



# 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.



## Mongolia

Population: 2.95 millions (#139 out of countries)

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### Geography

**Area:** 1,564,116 square km. Mongolia is a large landlocked nation between Siberia and China. Much of Mongolia is semi-arid or arid, with the Gobi Desert occupying the southern portion of the country. Sporadic mountain ranges appear in the northern and western parts of Mongolia, many of which are forested. Large lakes dot western Mongolia, yet the rest of the country has limited water resources. Most of semi-arid Mongolia consists of grassy plains with few trees. Due to Mongolia's continental location, it is subject to great extremes in temperature with warm or hot summers to very cold winters. Ulaanbaatar is the coldest capital city in the world. The current boundaries of Mongolia only contain what was historically known as Outer Mongolia. Inner Mongolia is one of the People's Republic of China's autonomous regions. Mongolia is the world's least densely populated independent nation with one person per 4.4 square miles. Dust storms, grassland fires, forest fires, drought, and harsh winter conditions are natural hazards. Air pollution, limited freshwater access, deforestation, overgrazing, and desertification are environmental issues. Mongolia is divided into twenty-one administrative provinces and one municipality.

### Peoples

Khalkh: 84.5%

Kazakh: 3.9%

Dorvod: 2.4%

Bayad: 1.7%

Buryat-Bouriates: 1.3%

Zakhchin: 1.0%

Other: 5.2%

Mongolia has a very homogeneous population. About 95% are Mongols, most of whom belong to the Khalkha subgroup. Turkic peoples, mainly Kazakhs, form most of the remaining 5%. Kazakhs are particularly concentrated in the far western province of Bayan-Olgii in which they constitute about 90% of the population of about 100,000. Other nationalities, such as the Chinese and Russians, make up less than 1% of the population.

**Population:** 3,168,026 (July 2020)

**Annual Growth Rate:** 0.99% (2020)

**Fertility Rate:** 1.95 children born per woman (2020)

**Life Expectancy:** 66.8 male, 75.2 female (2020)

**Languages:** Mongolian dialects (85%), Oirat (7%), Kazakh (4%), other (4%). The Khalkh dialect of Mongolian is the official language. Mongols speak the Mongolian language, which has several different dialects; the most popular being Khalkha. Turkic peoples speak a variety of different Turkic languages, such as Kazakh and Uzbek; Kazakh being the most prevalent. Only Mongolian dialects have over one million speakers (2.6 million).

**Literacy:** 98.2% (2018)

## History

Mongolia is known for its powerful empire conquered by Genghis Khan during the 1200s. With specially bred ponies, the Chinese stirrup, thumb-ring short bows, and skilled Mongol riders, the Mongolian hordes conquered vastly more populous nations. At its high point, the Mongol Empire stretched from Eastern Europe, Asia Minor and the Middle East to the west; Iran, Tibet and southern China to the south; and the Pacific Ocean to the east. Westward Mongol expansion was halted only by the death of Genghis Khan in 1227 AD. The empire fragmented into smaller Mongol states. The Eastern portion came under Chinese control in the 1600s, whereas the Russians eventually overcome their Golden Horde overlords in the West and the Mongol states in Central Asia eventually fell to Turkic tribes. Genghis and his direct descendants were exceptionally prolific due to many wives and widespread rape of conquered peoples; some 8% of men across a wide region of Asia carry a Y-chromosome lineage believed to go back to Genghis Khan.<sup>[1]</sup> Thus, a strong Mongol legacy, both genetically and culturally, persists in nations once under the Mongol yoke.

Mongolia became an independent nation in 1921 with help from the Soviet Union and had a communist government established in 1924. Throughout the Soviet era, ties to Russia were closer in Mongolia than in many Eastern European nations, as Russia offered Mongolia a degree of independence and protection from absorption into China. The government in Mongolia transitioned like many Eastern European communist nations to democracy and capitalism in the early 1990s. The transition from communism to capitalism resulted in shortages of food and goods throughout the country in the early 1990s. Mongolia has suffered from periodic natural disasters, such as prolonged droughts, flash flooding, and severe winters. In the past decade, economic growth has significantly slowed due to problems with foreign investment and fluctuating demand and prices for precious metals.

