stake ranged from 44-75% in 1988 when the stake was first organized.<sup>[9]</sup> Large meetings have been well attended. In 1998, over 12,400 attended a regional conference in Nigeria.<sup>[10]</sup> 2,000 attended the groundbreaking for the Aba Nigeria Temple in 2002.<sup>[11]</sup> 25,095 attended the open house of the Aba Nigeria Temple and 7,415 members attended the dedicatory services in 2005.<sup>[12]</sup> 6,788 were enrolled in seminary and institute during the 2009-2010 school year. The average number of members per congregation doubled between 1987 and 2010 from 160 to 321 not due to inactivity issues but the maturation of branches into wards between 1988 and 2010. Congregational and membership growth rates have been commensurate since the mid-2000s as larger numbers of branches and wards have been organized and fewer branches have matured into wards. The number of active members per congregation generally ranges from 50 to 200. Nationwide active membership is estimated at approximately 50,000, or 50-55% of total church membership.

## **Public Affairs and Finding**

Local LDS leaders and members have participated in public affairs and finding through proselytizing and holding meetings and support groups. Local LDS Relief Societies have sponsored self-help exhibitions for members and non-members alike providing opportunities for finding investigators.<sup>[13]</sup> In 1996, an open house for an LDS chapel in the Nigeria Port Harcourt Mission was attended by 1,600 nearby residents in the community and yielded 120 referrals for visits from full-time missionaries.<sup>[14]</sup> In 2003, an LDS member in Enugu presented cassette tapes of recordings of LDS hymns and the Mormon Tabernacle Choir to a local radio station for broadcasting.<sup>[15]</sup> That same year, primary children from a ward in Port Harcourt were featured on a television station for Nigeria's independence day.<sup>[16]</sup> The Church sponsors literacy classes in several areas of Nigeria providing opportunities for introducing the gospel to nonmembers seeking literacy skills.

## **Language Materials**

**Languages with LDS Scripture:** English, Igbo, Yoruba, Efik

All LDS scriptures and a few church materials are available in Igbo whereas the Book of Mormon and a few church materials are available in Yoruba and Efik. Gospel Principles and the Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith are available in Fulani and Hausa.

## **Meetinghouses**

In 2011, there were over 150 LDS meetinghouses in Nigeria. Larger congregations in major cities often meet in church-built meetinghouses whereas congregations in other locations generally assemble in renovated buildings, rented spaces, or



outdoors.

## Health and Safety

Threats of violence directed towards non-Africans has prompted LDS international leaders to only call African missionaries to serve in Nigeria with the exception of mission presidents and senior missionary couples. In February 2007, four Nigerian missionaries serving in Emohua, Rivers State were abducted and held hostage for five days. Their captors likely kidnapped the missionaries believing they had a connection with the oil industry. Local Nigerian members were instrumental in their release, which was done peacefully and with no ransom paid.<sup>[17]</sup> Violence in Aba prompted LDS leaders to close the Aba Nigeria Temple in 2009 for a year. Temple missionaries reported that the temple received threats from some in the area, who left bullet holes in some doors in the temple complex. The temple was closed as a precaution against violence towards members and non-Nigerian temple workers. Prior to reopening, the temple was made more secure for temple patrons.

## Humanitarian and Development Work

Numerous humanitarian and development projects have occurred in Nigeria, many of which headed and carried out by local members. Professors and students from Brigham Young University donated medical texts to a Nigerian nursing college in 1990.<sup>[18]</sup> In 2003, local church members in Ijebu-Ode donated supplies to a local library and prison.<sup>[19]</sup> Local LDS youth in Lagos helped clear city drains and fill potholes in 2004.<sup>[20]</sup> That same year local members in Enugu helped remodel the hospital room at a local prison.<sup>[21]</sup> Additional projects have included measles initiatives, clean water projects, health fairs, and neonatal resuscitation trainings.<sup>[22]</sup>

## Opportunities, Challenges and Prospects

### Religious Freedom

Latter-day Saints benefit from full religious freedom to worship, proselyte, and assemble in all administrative divisions in Nigeria. Friction between Christians and Muslims and threats of violence in the conflict-ridden Middle Belt in central Nigeria has contributed to a limited LDS presence restricted to Abuja and some small nearby cities and towns, Jos, Kaduna, and Bauchi. The enforcement of Shari'a law in twelve northern states imposes Islamic religious code on the Muslim population but does not significantly impact the operation of Christian denominations like the LDS Church. Christians in many northern states have been targets of religious violence and their meetinghouses have been demolished. Ongoing societal abuse of religious freedom in northern Nigeria and the Middle Belt may prevent any expansion of LDS outreach in the region for years to come.

