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.

Macau

Population: 0.59 millions (#171 out of countries)

By David Stewart and Matt Martinich

Geography

Area: 28.2 square km. Located in southern China near Hong Kong, Macau consists of a city on the coast of the South China Sea. Macau once consisted of two islands (Coloane and Taipa) and the Macau Peninsula, and today the two islands have been merged into one by land reclamation and connected by three bridges to the peninsula. The terrain is generally flat and subject to subtropical climate marked by cool winters and warm summers. Typhoons are a natural hazard. Macau is a special administrative region of China that has limited democratic freedoms.

Peoples

Chinese: 88.7%

Portuguese: 1.1%

Mixed: 1.1%

Other: 9.1%

The population is homogenously Han Chinese. Other ethnic groups include Macanese, a compound of Asian and Portuguese ancestry.

Population: 606,340 (July 2018)

Annual Growth Rate: 0.71% (2018)

Fertility Rate: 0.95 children born per woman (2018)

Life Expectancy: 81.6 male, 87.7 female (2018)

Languages: Cantonese Chinese (80.1%), Mandarin Chinese (5.5%), other Chinese languages (5.3%), Tagalog (3.0%), English (2.8%), Portuguese (0.6%), other (2.7%).

Literacy: 96.5% (2016)

History

The peninsula and islands of present-day Macau were largely uninhabited until after the thirteenth century. In the sixteenth century, the Portuguese established the first European settlement in East Asia in Macau. The following centuries were marked by occasional conflict with the Chinese government over taxation and the duration of Portuguese occupation of the area. During the latter half of the twentieth century, pro-communists pressed for reunification with China. Portugal tried repeatedly to cede Macau back to Chinese administrative, but this offer was refused and did not make progress until 1979. In 1987, Portugal agreed with China to return Macau to Chinese rule by 1999. Since 1999, Macau has been a special administrative region of China that possesses a high degree of autonomy and is not subject to the Chinese socialist economic system. Economic growth has occurred in the past decade, and Macau has emerged as a tourist and gambling center in East Asia.[1]

Culture

Macau boasts a unique blend of Portuguese and Chinese cultures that manifests itself in many aspects of daily life and local art. The entire population lives in urban areas. Macau has one of the lowest fertility rates and one of the highest life expectancy rates in the world. Chinese medicine is widely practiced. The population is highly secularized.

Economy

GDP per capita: $110,000 (2009) [184% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.914 (2017)

Corruption Index: N/A

Since 2001, the economy has transformed dramatically as a result of casino gambling and tourism. Manufacturing and other industrial activities have declined. Macau depends on the mainland for food, water, and energy. In 2006, gambling revenues outpaced the Las Vegas strip, and in 2009, twenty-one million visited Macau. Economic growth especially accelerated once travel restrictions on PRC citizens were relaxed. Today mainland Chinese account for more than half of tourists. Seventy-six percent (76%) of government revenue originated from taxes on gambling as of 2016. Services generate 93.7% of the GDP and employ most of the population. Agricultural activity is limited to vegetable cultivation and fishing. Primary industries include tourism, gambling, clothing, and electronics. Hong Kong and China are the primary trade partners.

Corruption is perceived as less prevalent in Macau than in mainland China and many other Asian nations. Illicit drugs destined for mainland China are often trafficked through Macau. Some government officials have been accused of corruption, especially regarding the gaming industry. There are rising concerns with money laundering and other types of corruption and illegal activity tied to the financial sector.

Faiths

Folk Religionist: 58.9%

Buddhist: 17.3%

Christian: 7.2%

Other: 1.2%

None: 15.4%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Catholic – 30,000

Evangelicals – 8,527

Seventh Day Adventists – 304 – 3

Latter-day Saints – 1,455 – 3

Jehovah's Witnesses – 346 – 5

Religion

Traditional Chinese folk religions and Buddhism are the primary religions in Macau, although most the population does not actively practice religion. In 2009, there were forty Buddhist temples and thirty Taoist Temples. Catholics account for 4% of the population, and Protestants constitute a little over 1%. Protestant groups include Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, and Seventh Day Adventist churches. In 2006, Protestant churches totaled seventy with 10,000 members, half of which attended weekly. Many religious groups perform extensive humanitarian and development service. Religiously active non-Chinese language speaking Protestants were estimated at 500 in the late 2000s.[2] Foreigners account for half of Catholics. The number of total Protestants in the late 2010s was estimated at approximately 8,000. Muslims likely number 5,000-10,000, whereas there appear to be approximately 2,000 Baha'is.[3]

Religious Freedom

The law protects religious freedoms, which are upheld by the government. Religious groups do not have to register with the government, but registration is required for legal status. There have been no recent reports of abuse of religious freedom by government or society. There are no restrictions in proselytism or missionary activity.[4]

Largest Cities

Urban: 100% (2019)

Macau, **Taipa-Coloane**

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

One of the two Macanese cities has a Church congregation. The entire population resides in two cities, and 80% reside on the Macau Peninsula.