## Culture

Buddhism, over six decades of communism, and a nomadic legacy and lifestyle influence Mongolian culture. Many Mongolians live in portable tent-like structures called gers (or yurts) made of felt and wood on the outskirts of cities or in the country. In Ulaanbaatar, many live in aging apartment buildings from the communist era or in gers just outside the city. Limited housing challenges young people to marry and live separate from their parents. Horse racing, archery, and wrestling competitions occur during Naadam, the largest annual festival celebrated in July. The Mongolian language was originally written in the Mongolian script developed in the thirteenth century and later adopted a modified Cyrillic script to increase functionality with the Russian

language. Mongolia experienced little contact with the international community prior to the early 1990s and has had little exposure to Western culture until recently. Alcoholism and immorality have increased in recent years.

## Economy

**GDP per capita:** \$13,700 (2018) [22.9% of U.S.]

**Human Development Index:** 0.735 (2018)

**Corruption Index:** 35 (2019)

Mining and agriculture account for the majority of the economic activity in Mongolia. Large amounts of valuable minerals or fossil fuels are extracted, including gold, copper, tungsten, and coal. Many of the people subsist on agriculture, particularly herding. China is Mongolia's biggest trade partner for exports. Mongolia also maintains close ties with Russia, on which it depends for energy needs. The small, predominantly rural population finds it difficult to compete and lags other larger, more developed economies. Nonetheless capitalism has taken hold in the country and has helped create many small businesses. Corruption remains a significant problem.

Environmental problems present long-term economic and health concerns. Overgrazing in the areas by the Gobi desert has led to some desertification as fragile vegetation is destroyed and unable to grow back after top soil is blown away. Roads connecting cities in the country are poorly maintained and oftentimes have long stretches where there is no defined road but instead a network of trails mingled together, a result of areas of roads being impassible due to periodic mud or water.

## Faiths

Buddhist: 53%

Muslim: 3%

Shamanist: 3%

Christian: 2%

None: 39%

## Christians

### Denomination – Members – Congregations

Evangelical – 46,459

Latter-day Saint – 12,261 – 24

Orthodox – less than 10,000

Catholic – less than 1,000

## Religion

About half of the population of Mongolia follows Buddhism and 40% consider themselves nonreligious, a result of decades of atheism fostered by the communist government. The remaining 10% consider themselves Muslim, Christian, or Shamanists. Most Turkic peoples are Muslim, particularly the Kazakh.[\[2\]](#)

## Religious Freedom

The constitution protects religious freedom, which is upheld by the government. Religious groups must register with the government although the qualifications for registration and the registration process are determined by local authorities. Proselytism is limited by legislation. Religious visas are difficult to obtain. Law requires that 95% of employees of a religious organization must be staffed by Mongolians. Christians in some areas report that local governments refuse to register new congregations. There are few recent instances of societal abuses of religious freedom.[\[3\]](#)

## Largest Cities

### Urban: 68.7% (2020)

Ulaanbaatar, Erdenet, Darkhan, Choibalsan, Moron, Nalaikh, **Olgii**, **Arvaikheer**, **Bayankhongor**, Khovd. Cities in **bold** do not have congregations of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Seven of the ten most populous cities have a Church congregation. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of the national population lives in the ten most populous cities.

## Latter-day Saint History

It was once considered the most closed country in the world. In 1989, it was thought that there were only four Mongolian Christians—none of whom were Latter-day Saints. Today, Latter-day Saints make up approximately 25% of the 35,000 Christians in Mongolia.

The Church was established in Mongolia after the Mongolian government requested Church assistance with the higher education institutions in the country. Six senior couple missionaries were called and arrived in Mongolia in September of 1992. Missionaries also came with the purpose of preaching the gospel, which was understood by the Mongolian government. Mongolia faced large shortages of food and other necessities during the transition from communism to capitalism. All six of the senior couples were assigned to serve in the capital of Ulaanbaatar and assisted Mongolia in its transition from communism to a free market economic system primarily in the country's higher level institutions.[\[4\]](#) Mongolia was dedicated for the preaching of the gospel by Elder Neal A. Maxwell on April 15, 1993. By this time, there were twenty people attending Church services, and five senior couples served in the country.[\[5\]](#) The Church became legally registered with the government in 1994. The Mongolia Ulaanbaatar Mission was created in 1995. The Church in Mongolia organized its first stake in 2009.