### Cultural Issues

The population of Nigeria overall has exhibited some of the highest receptivity to the LDS Church among the populations of African nations as demonstrated by rapid church growth over the past three decades which has been largely fueled by local members staffing leadership, serving missions, and performing member-missionary work. Interest in religion and church attendance rates for Nigerian Christians are among the highest in the world and provide cultural advantages for Latter-day Saints. Some cultural practices have presented challenges for the Church. Upon the initial establishment of the Church in 1979, LDS missionaries discovered that many new members and self-identified Latter-day Saints incorporated many elements of Pentecostal Christianity into their worship, including shouting hallelujahs, dancing, and the use of collection plates and drums. Some Nigerians may be initially disinterested in the LDS Church due to the absence of these and other traditional religious customs in LDS worship services. Interested individuals appear willing to make the necessary changes in their private and public worship once they begin learning about the Church and are baptized. Alcohol and illicit drug use poses challenges for LDS mission outreach for those who habitually use these substances.

Illiteracy is a challenge for growth in the LDS Church in Nigeria as some individuals have a limited understanding of church teachings and rely on others for developing their personal testimonies. Literacy rates in Nigeria are substantially higher than many African nations although approximately one-third of Nigerians are illiterate. Illiterate members may demonstrate a solid understanding of church teachings overtime and devotion to the Church through weekly church attendance, scripture reading, and prayer but offer limited utility as leaders. The Church has addressed literacy issues through holding literacy classes which have met local needs and provide finding opportunities.

Poverty has been a major challenge for members to develop economic self reliance and help build up the Church financially. As of 2009, the Perpetual Education Fund had yet to be introduced to Nigeria. Undertaking development work centered on employment workshops and constructing and staffing schools may meet local needs and provide greater reinforcement for long-term stability in the LDS Church by discouraging emigration and developing a stronger LDS Nigerian community.

LDS teaching approaches have been tailored to Christians and consequently most of the greatest growth in the Church in

Nigeria has occurred in predominantly-Christian areas. The lack of LDS materials tailored for those with a Muslim background seriously inhibits the Church's missionary efforts in predominantly Muslim areas of Nigeria. Of the twelve states under Shari'a law, only two have an LDS congregation (Kaduna and Bauchi). Lower receptivity among Muslim populations has likely contributed to extremely limited outreach potential in predominantly Muslim areas, but widespread religious freedom nonetheless offers valuable opportunities to establish church infrastructure, especially in the event if Muslims populations become more receptive one day. The practice of polygamy in states which practice Shari'a law poses a major obstacle to LDS outreach in the region as those engaged in a polygamous marriage must divorce polygamous spouses and be interviewed by a member of the mission or area presidency to be baptized. The production of LDS teaching approaches for Muslim audiences may improve prospects for growth in Muslim-majority areas.

## **National Outreach**

Approximately 23% of the national population resides in a city or location with an LDS congregation. 22 of the 37 administrative divisions have an LDS congregation. Approximately half of the Nigerian population resides in administrative states with one or no LDS congregations. 40% of the national population resides in the 15 unreached states (Adamawa, Benue, Borno, Ekiti, Gombe, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Kogi, Nassarawa, Sokoto, Taraba, Yobe, and Zamfara) whereas nine percent of the national population resides in the three states with only one LDS congregation (Kaduna, Bauchi, and Kwara). 61% of the population residing in cities over 100,000 inhabitants live in cities with LDS congregations.

