

Reaching the Nations International Church Growth Almanac

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



Netherlands



Population: 16.88 millions (#66 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 41,543 square km. Occupying lowland plains along the North Sea, the Netherlands borders Germany and Belgium. Many coastal areas consist of polders, which use dikes to prevent the flow of water onto reclaimed tracts of land that were formerly flood plains, swamps, or coastal sea floor. Consequently, large areas of the country are below sea level. There are some hills in the southeast. Temperate marine climate occurs, modifying temperature to generate cool summers and mild winters with frequent precipitation. One of Europe's largest rivers, the Rhine and its tributaries (Meuse and Schelde) empty into the North Sea in the south. Flooding is a natural hazard. Environmental issues include water pollution from industry and agricultural activity, air pollution, and acid rain. The Netherlands are divided into twelve administrative provinces.

Peoples

Dutch: 76.9%

Other European Union ethnic groups not otherwise specified: 6.4%

Turkish: 2.4%

Moroccan: 2.3%

Indonesian: 2.1%

German: 2.1%

Surinamese: 2.0%

Polish: 1.0%

Other: 4.8%

Once homogenously Dutch, immigrants account for approximately 23% of the population of the Netherlands today. Several of these groups originated from former Dutch colonies, such as Indonesia and Suriname. Turks and Moroccans constitute the largest Middle Eastern/North African nationalities.

Population: 17,280,397 (July 2020)

Annual Growth Rate: 0.37% (2020)

Fertility Rate: 1.77 children born per woman (2020)

Life Expectancy: 79.5 male, 84.1 female (2020)

Languages: Dutch (66.5%), Frisian (4.9%), Limburgish (4.1%), Gronings (3.5%), Arabic dialects (3.3%), Turkish (2.3%), Sallands (2.0%), Sranan Tongo (2.0%), Twents (1.9%), Gronings (1.5%), Zeeuws (1.3%), Achterhoeks (1.2%), Turkish (1.1%), Veluws (1.0%), Indonesian (0.8%), Papiamentu (0.8%), Vlaams (0.8%), other (1.0%). Dutch and Frisian are official languages. Other indigenous languages like Limburgish are recognized on a provincial level. Dutch is spoken by most minority groups as a second language and is the only language with over one million native speakers (11.4 million). Most the population speaks English as a second language.

Literacy: 98% (2011)

History

Germanic tribes inhabited the region, which was partially conquered by the Romans in the first century BC. The Franks ruled between the fourth and eight centuries AD, followed by the House of Burgundy and the Austrian Habsburgs. The Spanish seized the Netherlands in the sixteenth century, and the Dutch revolted under Willem of Orange in 1558. The Republic of the United Netherlands formed in 1579 as a result of the Union of Utrecht but only consisted of the seven northern provinces. The Netherlands have also gone under the name of Holland. During the next century, the Dutch expanded their influences worldwide as colonialism began in the West Indies and Southeast Asia. War and declining technological superiority contributed to waning power in the eighteenth century. Napoleonic France overran the monarchy in 1795, and the Netherlands remained part of France until 1815 when the Kingdom of the United Netherlands was established. Belgium revolted and gained independence in 1830. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Netherlands experienced progress and regained greater power through its colonial possessions. The Netherlands professed neutrality during both World Wars but was occupied by Nazi Germany between 1940 and 1945, and 75% of the Jewish population perished. Dutch colonies became independent nations shortly after World War II or possess a high degree of autonomy as dependent areas still under Dutch sovereignty today.[1] The Netherlands was among the original founding nations of the European Union and NATO. In 1999, the euro currency was introduced. In 2010, Caribbean Dutch possessions under the Netherland Antilles were reorganized, with Sint Maarten and Curacao becoming constituent countries under Dutch sovereignty. The smaller islands of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba are special “public entities.” The Netherlands is a parliamentary constitutional monarchy.