## Membership Growth

### Church Membership: 12,261 (2019)

Church membership grew from 100 in 1993 to 400 in 1995, 1,100 in 1997, 1,850 in 1999, 3,521 in 2001, and 5,455 in 2003. Annual membership growth rates surpassed 20% from 1993 until 2003. However, annual membership growth rates rapidly decelerated in the 2000s to 16% in 2004 and 6-9% between 2005 and 2010. Membership growth slowed dramatically after 2004 as attention was focused on reactivating less active members and training members for stake responsibilities. Church membership reached 7,306 in 2006 and 9,896 in 2010.

One of the obstacles for forming a stake in the 2000s was the small number of families and married members, as it was reported in December 2007 that about 70% of the 3,700 members in the Ulaanbaatar Mongolia District were single and that there were 600 students enrolled in institute and about 700 students enrolled in seminary.<sup>[6]</sup> Although most of the converts were youth, full families were also joining the Church.

Slow membership growth occurred in the 2010s. Annual membership growth rates ranged from as low as 1.6% to as high as 3.7%. Church membership totaled 10,763 in 2013, 11,436 in 2016, and 12,261 in 2019. In 2019, Church membership increased by 3.1%— the highest growth rate reported since 2012.

In 2019, one in 256 was nominally a Latter-day Saint, or 0.39% of the population.

## Congregational Growth

### Wards: 12 Branches: 12 Groups: 1+ (May 2020)

The Ulaanbaatar Branch was organized in 1993 followed by branches created in Erdenet (1995), Darkhan (1997), Nalaikh (1997), Khovd (1998) and Choibalsan (1999). By 1996, there were three branches in Ulaanbaatar, and a district was created. The number of congregations increased from nine in 1999 to twenty in 2001 and twenty-two in 2003 primarily due to the proliferation of branches in Ulaanbaatar. Mongolia's second district was organized in Darkhan in 2000. The Church's first branches in several additional cities were organized in Sukhbaatar (1999), Baganuur (2001), Zuun Kharaa (2001), Moron (2002), and Oyu-Tolgoi (2010). The number of branches decreased to twenty in 2004 due to two branches discontinued in Ulaanbaatar, but the number of branches then increased to twenty-one in 2007.

The Ulaanbaatar Mongolia West Stake was created from the Ulaanbaatar Mongolia District in 2009 and consisted of the Enkhtaivan, Khan Uul, Sansar, Selbe, Songino, and Unur Wards. The remaining branches remained in the Ulaanbaatar Mongolia District which was renamed the Ulaanbaatar Mongolia East District. Many of the branches in the district were not ready to become wards due to their smaller sizes and lower activity rates. A group also met in Bulgan in the late 2000s. The group appeared to continue to operate as of 2020.

The Church organized the Ulaanbaatar Mongolia East District into a stake in 2016 with five wards and two branches. That same year, the Tuul Ward and Bayangol Ward were organized in the Ulaanbaatar Mongolia West Stake. In 2019, the Church discontinued the Erdenet 2nd Branch.

## Finding

Most church growth has occurred among young men and women. Elder Lewis, a returned missionary, noted he served in one branch of over 200 members where only ten members were over the age of thirty. When asked whether the growth among young people was because of English-teaching programs, Elder Lewis replied: “Perhaps somewhat. But mostly, that’s the age that is receptive to the gospel.” Many older individuals, he notes, are less likely to join the Church because of old habits and the sway of traditional religion.

Tracting and street contacting are not allowed in Mongolia, and so almost all new converts are found through the efforts of existing members or through spontaneous inquiries of students in English classes taught at the high school and university levels. Getting referrals from members was never a problem, explained Elder Lewis, because members were enthusiastic to share the gospel. While most Mongolians are nominally Buddhists or Shamanists, he explained, many of the younger generation know little about their own Buddhist beliefs because of religious prohibitions during the communist era. Because of this, they were relatively easy to teach and had few hang-ups with gospel principles. While there are occasional problems with tobacco and alcohol use, these vices are much less prevalent in Mongolia than in surrounding nations. Even strict Buddhists, he states, were wonderful to teach because they did not use alcohol or tobacco excessively and generally observed high moral standards. One returned missionary noted that he was once assigned to teach a group of Buddhist monks. “They were some of the friendliest people I ever met,” he states. “They bore no animosity towards Christians. When people asked them how they could learn about Christianity, they would give them our church address and meeting time.”