Taking the ratio of LDS congregations to state population provides insights into the scope of LDS outreach by state as congregations serve as mission outreach centers and the percentage of Latter-day Saints in the general population by Nigerian state. LDS outreach appears most penetrating and the percentage of Latter-day Saints appears highest in Akwa Ibom, Edo, and Abia States as indicated by each of these states having less than 100,000 inhabitants per LDS congregation. Nigerian states with an LDS presence that appear to have the lowest percentage of members each have over one million inhabitants per LDS congregation and include Kaduna (one congregation per 6.1 million inhabitants), Bauchi (one in 4.65 million), Kwara (one in 2.37 million), Ondo (one in 1.73 million), Niger (one in 1.32 million), and Plateau (one in 1.07 million). On average, there is one LDS congregation per half a million inhabitants in Nigeria.

Societal abuse of religious freedom, lower receptivity rates, violence between Christians and Muslims, distance from mission outreach centers, the lack of LDS materials in local languages, and no LDS teaching materials tailored toward those with a Muslim background have limited national outreach in northern Nigeria. Prospects for opening additional LDS congregations in currently unreached northern states is poor due to safety concerns stemming from ongoing societal abuse of religious freedom and violence. States without an LDS congregation at present which appear most likely to receive LDS outreach in the foreseeable future include Adamawa, Benue, Ekiti, Kogi, Nassarawa, and Taraba as each of these states are not under Shari'a law and have sizeable Christian populations notwithstanding Muslims outnumbering Christians in most of these states. Past failed LDS efforts to organize new missions in central Nigeria in Jos and Ilorin in the early 1990s may prevent any attempted expansion of LDS mission outreach in central and northern areas until threats of religious violence diminish.

Prospects for expanding LDS outreach appear most favorable in southeastern and southwestern Nigeria, the Niger Delta, and Edo State as these areas have demonstrated the highest receptivity and are generally more stable than the Middle Belt and northern areas. Unparalleled LDS outreach has occurred in rural areas of southeastern states since the establishment of the Church in the late 1970s and at present nearly a dozen stakes and districts function in rural areas of Akwa Ibom State. Some of the greatest advances in expanding national outreach in Africa since 2000 have occurred in southeastern Nigeria as rapid congregational growth has occurred in rural areas, most notably Ibiono, Ikot Ekpene, and Okpuala Ngwa. To the contrary of most areas of the world, urban areas appear less reached by Latter-day Saints than many rural areas in Akwa Ibom State. Significant opportunities for continued expansion of outreach in southeastern Nigeria exist as despite recent advances as most of the region is not within the geographical boundaries of established stakes and districts. Holding cottage meetings, organizing dependent branches, and assigning ward and branch missionaries to proselyte in these locations may facilitate continued national outreach expansion. Expansion of LDS outreach into rural areas in Edo State began in the late 2000s and experienced marked success as the number of branches in Ekpoma increased from two in the late 2000s to seven by mid-2011. Notable success in multiplying the number of LDS congregations in some of the largest cities occurred in the 2000s, most notably in Benin City and Lagos. Created in 2007, the Benin City Nigeria New Benin Stake had six wards and by mid-2010 the number of wards increased to 15. Today Benin City appears to be the most reached Nigerian city with over one million inhabitants.

The LDS Church has utilized media and other means to expand outreach in Nigeria but these efforts appear inconsistent and uncoordinated with mission leadership. Significant opportunities for conducting persistent LDS outreach by television, radio, and the internet in Nigeria have yet to be explored.

## **Member Activity and Convert Retention**

Member activity and convert retention rates appear higher than in most African nations and rank among the highest in the world for nations with over 10,000 members. Good member activity and convert retention rates appear to have occurred primarily from local member and missionary self sufficiency and cultural customs which strongly encourage church attendance. The country has developed a much larger and stronger leadership and membership base than in many other African nations. The Church has focused on retaining converts and developing leadership to meet member needs and facilitate future growth. The Church strives to maintain a balance between developing strong local membership and leadership by adding new converts without overburdening the existing church infrastructure. High involvement of local members in missionary activity has benefited

convert retention and member activity rates and reduces demands of the limited number of full-time missionaries assigned to the country. The utilization of African missionaries has also likely facilitated investigator and recent convert understanding of LDS teachings as African missionaries have greater familiarity with local culture. Competition for converts with other Christian denominations has likely led to attrition of some LDS converts who have returned to their former churches or have joined other denominations.