Culture

Known as a land of tulips, windmills, and wooden shoes, the Netherlands has retained many native customs and traditions despite long periods of past foreign occupation. Dutch painters have been world renowned for centuries and include Rembrandt, Vincent van Gogh, and Piet Mondrian. The Dutch traditional festival of Sint Nicolaas on December fourth features Sinterklaas, which, combined with Father Christmas, has led to the American figure of Santa Claus.[2] Despite a rich Christian past, the Netherlands is among the most secular European nations, as only a small minority actively practice their faith. Cuisine varies by location and is influenced by nearby countries like France and Germany. Soups, breads, pastries, meats, and alcohol are common foods. Legalized prostitution occurs in Amsterdam’s red light district; the government has sought to reduce its size as crime and human rights violations have increased. Cigarette and alcohol consumption rates and rates of illicit drug use are high

compared to world averages.

Economy

GDP per capita: $53,900 (2017) 90.1% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.933 (2018)

Corruption Index: 82 (2019)

The Netherlands are an important transportation and industrial hub for Western Europe. As such, much of the economy is focused on transportation. The Netherlands has outperformed many other European nations in attracting foreign investment. The global financial crisis in the late 2000s took a heavy toll on the economy as exports declined by 25% due to the slowdown in demand for Dutch goods. Recovery was slow, and the government did not begin to report a budget surplus until 2017. Natural gas, oil, peat, salt, limestone, sand, gravel, and farmland are natural resources. Services employ 82% of the labor force and generate 70% of the GDP, whereas industry employs 17% of the work force and generates 18% of the GDP. Major industries include agroindustries, engineering products, machinery, chemicals, petroleum, constructions, electronics, and fishing. Agriculture accounts for less than 2% of the GDP and work force. Primary crops include vegetables and flowers. Germany, Belgium, the United Kingdom, and China are the primary trade partners.

The Netherlands has consistently ranked among the ten least corrupt countries in the world for many years. Financial and administrative corruption are low, but money laundering vulnerability is a concern. Illicit drugs are produced and trafficked throughout Europe, especially ecstasy and marijuana. The Netherlands is a significant transshipment point for cocaine, heroin, and hashish.

Faiths

Christian: 38.5%

Muslim: 5.1%

Other: 5.4%

None: 51%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Roman Catholic – 4,078,174

Dutch Reformed – 1,105,945

Evangelicals – 716,883

Calvinist – 501,132

Jehovah’s Witnesses – 29,525 – 352

Latter-day Saints – 9,326 – 24

Seventh Day Adventists – 5.990 – 74

Religion

The Netherlands is one of the most secular European nations. The number of nonreligious individuals continues to increase and recently surpassed 50% of the population. Estimates of the percentages of those affiliated with a particular religious group differ, as a report conducted by the Scientific Council for government Policy found that 51.6% of the population had some religious affiliation in 2006 and 43.4% of the population was Christian. The Social Planning Bureau found that the percentage of the population that were church members declined from 76% in 1958 to 30% in 2006 (16% Catholic and 14% Protestant). Catholics are the largest religious group. In the 2000s, 16% of the population regularly attended a Christian church.[3] Most Muslims are Turkish or Moroccan immigrants. Hindus number approximately 10,000 and primarily consist of Surinamese immigrants of Indian ancestry. Buddhists total 17,000. The number of Jews is estimated between 40,000 and 50,000.[4] Most non-Christian individuals who identify with a relationship group do not appear to actively practice their faith.

Religious Freedom

The constitution protects religious freedom and grants the government authority to restrict religious practices if they become a risk to public order, traffic safety, or public health. The government upholds religious freedom guaranteed by the constitution and diligently works to foster an environment of religious tolerance. Public speech that incites hatred toward a religious group is a crime and has been an area of conflict due to freedom of speech principles. Religious groups are not required to register with the government to operate, but certain rights and privileges, such as tax exemption status, are only bestowed upon registered religious groups. There have been some recent reports of societal abuse of religious freedom targeting Muslims and Jews, which has been condemned by the government. The government recently passed legislation that bars the use of face coverings in public.[5]

Largest Cities

Urban: 92.2% (2020)

Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht, Eindhoven, Leiden, **Dordrecht**, Groningen, **Tilburg**, Haarlem, Almere, Heerlen, 's-Hertogenbosch, **Nijmegen**, Breda, **Amersfoort**, **Enschede**, Apeldoorn, Zoetermeer, **Maastricht**, **Velsen**, Arnhem, Alkmaar.