## **Activity and Retention**

Activity was approximately 50% in 1997, and is substantially less at present. Many Mongolians become Christians only for a year or two, and sometimes much less, before dropping out—a trend that has been noted with concern by other Christian groups as well. Training local priesthood leadership is also a challenge, and home teaching rates in Mongolia were poor when this program was implemented. There are also far more active women than men, and—recognizing that the prospects of some female members of marrying within the Church are slim—special classes have even been organized by some senior couple missionaries to train female members to proselytize non-Latter-day Saint boyfriends or acquaintances. The rural nature of Mongolia presents unique issues, as Ulaanbaatar is the only city in the country with more than 100,000 inhabitants. While it is easy to find individuals to teach in small towns, keeping track of people logistically after baptism can be a problem, especially when members move without notice. The ratio of membership to congregations has rapidly increased from 157 in 2000 to 430 in 2010 and 511 in 2019, indicating significant challenges with convert retention. There have been some activities designed to help strengthen youth in the Church. For example, ninety-six youth and twenty-six adult leaders participated in a pioneer trek in 2012.[\[7\]](#)

Returned missionaries in the late 2010s noted the average number of active members in the following congregations: Tuul (80), Unur (70), Bayangol (50), and Han Uul (40). Most congregations appear to have between fifty and 100 active members. One returned missionary estimated that only 40% of new converts continue to attend church one year after baptism. In the 2010s, the Mongolia Ulaanbaatar Mission usually baptized 100-200 converts per year. Local Mongolian members reported that most wards baptize between 10-20 new converts a year. Active membership is likely around 2,000, or 16% of total membership.

## **Language Materials**

**Languages with Latter-day Saint Scripture:** Mongolian, Russian.

All Church scriptures are available in Mongolian and Russian. The Church has translated a large number of unit, temple, leadership, priesthood, relief society, Sunday School, young women, primary, missionary, audio/visual, and family history materials in Mongolian and Russian. The Liahona magazine has monthly issues in Russian and six issues a year in Mongolian. Church materials in Kazakh are limited to sacrament prayer translations, the Articles of Faith, and selected hymns and children’s songs. In 2020, the translation of the Book of Mormon into Kazakh was in process.

## **Meetinghouses**

The first chapel in Mongolia was dedicated in 1999 in a remodeled building colloquially known as the “Children’s Cinema”

because it was used decades before to show films for children in Ulaanbaatar.<sup>[8]</sup> In early 2010, several large Church-built chapels had been built in Ulaanbaatar and Choibalsan. Other meeting houses were typically remodeled buildings. There were sixteen meetinghouses in 2013.<sup>[9]</sup> There were fourteen meetinghouses in 2020.

## **Humanitarian and Development Work**

The Church has conducted at least 281 humanitarian and development projects in Mongolia since 1985, including community projects, emergency response, wheelchair donations, vision care, clean water projects, maternal and newborn care, immunization initiatives, and Benson Food projects.<sup>[10]</sup> In 2000, members of the Church in Utah donated food and clothing to Mongolia following a harsh drought followed by a severe winter.<sup>[11]</sup> In 2003, the Church provided relief after flooding in Ulaanbaatar. Supplies were sent from Salt Lake City and distributed by missionaries in Mongolia.<sup>[12]</sup> During the same year the Church News reported that humanitarian and welfare missionaries in the Mongolian Ulaanbaatar Mission were teaching skills such as knitting to help the Mongolian people.<sup>[13]</sup> In 2004, the Church provided medical training to Mongolia via video recordings of surgical procedures for surgeons in the country.<sup>[14]</sup> The Church News published a lengthy article about humanitarian work done by the Church in Mongolia in 2005. Examples of service provided included wheelchair donations, clean water projects, vision restoration programs, and neo-natal resuscitation programs.<sup>[15]</sup> Humanitarian projects continue in Mongolia today, with many now currently carried out by local Church leaders instead of foreign aid. Examples of such projects include a local member quilt making activity in Ulaanbaatar for those in need and removing litter from city streets and public places.