## **Ethnic Issues and Integration**

Geography has historically separated ethnic groups and reduced ethnic integration issues, but over the past half century many ethnic groups have relocated to locations to which they are not native. Ethnic integration issues pose the greatest challenges for the LDS Church in the Middle Belt where resource competition, discrimination, and ethno-religious violence are commonplace. Ethnic integration challenges has not appeared to pose significant challenges for the Church in most areas in which it is established. Common usage of English has facilitated the integration of differing ethnic groups.

## **Language Issues**

The use of English as an official language and for business, government, and interethnic communication has facilitated the growth of the LDS Church as many utilize LDS materials in English. LDS materials are available in the native language of two-thirds of the Nigerian population although LDS scripture is only available in the native language of slightly less than half of the population. Translating additional church materials and LDS scriptures in local languages will be needed to facilitate local member comprehension of church doctrines and to perpetuate church growth, especially in rural areas where English is less commonly spoken. Linguistic diversity is extreme in some areas with sizeable LDS populations such as in Akwa Ibom State where approximately a dozen indigenous languages are spoken. Prospects appear most favorable for additional LDS materials and scriptures to be translated into Igbo, Yoruba, and Efik and poor for additional translations in Hausa and Fulani due to few speakers among Latter-day Saints and a lack of LDS outreach in areas where speakers of these languages reside. Additional translations of materials and scriptures will be required to make greater headway in proselytizing speakers of these languages. Prospects of translations of LDS materials in additional languages may be forthcoming for languages spoken in rural areas with sizeable numbers of speakers that have experienced recent church growth, such as Edo, Ibibo and Ijaw.

## **Missionary Service**

Nigerians have historically served full-time missions in large numbers, resulting in the self-sufficiency of the LDS missionary force in Nigeria at present. In 1988, there were 46 Nigerians serving full-time missions when LDS membership was nearly 10,000. In 2011, there may have been over 500 Nigerians serve full-time missions worldwide, almost all of which serve in Africa. Opportunities abound for increasing the number of Nigerian members serving missions, which will be critical toward expanding LDS outreach both within Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa. Increased emphasis on seminary and institute attendance for mission preparation may increase the number of local members serving missions in the coming years.

## **Leadership**

The LDS Church in Nigeria exhibits self-sufficient local leadership which staffs administration for practically all congregations and is capable of expanding outreach with coordinating with mission leadership. Success in achieving good local leadership development has hinged on enthusiastic LDS converts training and mentoring new members and high rates of missionary service. Poverty, illiteracy, and limited leadership training in isolated congregations poses challenges for increasing the number of priesthood holders capable of holding leadership positions. Several districts have likely not become stakes due to challenges reaching the minimal number of active Melchizedek Priesthood holders, but often this may be due to limited LDS membership altogether. Delays in stake creations due to activity or leadership challenges may have occurred in districts in western Nigeria such as in Ibadan. Several Nigerians have served in international church leadership positions. In 1990, David William Eka from Port Harcourt was called as a regional representative in 1990.<sup>[23]</sup> In 1995, Christopher N. Chukwurah from Lagos was called as an area authority.<sup>[24]</sup> In 2001, David William Eka was called to preside over the Nigeria Lagos Mission.<sup>[25]</sup> In 2003, Alexander A. Odume from Benin City and Adesina J. Olukanni from Ikeja were called as Area Authority Seventies.<sup>[26]</sup> In 2007, Loveday Iheanyichi Nwankpa from Aba was called to preside over the Nigeria Port Harcourt Mission<sup>[27]</sup> and Frederick C. Ihesiene from Aba<sup>[28]</sup> and David W. Eka from Port Harcourt were called as Area Seventies.<sup>[29]</sup> In 2010, Elder Adume was called as the Aba Nigeria Temple president.<sup>[30]</sup> In the coming years, Nigerian LDS leadership may play a major role in overseeing LDS missionary activity in other African nations due to its large numbers and strong devotion.