Cities listed in **bold** have no congregation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Sixteen of the twenty-three cities with over 100,000 inhabitants have a Church congregation. Thirty-seven percent (37%) of the national population resides in the twenty-three most populous cities.

Latter-day Saint History

The first known Latter-day Saint to travel to the Netherlands was Elder Orson Hyde, who stopped for over a week in Amsterdam and Rotterdam en route to Jerusalem on a missionary journey in 1840. Orson Hyde preached to Jewish rabbis during his stay, but the Church did not assign missionaries to the Netherlands until August 1861. By May 1862, the missionaries baptized fourteen converts and organized a branch in Amsterdam. Missionaries serving in the Netherlands operated under the Swiss and German Mission until the creation of the Netherlands Mission in late 1864.[6] Persecution worsened in the 1860s and 1870s, slowing missionary progress. Full-time missionaries also struggled to learn Dutch proficiently. The first Dutch-language tracts and church materials were translated in the 1860s. The translation of the Book of Mormon in Dutch was completed by 1889.

Remaining Latter-day Saint scriptures were translated by 1911.[7] Belgium was assigned to the Netherlands Mission in 1891.[8] During World War II, the Church withdrew the fifty-four full-time missionaries assigned to the Netherlands. During the war, 393 members immigrated to the United States, and 579 converts were baptized primarily through the efforts of sister member-missionaries. Over 1,700 converts were baptized between 1921 and 1929.[9] The Church began petitioning for official recognition from the government in the 1930s but did not obtain government recognition until August 1955. Prior to this time, the Church was not able to own property and did not receive benefits granted to other officially recognized religious groups. Dutch Latter-day Saints planted potatoes in abundance following World War II and sent seventy tons of excess potatoes to needy German Latter-day Saints.[10] 1952, LDS Church President David O. McKay visited the Queen of the Netherlands.[11] In 1961, the Church organized its first stake in continental Europe in the Netherlands, named the Holland Stake, which was the first non-English-speaking stake organized in the Church. During the first one hundred years of a Church presence in the Netherlands, 4,500 full-time missionaries were assigned, and over 14,000 converts were baptized—many of whom immigrated to Utah.[12] Seminary and institute began by the mid-1970s. In 1996, President Hinckley visited and met with local members.[13] In 2002, the Church consolidated the Netherlands Amsterdam Mission with the Belgium Brussels and Switzerland Geneva Missions, resulting in the formation of the Belgium Brussels/Netherlands Mission.[14] In 2005, the Netherlands was included in the Church's European tour of its Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit.[15]

Membership Growth

Church Membership: 9,326 (2019)

There were 2,631 Latter-day Saints in 1930.[16] Following World War II, there were 3,200 members.[17] Church membership totaled 3,408 in 1950 and 3,810 in 1960. By 1973, there were over 7,000 Latter-day Saints.[18] Membership fluctuated between 6,300 and 8,000 between the early 1970s and the mid-1990s. Membership reached 7,500 in the mid-1990s, and by year-end 2000, there were 7,778 Latter-day Saints.

Slow, consistent membership growth occurred in the 2000s as membership totaled 8,006 in 2003, 8,286 in 2005, 8,548 in 2007, and 8,901 in 2009. Church membership generally increased by approximately one hundred a year. Annual membership growth rates in the 2000s varied from a low of 0.4% in 2001 to a high of 2.4% in 2005. Nominal membership growth in the 2000s was primarily attributed to convert baptisms among the non-Dutch population, although church attendance remained stagnant or may have even declined over this period. In the 2010s, Church membership growth rates were essentially stagnant, as Church membership stood at 9,284 in 2013, 9,017 in 2015, and 9,421 in 2018. Annual membership growth rates in the 2010s ranged from as high as 2.26% to as low as -2.38%.