## **Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects**

### **Religious Freedom**

Laws that restrict proselytism challenge the scope and freedom with which the Church may conduct missionary work, yet have also motivated members to assist in finding investigators for missionaries and increase outreach and Church growth. In 2009, significant challenges arose with the government regarding foreign missionary visas. No foreign missionaries were expelled from the country, but the government refused to issue visas to prospective new missionaries. Some portions of the visa issues were resolved in early 2010 when several senior couples were granted visas. In early 2010, many American missionaries were temporarily reassigned to missions in the United States while they waited for the Mongolian visas. Missionaries report that one of the reasons for the government refusing to issue additional visas was that government officials expressed concern about ecclesiastical activities of foreign missionaries in addition to humanitarian work and teaching English. In the 2010s, the Church has been unable to expand to additional cities or towns due to religious freedom restrictions, and there have been few foreigners assigned to serve full-time missions in the country.

### **Cultural Issues**

One of the great challenges for the growth of the Church in Mongolia is the difficulty couples face in getting married and finding a home to live in together. Housing in Mongolia is expensive and usually unaffordable by newly married couples, so many hesitate to marry until they are able to find a place to live. Other cultural and social issues including promiscuity and alcohol use oppose Church's teachings. The Church has yet to develop teaching approaches and resources to present the Latter-day Saint gospel message to the background of Buddhists.

### **National Outreach**

Latter-day Saint congregations operate in cities inhabited by 56% of the national population. Currently, more than one-third of the population lives in the capital, Ulaanbaatar. The Church has a strong presence in the city with twelve wards. However, there has been hardly any increase in the number of congregations in Ulaanbaatar since 2001 due to the focus on maturing branches into wards, as well as a general decline in growth rates and growing inactivity problems. With continued growth, additional



congregations may be created. Züünmod, a small town near Ulaanbaatar with about 17,000 inhabitants, might open to missionary work in the coming years if religious freedom conditions improve.

With the Church most established in the largest city of the country, it is able to influence the Mongolian people who visit the city from other outlying areas of Mongolia. The Church has a congregation in the next five most populous cities of the country, which have populations ranging from 38,000 to 99,000. There are eight cities with over 20,000 inhabitants without a Church presence. Most of the twenty-one provinces have no Church presence, and each has about 100,000 people or less.

The city of Khovd has provided missionaries serving in Mongolia with the unique experience of teaching the gospel to some Muslims. With a strong branch historically numbering well over one hundred active members, missionaries are able to come into contact with more Turkic peoples than in any other regions with a Church presence. Just to the west of the city Khovd is the province of Bayan-Olgii, where the majority of the population is Kazakh. However, no missionaries currently serve in Bayan-Olgii.

The majority of Mongolians do not reside Mongolia but in neighboring countries, chiefly in China. The Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region in the People's Republic of China contains about four million Mongolians. The Liaoning Province, which is between Inner Mongolia and North Korea, contains over 600,000 Mongolians. An estimated one million Mongolians live in Russia. Because the gospel has taken hold in Ulaanbaatar and larger regional cities in Mongolia, it has a greater chance to spread to these other areas among the Mongolian population as family members share the Gospel with relatives who may reside one of these locations.

## **Member Activity and Convert Retention**

Decreasing member activity over the past two decades challenges Church growth in the future due to little increase in congregations. Although the small increase in congregations has partially resulted from branches growing in membership in preparation to become wards, convert retention and activity rates have declined. Additional branches may not have been organized due to a lack of able priesthood holders, difficulty in locating a meetinghouse, or the highly transitive nature of nomadic members in rural areas.

Single adults and youth comprise the majority of converts. These groups pose greater needs for fellowshiping and teaching in order to remain active and marry within the Church. The missionary program has provided a valuable resource in the retention of youth and young adults, but many become inactive after serving their missions. Inactive and less active members provide finding opportunities for the Church, as they likely have more nonmember friends and associates who may want to learn about the Church compared to active members who tend to decrease their nonmember social interaction over time.

## **Ethnic Issues and Integration**

Ethnic issues have not been a factor that has limited Church growth, as no organized outreach occurs in regions with significant non-Mongol populations. The Church may experience some issues in western provinces between Mongols and Turkic peoples meeting in the same congregations.

## **Language Issues**

Individuals in small towns and villages are often not as educated as those in Ulaanbaatar, and many lead simpler lives. Nonetheless, literacy is excellent. Elder Lewis states that he never met a Mongolian who could not read. The Book of Mormon was published in Mongolian in 2001. Interestingly, there was no Book of Mormon and few church materials in Mongolian during



the initial years of the most rapid growth.