## **Temple**

Nigeria is assigned to the Aba Nigeria Temple. Announced in 2000 and completed in 2005, the Aba Nigeria Temple is a small temple with two endowment rooms and two sealing rooms. Endowment sessions are made by appointment. The temple appears moderately utilized primarily by members living in southeastern Nigeria. Members from other regions of the country appear to infrequently attend the temple due to travel times and costs. Due to poverty and relatively few Latter-day Saints in the country, the LDS Church in Nigeria appears to heavily rely on the international church for finances which may delay the construction of additional temples. Concentrated populations of LDS members in other areas of the country may merit the construction of additional temples in the coming years. Benin City and Lagos appear the most likely to support future temples due to their large populations, the operation of three or more LDS stakes in each city, and consistent congregational growth and



stake organizations in both cities.

## Comparative Growth

The LDS Church in Nigeria supports the largest number of LDS members, stakes, districts, congregations, and missions in Africa and the twenty-first most members and stakes, the seventh most districts, the eleventh most congregations, and the thirteenth most missions worldwide notwithstanding Nigeria ranks eighth in population size worldwide. No other country in the world has as high of an activity rate for Latter-day Saints as Nigeria. 30% of LDS membership in Africa is in Nigeria. The ratio of LDS missions to the general population is comparable to most of Sub-Saharan Africa. Nigeria remains largely underserved by LDS mission outreach despite widespread religious freedom and a highly receptive population. If the ratio of LDS missions to the general population in Nigeria were at the same ratio as in Mexico, there would be 33 LDS missions in Nigeria. Member activity rates in Nigeria are slightly above average for Sub-Saharan Africa whereas the percentage of the population residing in areas with LDS congregations was representative for the region. No other country with more members than Nigeria experienced as high of an annual membership growth rate as Nigeria during most of the 2000s. The increase in the number of LDS congregations in Nigeria between 2000 and 2010 was among the largest worldwide as Nigeria was one of only four countries which experienced increases in the number of LDS congregations over 100 during this period, the others being the United States, Mexico, and Brazil.

Other Christian churches with a strong focus in missionary work have experienced strong growth in Nigeria, but many have experienced less rapid growth and report smaller membership numbers than in other African nations notwithstanding Nigeria supporting Africa's largest population. Most Christian denominations operating in Nigeria today were established decades prior to the LDS Church. For example, when the LDS Church was first established in Nigeria in the late 1970s there were 40,000 Seventh Day Adventists. Jehovah's Witnesses reported 313,000 active members organized in 5,045 congregations whereas the Seventh Day Adventist Church had 263,000 members in 804 congregations in 2008. Pentecostals and evangelicals appear to be the most successful Christian denominations in Nigeria and continue to report rapid growth and tens of millions of members although outreach in northern and central areas remains spotty and difficult due to ethno-religious violence.

## Future Prospects

The outlook for future LDS Church growth in Nigeria is favorable due to a well-established body of self-sufficient local leadership, high rates of missionary service among members, continued expansion of national outreach over the past three decades into rural areas, consistent congregational growth, strong member activity and convert retention, and high rates of receptivity in many areas. Several stakes appear close to splitting to organize additional stakes and some districts may become stakes within the near future. The number of stakes in Benin City will likely more than double with the next decade due to rapid congregational growth as all three stakes had ten or more wards in mid-2011. Additional stakes may be organized in Akwa Ibom State and additional districts may be organized in Yenagoa, Afikpo, and Ohafia. Over the medium and long term, the LDS Church in Nigeria may expect to experience growth comparable to the Philippines and Brazil during the last few decades of the twentieth century only with higher convert retention and member activity rates. The opening of a missionary training center in Nigeria, the introduction of the Perpetual Education Fund, and a small LDS university to supply training to Nigerian missionaries and foster local sustainability warrants serious consideration from regional and international church leadership. Prospects appear favorable for the construction of additional temples in Nigeria in the foreseeable future in Benin City and Lagos but the low degree of financial self-sustainability may delay the building of additional temples for many more years.

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