In 2019, one in 1,846 was nominally a Latter-day Saint.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 20 Branches: 4 (June 2020)

There were three Latter-day Saint congregations by 1865 that met in Amsterdam, Gorinchem, and Rotterdam.[19] There were sixteen branches by 1939.[20] The first stake in the Netherlands, the Holland Stake, was organized in 1961 in The Hague. In 1973, the Church reported twenty-five congregations in the Netherlands that met in twenty-three cities, including Arnhem (2), Rotterdam (2), Alkmaar, Almelo, Amersfoort, Apeldoorn, Delft, Den Helder, Dordrecht, Gouda, Groningen, Haarlem, Harlingen, Heerlen, Hengelo, Hilvensum, Leeuwarden, Maastricht, Nijmegen, The Hague, Utrecht, Vlaardingen, and Zeist.[21] By 1973, there was one stake and four districts. At this time, the stake had four wards and four branches.[22] The original Holland Stake was renamed The Hague Netherlands Stake upon the creation of additional stakes in Rotterdam (1978) and Apeldoorn (1989). By year-end 2000, there were forty-three congregations (17 wards, and 26 branches).

Congregation consolidations occurred in the 2000s as the number of congregations declined to thirty-seven in 2001, thirty-six in 2002, thirty-five in 2003, thirty-four in 2006, and thirty-three in 2009. Between year-end 2000 and late 2010, the number of wards increased by three, and the number of branches declined by thirteen. Discontinued congregations in the 2000s include the Almelo, Amstelveen, Delft, Hoorn, Schiedam-Vlaardingen, Winterswijk, Ymond, and Zeist Branches, and one of the two

original The Hague wards and the Krimpen aan den IJssel Ward. The majority of discontinued congregations were in or near Rotterdam, The Hague, and Amsterdam. Branches operating in Almere, Den Bosch, Gouda, Hengelo, Spijkenisse became wards during this period. The Church reported additional congregation consolidations in the 2010s as the total number of congregations decreased to twenty-six in 2017, twenty-five in 2018, and twenty-four in 2019. Congregations closed during the 2010s included the Heerenveen Branch (2012), Assen Branch (2017), Hilversum Branch (2017), Nijmegen Branch (2017), Tilburg Branch (2017), Dordrecht Ward (2017), Gouda Ward (2017), Den Helder Branch (2017), Amersfoort Ward (2018), and the Vlissingen Branch (2019). The Church organized its first branch or ward in most Dutch cities between 1960 and 1990.

Activity and Retention

In 1973, the Church estimated that 800 Dutch-speakers from the Netherlands and Belgium would attend an area conference in Munich held later that year.[23] In 1996, 2,000 Dutch Latter-day Saints attended a special meeting with President Hinckley.[24] 32,819 attended The Hague Netherlands Temple open house in 2002.[25] The average number of members per congregation increased from 181 in 2000 to 270 in 2009 and 389 in 2019. Four hundred six were enrolled in seminary or institute during the 2008–2009 school year. In the mid-2010s, returned missionaries reported the number of active members per congregation as follows: Rotterdam 1st (100), Rotterdam 2nd (90), Almere (85), Apeldoorn (85), Eindhoven (80), Spijkenisse (70-90), Hengelo (60), Zoetermeer (60), Groningen (55-100), Amsterdam (50-85), Heerlen (50-75), Arnhem (50-70), Emmen (50-60), Alkmaar (50), Breda (50), Den Bosch (45-60), Tilburg (45), Lelystad (40), Leiden (35), Amersfoort (25-45), Nijmegen (25-40), Utrecht (25-40), Den Helder (25-30), Leeuwarden (25), Haarlem (20-50), Hilversum (20), and Vlissingen (12). During the 2010s, the Belgium/Netherlands Mission baptized between 100-300 new converts for most years and approximately half of these new members continued to attend church one year after baptism. One of the Rotterdam wards had only 18% of members on Church records attend sacrament meeting in 2017. In 2019, the Apeldoorn Ward and the Heerlen Ward each had over 100 people who attended sacrament meeting per local member reports. Distance to the nearest meetinghouse and difficulties with following the principles of the word of wisdom and tithing are cited as common reasons why inactive members no longer attend church. Total active membership is estimated at no greater than 2,500, or 27% of Church membership.

Language Materials

Languages with Latter-day Saint Scripture: Dutch, Indonesian, Arabic, Turkish, English.

All Church scriptures are available in Dutch, Indonesian, Arabic, and most commonly spoken languages in the European Union. The Book of Mormon and most of the Doctrine and Covenant have been translated into Turkish with plans to complete the remainder of Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price in the near future. Many unit, temple, Priesthood, Relief Society, Sunday School, young women, primary, missionary, and family history materials are available in Turkish.