Church History

In 1964, the Southern Far East Mission president and Elder Gordon B. Hinckley visited Macau to explore the possibility of sending missionaries. Later that year, missionaries were assigned and baptized the first convert. In December 1964, the Church stopped holding meetings because it lacked the needed license to assemble from the Portuguese government. In 1965, missionaries were banned from proselytism and left the colony. In 1976, missionaries returned to Macau as a result of improved religious freedom and began to hold church meetings. In 1977, the Church organized the Macau Branch.[5] In 2010, Macau and Hong Kong participated in a meeting with President Dieter F. Uchtdorf attended by 2,500.[6] In 2010, missionary activity continued to fall under the China Hong Kong Mission. Apostle Elder Jeffrey R. Holland appeared to dedicate Macau for missionary work during a visit in 2014.[7] In 2016, apostle Elder Gary E. Stevenson met with members in Macau.[8]

Membership Growth

Church Membership: 1,455 (2018)

In 1993, there were 640 Latter-day Saints.[9] By year-end 2000, membership totaled 928. Slow membership growth continued in the 2000s and 2010s. Membership totaled 1,028 in 2003, 1,191 in 2007, 1,308 in 2011, 1,410 in 2015, and 1,455 in 2018. Annual membership growth rates generally ranged from 3-6% in the 2000s and 0-3% in 2010s.

In 2018, one in 417 was a member on Church records, or 0.24% of the population.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 0 Branches: 3 (2019)

In 1994, the newly created Hong Kong Kowloon West Stake incorporated the Macau Branch.[10] A second branch was created in 1998 to allow Cantonese and English speakers to meet separately. A third branch for Mandarin speakers was organized in 2001,[11] but was discontinued in 2006. A Mandarin-speaking branch was reestablished in 2014. Branches in Macau reportedly directly to the China Hong King Mission until the organization of the first district in the country, the Macau District, in 2015. The English-speaking branch holds Church services on multiple days a week to accommodate domestic workers who cannot attend church on Sundays.

Activity and Retention

Member activity rates in Macau have appeared to worsen in the past 30 years as indicated by the average number of members per branch. This members-to-branches ratio has increased from 200-300 in the late 1980s and early 1990s to 386 in 2006 and 485 in 2018. There appeared to be as few as thirty active members in one of the Macau branches during the early 1990s. Returned missionaries reported that the English-speaking Macau 2nd Branch had between 50-80 active members in the mid- to

late 2010s. Other branches in the late 2010s appeared to have 50-100 active members. Total active membership is estimated at 200-250, or 14-17%.

Language Materials

Languages with Latter-day Saint Scripture: Chinese, English, Tagalog.

All Church scriptures are available in Chinese (both traditional and simplified characters) and Tagalog. Most Church materials are available in Chinese and Tagalog. A large selection of audio-visual materials is available in Mandarin and Cantonese.

Meetinghouses

All branches meet in the same meetinghouse, a rented space on the Macau Peninsula. A larger meetinghouse was obtained in 2016.[12]

Humanitarian and Development Work

The Church has officially completed only one humanitarian project in Macau since 1985, which was emergency response.[13] Service projects are limited to full-time missionaries completing weekly service hours and local congregations sponsoring service projects.

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

There are no restrictions on the activities of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Macau. Members meet and worship without any legal challenges. Full-time missionaries openly proselyte.

Cultural Issues

Secularism and disinterest in religion are the primary obstacles to mission outreach. The percentage of Christians has fallen dramatically over the past decades and centuries. Although most identify with a specific religious tradition, few actively participate in religious activities. The gambling industry is a major challenge for Church teachings.

National Outreach

Nearly the entire population resides within close distance to the mission outreach center. The small geographical size of Macau reduces the need for many meetinghouses. High costs for real estate also make the establishment of more meetinghouses unfeasible. The organization of a member group on Taipo Island may provide better opportunities to reach these residents due to distance. Missionaries serve throughout Macau, including on Taipo. Most know little about the Church, however. Creative and nontraditional mission outreach methods such as Internet outreach and service projects may help bring greater awareness of the Church and its members to the general population. There are significant opportunities to proselyte mainland Chinese

vacationing in Macau, including the operation of a Mandarin-speaking branch.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Low levels of church attendance and disinterest toward religion appear to have severely affected Latter-day Saint membership in the past decades. Close proximity to mission headquarters in Hong Kong may have limited local members' ability to develop self-sufficiency in leadership and administration, which tend to be better developed in many nations with small Latter-day Saint populations located far from mission headquarters. Full-time missionaries complain of inadequate records of inactive or less-active members for the branches, which hamper reactivation efforts. Most members on Church records in Macau joined the Church in the 1990s and early 2000s at a time when teaching and preparation for Church membership were often cursory and lacked long-term accountability for converts. Convert retention rates in the China Hong Kong Mission rose dramatically in the 2010s compared to previous decades, but it is uncertain whether these retention rates have also improved in Macau. It is unclear whether seminary and institute have been introduced. Youth and adults attending these Church Education System programs may help improve member activity rates, convert retention rates, and doctrinal understanding.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

The lack of ethnic diversity reduces potential ethnic integration conflicts at church among most Macanese. The operation of three congregations, each for specific language groups, allows greater accommodation of Macanese natives, ethnic minorities, and foreign expatriates.