While senior couple missionaries made up almost 50% of the missionary force in 1995 and approximately one-third in 1997, the only ones to become proficient in Mongolian were the wives of the first two mission presidents. The first senior couple missionaries taught the gospel in English, while those serving more recently have largely limited their efforts to teaching English-language classes, mentoring local Mongolian leaders, and working with retention. Teaching the gospel to nonmembers is handled almost exclusively by young missionaries who are proficient in the local language. Mongolian is a challenging language for foreigners to learn, stated one missionary: "It takes about six months before you start to feel comfortable with the language."

## **Missionary Service**

The Church Mongolia has the reputation of having an unusually high number of members who have served full-time missions. In 2001, a visiting General Authority at a fireside in Shanghai, China announced that 40% of missionaries from the Asia Area come from Mongolia. Mongolia previously had the highest baptism rate per missionary in the Asia Area during the years of rapid membership growth. All of this has grown out of one of the smallest missions in the church—growing from sixteen young missionaries serving in Mongolia in 1995 to thirty-four in 1997. In 1999, at least seventy full-time elders served as missionaries in the mission.<sup>[16]</sup> The one hundred-missionary mark was crossed in late 1999. As of June 2009 there were 155 Mongolian missionaries who were serving or who had received calls to serve; 115 were currently serving in the Mongolian Ulaanbaatar Mission.<sup>[17]</sup> 200 missionaries were serving in the Mongolian Ulaanbaatar Mission. In mid-2009, there were a total of 660 known returned Mongolian missionaries, 402 of which were living in Mongolia. At the end of 2009 the number of Mongolian missionaries in the mission field reached 226, more than half of which served in Mongolia. This represents a large increase from two and a half years before when only forty Mongolians were serving missions. However, in late 2009 39% of Mongolian returned missionaries no longer lived in Mongolia.<sup>[18]</sup> In 2013, there were more than 1,000 Mongolian Latter-day Saints who had served full-time missions<sup>[19]</sup> and the first Mongolian senior couple was called to serve a mission.<sup>[20]</sup> Only 59% of returned missionaries in Mongolia were still active in the Church, an improvement from before senior missionaries were tasked to find and reactive them. There is likely no other nation in the Eastern hemisphere that has as high of a number of returned missionaries as Mongolia, where approximately 10% of members have served a mission, including those who emigrated. It is unclear whether native Mongolian missionaries serving in the Mongolian Ulaanbaatar Mission have facilitated the growth of the Church more than non-Mongolian missionaries in the mission.

The unique demographics of the Church in Mongolia—coupled with the high missionary enthusiasm of new members—have contributed significantly to the high rates of missionary service in Mongolia. Many serve one-month local mini-missions before embarking on full-time missions. The number of Mongolians desiring to serve missions was so great at one time that prospective missionaries were required to serve at least six months in a significant local calling, often as a branch missionary or in a local leadership or teaching position. After serving missions, some returned missionaries marry other returned missionaries and start their own families. While economic challenges are a fact of life in Mongolia, many Mongolian members demonstrate exceptional faith and faithfully pay tithing and fast offerings even in the face of severe hardships.

Mongolia is a model to many nations with smaller Latter-day Saint populations that struggle to send out native missionaries in appreciable numbers. Perhaps most importantly, Mongolia is one of few countries in the world that has become largely self-sufficient in meeting its own missionary needs and producing a surplus that can serve in other countries. Nations where the Church has been long-established in Latin America, Europe, and other regions of Asia remain highly dependent on North American missionary manpower.

## **Leadership**

Local leadership has been largely self-sufficient for many years. Returned missionaries in Mongolia have greatly strengthened the congregations of the Church throughout the country. In Ulaanbaatar, all but one of the twelve members of the two stake or district presidencies and their wives have served a full-time mission as of the early 2010s. In mid-2020, all congregations appeared to be led by a local member.

Local leadership has not appeared to strongly rely on Church employees to fill executive leadership positions. Although the first stake president in Mongolia was a seminary and institute director for the Church neither of his counselors were Church employees.<sup>[21]</sup> None of the stake presidency members were Church employees when the Ulaanbaatar Mongolia East Stake was organized in 2016<sup>[22]</sup> or when the Ulaanbaatar Mongolia West Stake presidency was reorganized in 2018.<sup>[23]</sup>

## Temple

Mongolia is assigned to the Seoul Korea Temple district. Members have previously traveled by train across China to attend the Hong Kong China Temple in groups. Members look forward the possibility of a temple in Ulaanbaatar once membership growth and activity warrant one.