Meetinghouses

The first Church meetinghouse began construction in 1937 in Rotterdam. The number of meetinghouses greatly multiplied in the 1960s, and by 1966, there were thirty-eight LDS meetinghouses in the Netherlands.[26] In 2010, most, if not all, congregations met in church-built meetinghouses or church-owned buildings. There were thirty-two meetinghouses in late 2010. By 2020, there were twenty-three meetinghouses.

Humanitarian and Development Work

High standards of living have resulted in the Church conducting only three humanitarian projects in the Netherlands since 1985—all of which were refugee response efforts.[27] Humanitarian and development work sponsored by the Church has focused on sending aid outside the country or conducting small-scale service projects in the Netherlands. In 1990, Dutch members gathered food to send to the needy in Romania.[28] In 1995, more than 650 attended a workshop sponsored by the Church and other groups that taught parents how to deal with challenges raising youth.[29] In 1997, members from the Zoetermeer Ward cleaned their community, and the event was covered by four local newspapers.[30]

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

Freedom of religion protected by the constitution, which is upheld by local laws, and government policy allows the Church to assemble, worship, and proselyte freely. Foreign full-time missionaries frequently serve and report no significant challenges obtaining needed visas or documentation to proselyte.

Cultural Issues

The highly secularized Dutch society has resisted Latter-day Saint missionary efforts for decades, resulting in stagnant to slow membership growth. Promiscuity, drug use, and high alcohol consumption rates create a challenging environment for Dutch members to live church teachings and for full-time missionaries when finding and teaching investigators. Nominalism among Dutch Christians is an obstacle for missionary efforts, as many have traditional ties to their churches but do not engage in regular religious practices. The Church has gained greater success in recent years with immigrant groups but has added native Dutch converts in small numbers. High cost of living has reduced the practicality of assigning greater numbers of full-time missionaries to a population that exhibits low receptivity. Member-missionary efforts will be pivotal toward overcoming these issues, as local members are familiar with cultural challenges and provide long-term support for investigators and new converts.

National Outreach

Thirty-three percent (33%) of the national population resides in a city with a Latter-day Saint congregation, and eleven of the Netherlands' twelve administrative provinces have a congregation. Zeeland, the least populous province, is the only province without a ward or branch although there was one branch in the province until 2019. The closure of nearly half of the Church's congregations in the Netherlands during the past two decades has significantly impacted the Church's national outreach in the country. The Church has had an established ward or branch in as many as thirty-seven cities in the Netherlands at one time or another since the early 1970s; however, the number of cities with a ward or branch as of mid-2020 was only twenty-two. Nine percent of the population lives in a city where the Church used to operate a ward or branch, although missionaries continue to be placed in many of these cities albeit members and prospective members must travel to additional cities to attend church. Cities with over 100,000 inhabitants without a Church congregation constitute seven percent of the national population. Nearly one-quarter of the national population lives in the approximately one hundred cities with at least 20,000 people where there are no Latter-day Saint congregations.

Expanding national outreach will require the establishment of additional mission outreach centers in currently unreached or lesser-reached cities. However, based on the trend of congregation consolidations, the Church will likely not establish a presence in these cities until currently operating wards and branches are fully self-sustaining and contain enough active members to divide. The creation of dependent branches and groups operated by local members in the largest cities without a ward or branch (like Tilburg, Enschede, Haarlemmermeer, Maastricht, Ede, and Venlo) and lesser-reached sectors of Amsterdam and The Hague provides a dynamic, flexible approach toward addressing declining national outreach issues.