Language Issues

Church materials are translated into nearly every native language spoken. English-speaking, Mandarin-speaking, and Cantonese-speaking missionaries serve in Macau. No significant language challenges have been reported.

Missionary Service

Few full-time missionaries serve from Macau. Most missionaries assigned are North Americans. Senior couples serve regularly in the country and assist with church administration. Low fertility rates create challenges for long-term growth due to few youth converts and small family sizes.

Leadership

Local members serve as the branch president for all three branches. Active priesthood holders appear limited in number. The closure of the Macau Third Branch in 2006 may have been due to insufficient leadership in both Chinese branches. However, the reestablishment of a Mandarin-speaking branch in 2014 and the creation of the first district in Macau in 2015 signal improvements with leadership development.

Temple

Macau is assigned to the Hong Kong China Temple district. The temple closed in 2019 for extensive remodeling. Few nations with small Latter-day Saint populations are within such close proximity to a temple at just seventy kilometers. Temple trips occur regularly.

Comparative Growth

Membership growth rates have compared to most industrialized East Asian nations. The percentage of Latter-day Saints in the Macanese population is higher than most Asian countries and is only less than the Philippines, Mongolia, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Member activity rates compare to other industrialized Asian nations.

Missionary-minded Christian groups report slow or stagnant church growth in Macau and small church memberships. Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists both experience slow membership growth rates. These denominations are approximately the same size as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Macau. Christian groups report that the population is largely unreceptive to mission outreach efforts.

Future Prospects

The growth outlook over the foreseeable future appears mediocre due to the small community of active Latter-day Saints, low responsiveness of the population to the Church's teachings, and the increasing influence of gambling and secularism on Macanese society. The operation of language-specific branches for English, Cantonese, and Mandarin speakers is meaningful and offers mission outreach support and infrastructure if the population one day becomes more receptive to Latter-day Saint teachings. Macau appears unlikely to become a stake for many years or decades until there are at least five, ward-sized congregations and 500 active members, whereas at present the Church appears only half-way in accomplishing this goal despite over forty years of outreach.

[1] "Background Note: Macau," Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, 26 July 2010.
http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/7066.htm

[2] "China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong, Macau)," International Religious Freedom Report 2009, 26 October 2009.
http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127268.htm

[3] "2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: China: Macau." U.S. Department of State. Accessed 15 November 2019.
https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/china-includes-tibet-xinjiang-hong-kong-and-macau/ma

[4] "2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: China: Macau." U.S. Department of State. Accessed 15 November 2019.
https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/china-includes-tibet-xinjiang-hong-kong-and-macau/ma

[5] "Country Profiles," LDS Newsroom, retrieved 22 September 2010.
http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/contact-us/macau

[6] "Taiwan, Hong Kong visited by President Uchtdorf," LDS Church News, 31 July 2010.
http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/59664/Taiwan-Hong-Kong-visited-by-President-Uchtdorf.html

[7] Weaver, Sarah Jane. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland visits LDS Church members in Asia." LDS Church News. 24 March 2014.
https://www.thechurchnews.com/archives/2014-03-24/elder-jeffrey-r-holland-visits-lds-church-members-in-asia-41305

[8] Weaver, Sarah Jane. "Elder Stevenson celebrates 50th anniversary of Church in Thailand during visit to Asia." LDS Church News. 24 March 2016.
https://www.thechurchnews.com/leaders-and-ministry/2016-03-24/elder-stevenson-celebrates-50th-anniversary-of-church-in-thailan

[9] "Asia area: Welcome mat is out in several countries," LDS Church News, 19 June 1993.
http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/22920/Asia-area—Welcome-mat-is-out-in-several-countries.html

[10] "New stake presidencies," LDS Church News, 30 April 1994.
http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/24516/New-stake-presidencies.html

[11] "Country Profiles," LDS Newsroom, retrieved 22 September 2010.
http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/contact-us/macau

[12] Weaver, Sarah Jane. "Elder Stevenson celebrates 50th anniversary of Church in Thailand during visit to Asia." LDS Church News. 24 March 2016.
https://www.thechurchnews.com/leaders-and-ministry/2016-03-24/elder-stevenson-celebrates-50th-anniversary-of-church-in-thailan

[13] "Where We Work." Latter-day Saint Charities. Accessed 15 November 2019.
https://www.latterdaysaintcharities.org/where-we-work