## Comparative Growth

Mongolia is the mainland Asian nation with the highest percentage of Church members, at 0.39% or one member per 256 people, even though the Church has only operated in Mongolia since 1992. The country in mainland Asia with the next highest percentage of members of the Church is South Korea, where the Church has functioned for over fifty years, with at about 0.17%, or one member per 582 people. To suggest that this relatively high percentage of nominal Latter-day Saints in Mongolia is due to Mongolia having a smaller population than South Korea or other populous Asian countries is unsupported; Singapore has approximately two million more people than Mongolia, yet the ratio of nominal Latter-day Saints to the population is one per 1,738. Membership and congregational growth rates in Mongolia during the 2010s have been consistent with most developing Asian nations. The Church in Mongolia has experienced remarkably similar growth trends as the Church in Cambodia as both reported very high growth rates in the 1990s and early 2000s, and both countries reported a sharp decline and very low growth rates in the 2010s.

Mongolians have been uniquely receptive to the Church—due to a combination of factors including intrinsic receptivity from culture and circumstance, the Church establishing itself on a strong foundation, the willingness of youth to serve missions, and the great attention given to humanitarian relief. Missionaries serving in Mongolia also report that the Mongolian members of the Church feel a strong affinity for the Book of Mormon, perhaps because they relate very much with the peoples of the Book of Mormon. One of the suggested reasons why Mongolia has been such a fertile land for Latter-day Saints compared to many others is that there is a strong concentration of the tribes of Israel. Missionaries report that lineages of all of the tribes of Israel have been declared among Mongolian missionaries' patriarchal blessings.

Protestant groups have utilized radio and television as a means of spreading Christianity in the country. Evangelicals have experienced very limited growth compared to other nations but they outnumbered Latter-day Saints in the late 2010s by nearly three to one. Other strong missionary oriented Christians such as Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses have a small presence in Mongolia. Seventh-Day Adventists have reported rapid growth but maintain a small presence. The number of Adventists and Adventist congregations has more than doubled in the past decade. Jehovah's Witnesses claim about 500 members in nine congregations. Within the past decade, the number of regularly proselytizing Witnesses has doubled and the number of Witness congregations has tripled. However, Witnesses maintain a more limited national presence in Mongolia than Latter-day Saints.

## Future Prospects

The Church in Mongolia maintains stable and stalwart leadership and an unusually high percentage of returned missionaries in general Church membership. However, the Church in Mongolia has experienced a stark deceleration in growth that began during the mid-2000s when leadership sought to reactive inactive members and prepare to organize the first stake. These difficulties were further compounded by increased government restrictions that have prevented proselytism and present nearly insurmountable obstacles to organize congregations in previously unreached cities. Even worse, member activity rates among returned missionaries appear unusually low. In sum, the Church in Mongolia has experienced slow growth for approximately the past decade combined with significant member inactivity problems. The outlook for growth within the foreseeable future appears mediocre given low member activity rates, comparatively few convert baptisms during years when finding has relied on member referrals, and the lack of sustained success with reactivation efforts. Efforts to help Latter-day Saint youth and young adults to

marry within the Church, raise and retain children born into the Church, and revitalize Mongolia's once vibrant member-missionary program will be needed to help reverse the ongoing trend of very slow growth. Mongolia appears a likely candidate for a small temple one day given its remote location and two stakes within a single metropolitan area. However, prospects will significantly improve for a temple in Mongolia once the number of active members consistently increases.

[1] Zerjal et al., "The Genetic Legacy of the Mongols" (PDF), American Journal of Human Genetics, 2003.

[2] "2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Mongolia." U.S. Department of State. Accessed 20 June 2020. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/mongolia/>

[3] "2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Mongolia." U.S. Department of State. Accessed 20 June 2020. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/mongolia/>

[4] "Six missionary couples to help with Mongolia's higher education," LDS Church News, 19 September 1992. <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/22538/Six-missionary-couples-to-help-with-Mongolias-higher-education.html>

[5] "Mongolia dedicated for preaching of the gospel," LDS Church News, 19 June 1993. <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/22900/Mongolia—dedicated-for-preaching-of-the-gospel.html>

[6] Searle, Don L. "Mongolia: Steppes of Faith," Liahona, Dec 2007, 18–23.

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