The Church maintains an Internet site for the Netherlands in Dutch at http://www.kerkvanjezuschristus.nl/. The website includes local news, explanations of church teachings, links to other church websites, and contact information to request missionary visits. Use of the website by local members can help improve member-missionary efforts and expand national outreach. By 2005, the Netherlands country website had an average of 8,000 hits a day.[31] When the Church launched its first official website in the mid-1990s, the Netherlands ranked tenth among countries with the most visitors to the new site.[32]

Member Activity and Convert Retention

The average number of Latter-day Saints per congregation has nearly doubled in the past 20 years as a result of slow

membership growth and consistent congregation consolidations. The declining number of congregations is a major concern for sustaining church growth over the long term. Reasons for congregation consolidations in the Netherlands include a lack of active members, plans to make a larger congregation (a ward) out of multiple smaller congregations (branches), inadequate numbers of priesthood holders to fill leadership positions, and little or no growth in the number of active membership despite decades of consistent proselytism efforts. Much of the recent emphasis on congregation consolidations has been to help prevent member and leader burnout in smaller congregations as there are a limited number of active members to serve in essential branch or ward callings. Also, there is a desire that congregations with more active members may provide greater socialization opportunities for Latter-day Saints. Congregations more distant to Latter-day Saint populations often exacerbate member inactivity rates as less active and active members decrease the regularity they attend church meetings due to increased travel times and inconvenience. Fewer mission outreach centers often leads to a decline in the number of convert baptisms and reduced national outreach potential.

The lack of language-specific congregations to meet the needs of non-Dutch speakers creates challenges to retain converts from the most receptive populations to the Church in the Netherlands, namely immigrants from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Transient lifestyles and limited traditions of religious service among immigrant groups have also contributed to low retention among immigrant converts. The creation of such language-specific congregations may be helpful for the long-term sustainability of church growth among these populations, but the diversity of membership has not achieved sufficient numbers of speakers of specific languages to allow non-Dutch congregations to be organized

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Dutch congregations have fellowshipped the increasing number of immigrant converts in recent years. No major ethnic integration issues have been reported, likely due to Dutch society's increasingly cosmopolitan atmosphere. However, language barriers and cultural differences create some challenges integrating immigrant groups into the same congregations. There have been no appreciable numbers of immigrant converts from North Africa or Turkey at present. The Church has yet to perform organized missionary outreach among Muslims in the Netherlands.

Language Issues

Over 80% of the population speaks Dutch as a first or second language, and many of the remaining 20% speak Dutch as a third language, resulting in widespread use of Dutch by full-time missionaries in proselytism. Higher receptivity to the Church among immigrant groups warrants greater language-specific outreach in order to reach the growth potential among these populations. Some full-time missionaries have been assigned to work specifically with non-Dutch populations and teach in their respective languages, especially Chinese. However, converts from these ethnic groups have been too few or too transient to warrant the establishment of language-specific units.

Missionary Service

The Netherlands remains dependent on foreign full-time missionaries to staff its missionary needs as a result of few missionary-aged youth converts and low birthrates among the Dutch Latter-day Saint population. Increasing numbers of immigrant Latter-day Saints may help increase the self-sustainability of national full-time missionary numbers due to higher birthrates than the indigenous population. However, these prospects will rely on improved retention of immigrant converts and successful long-term assimilation into congregations.

Leadership

The Church has held a long-standing tradition of local leadership. During World War II, the entire Netherlands Mission presidency was made up of local Dutch members.[33] The Church benefits from strong, capable local leadership that allows for the operation of three stakes. Few, if any, church employees serve in leadership positions, indicating developed self-sustainability of local priesthood holders. Several international Church leaders were born in the Netherlands and immigrated to the United States in the twentieth century. As of 2020, all but one of the previous temple presidents and their wives of The Hague Netherlands Temple resided outside of the Netherlands prior to their call but most had Dutch heritage or were born in the

Netherlands. In 2011, Christiaan Hugo Kleijweg from Leiden was called as The Hague Netherlands Temple president—the only Dutch native who was called to serve as the temple president at the time he also lived in the Netherlands.[34] Only one Dutch member residing in the Netherlands has been called to an international church leadership position. In 2005, Chrstiaan H. Kleijweg from Oorschoten was called as an Area Seventy.[35]

Temple

Announced in August 1999, The Hague Netherlands Temple began construction in 2000 in the Zoetermeer area[36] and was dedicated in 2002. The temple serves the Netherlands and Belgium and operates well under capacity. In 2010, four endowment sessions were scheduled on Thursdays and Fridays, and three sessions were scheduled on Saturdays. At the time, the temple was not open Sunday through Wednesday.

Comparative Growth

Annual membership growth rates of less than 3% and consistent congregation consolidations during the 2000s and 2010s were representative of the Church in most Western European nations like the Netherlands. However, the net decrease in the number of congregations in the Netherlands ranked among the highest in the worldwide Church during this period. Among countries with at least 5,000 members, only the Church in Belgium reported a higher percentage decrease in the number of congregations than the Netherlands (59% decrease in the number of congregations in Belgium between 1999 and 2019 versus a 44% decrease in the number of congregations in the Netherlands during this same period). The percentage of Latter-day Saints in the population compares to France and Belgium and is higher than Central and Eastern Europe but lower than Scandinavia, the Iberian Peninsula, and the British Isles. Latter-day Saint member activity and convert retention rates appear higher in the Netherlands than in Belgium, as the Netherlands has 50% more members than Belgium, but twice as many congregations. Temples in other European countries that have comparatively sized temple districts appear better utilized than The Hague Netherlands Temple. The Copenhagen Denmark Temple district includes three stakes and a few branches but in 2010 was open for one more additional day a week compared to The Hague Netherlands Temple and scheduled two more endowment sessions on Fridays. The Stockholm Sweden Temple services four stakes and three districts, but scheduled nine endowment sessions on Tuesdays and Fridays, five on Wednesdays and Thursdays, and four on Saturdays in 2010. Seminary and institute attendance rates rank average to below average for Europe.

Christian groups participating in active mission outreach report slow growth and have been largely unable to achieve breakthroughs with the nonreligious population. Seventh-Day Adventists achieve slow but consistent congregational and membership growth as the number of churches increased from 47 to 54 and membership increased from 4,132 to 4,524 between 1998 and 2008. Adventist membership increased by approximately 1,000 during the 2010s and several new churches were organized. Jehovah's Witnesses appear to be the most successful of missionary-minded Christian groups and have grown to over 30,000 active members meeting in approximately 350 congregations. However, the number of Witnesses has decreased by nearly 1,000 in the past decade, and the number of Witness congregations has decreased by approximately forty during this time.

Future Prospects

Until the 2010s, the Church in the Netherlands reported more significant rates of membership growth than many other secularized European nations, but the outlook for future growth appears bleak given the ongoing trend of congregation consolidations. The doubling of the average number of members per congregation since 1999 points to significant member inactivity and convert retention problems that have compounded for decades. The Church has dramatically halved its national outreach capabilities in terms of the number of cities with congregations. Combined with the consolidation of the Netherlands Amsterdam Mission and the Belgium Brussels Mission into a single mission back in 2002, the Church allocates much fewer resources to the Netherlands than in previous decades even though the size of the population continues to increase and more receptive immigrant groups have become a larger percentage of the national population. Perhaps the greatest failure of the Church in the Netherlands has been the inability for the Church to find, teach, baptize, and retain for life new converts in appreciable numbers to not only expand into previously lesser-reached or unreached areas, but to maintain the cities where the Church has already established a presence. Although recent efforts by stake, mission, and area leaders have focused on the establishment of congregations with larger numbers of active members to reduce member burnout and promote more socializations opportunities at church, the size of active Church membership in individual congregations has not appeared to be the primary barrier for member inactivity and convert attrition in previous decades. Rather, a lack of member-missionary participation, reduced national outreach capabilities, insufficient pre-baptismal teaching and preparation for new converts, reliance on foreign full-time missionaries to staff local missionary needs, a highly secularized society, and the lack of

language-specific congregations for immigrant groups appear primarily to blame for the Church's floundering progress in the Netherlands. Establishing a strong Latter-day Saint presence among immigrant groups will be crucial to improve member activity and convert retention rates among the most receptive populations. Stagnant growth and low receptivity exhibited by the indigenous Dutch population is concerning and appears to be at the forefront of the decline in national outreach in recent years together with fewer full-time missionaries assigned. Greater self-sustainability of full-time missionary numbers as well as minimizing emigration among Dutch members will be required to maintain membership growth, expand national outreach, and preserve what remains of the Dutch Latter-day Saint community.

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[6] "The Church in Europe," Ensign, Aug. 1973, 16–35.

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