

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.



Japan

Population: 127.1 millions (#11 out of countries)

By David Stewart and Matt Martinich

Geography

Area: 377,915 square km. Japan consists of a chain of volcanic islands in the North Pacific Ocean that stretches from Okinawa in the south to Hokkaido in the north near the Korean Peninsula. The four largest islands are Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu. Rugged mountains dominate the terrain. Cool temperate climate occurs in the north whereas tropical climate occurs in the south. Natural hazards include volcanoes, earthquakes, tsunamis, and typhoons. Pollution and the acidification of lakes and reservoirs are environmental issues. Japan is divided into 47 administrative prefectures.

Population: 126,804,433 (July 2010)

Annual Growth Rate: -0.242% (2010)

Fertility Rate: 1.2 children born per woman (2010)

Life Expectancy: 78.87 male, 85.66 female (2010)

Peoples

Japanese: 98.5%

Korean: 0.5%

Chinese: 0.4%

other: 0.6%

Nearly the entire population is Japanese, with small Korean and Chinese minorities. Other ethnic groups consist primarily of immigrant workers from South Asia.

Languages: Japanese (97.7%), Okinawan (0.8%), Korean (0.5%), other (1%). Japanese is the official language. Languages

spoken by over one million speakers include Japanese (123.9 million and Okinawan (1 million).

Literacy: 99% (2002)

History

Emperor Jimmu founded the first known Japanese state in 600 B.C. The Yamoto dynasty ruled the national government whereas military governors known as shoguns, regents, and nobles held the greatest political power. Cultural, religious, and social influence from China increased during the first millennium A.D. as the Chinese writing system was officially adopted in 405 A.D. and Buddhism spread to the islands in the sixth century. The capital of the Japanese Empire was first based in Nara in 710 A.D. and remained in Nara until 1867. Contact with Europe first occurred in the mid-sixteenth century and trade commenced with Portugal, the Netherlands, England, and Spain. Christian missionaries also began proselytism during the sixteenth century. By the mid-seventeenth century Japan mandated that all missionaries leave and severely restricted trade with other nations out of fear that increasing contact with European powers was a precursor of a military invasion. The United States led the reestablishment of trade and international relations with Japan and the outside world in 1854 at the Convention of Kanagawa. Western influence quickly reformed economic, political, and social systems and institutions in the following decades in a period known as the Meiji restoration as the feudal system was removed, the emperor gained greater political power, and Western-style legal and education systems were implemented. By the end of the nineteenth century, Japan had modernized and become a world power.

Japan fought wars with China and Russia in the 1890s and 1900s, respectively, gaining Taiwan and the Pascadores Islands and a high degree of influence in Korea, Manchuria, and southern Sakhalin Island. Japan annexed Korea in 1910 and former German territorial possessions in the Pacific north of the Equator in 1919 through a mandate of the League of Nations. Aspects of a democratic form of government began to be considered in the 1920s, but progress was deterred by the rising influence of military leaders in the 1930s that resulted in invasions of Manchuria in 1931 and China in 1937. In December 1941, Japan attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor and within a couple years had conquered Micronesia, the Philippines, Indonesia, northern New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Southeast Asia, and several coastal areas of China. The United States and Allied forces successively liberated Japanese-controlled territories beginning in 1943 and ultimately forced Japan to surrender in August 1945 after the dropping of two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Approximately three million Japanese perished as a result of the war and Japan lost all of its overseas possessions, including Korea, Manchuria, southern Sakhalin, and the Kuril Islands. The United States became the administering authority over the home islands of Japan following the war and introduced political, social, and economic reforms that were targeted to make Japan a peaceful country with a democratic government. Japan did not regain full sovereignty until 1952 and a total return of administration did not occur until 1972 when the United States delivered Okinawa back to Japanese control.[1] During the latter half of the twentieth century, Japan experienced unprecedented economic growth and development, resulting in Japan becoming one of the wealthiest, most powerful economies in the world. Economic development slowed substantially in the 1990s, but Japan remains a global economic power.

Culture

Shintoism, Buddhism, and militarism dominated Japanese society for centuries prior to the mid-twentieth century. Japanese are renowned for their high work ethnic, ingenuity, and business skills which have transformed their economy and society into one of the most technologically advanced in the world. Fish, rice, seaweed, vegetables, and fruit are common foods. Cigarette consumption rates are among the highest worldwide. Alcohol consumption rates are comparable to the worldwide average rate of alcohol use.

Economy

GDP per capita: $34,200 (2010) [72.2% of US]

Human Development Index: 0.884

Corruption Index: 7.8

With the world's fourth largest GDP, Japan supports a large, technologically advanced economy that is heavily integrated into global trade and commerce. Japan is the fourth largest producer and consumer of electricity, third largest oil and natural gas importer, and fifth largest importer/exporter. Services employ 68% of the labor force and generate 76% of the GDP whereas industry employs 28% of the labor force and generates 23% of the GDP. Motor vehicle manufacturing, electronics, machinery, metals, shipbuilding, chemicals, clothing, and processed foods are major industries. Agricultural activity accounts for four percent of the labor force and generates 1.5% of the GDP. Rice, sugar beets, vegetables, fruit, pork, poultry, eggs, dairy products, and fish are common crops and agricultural products. China, the United States, and South Korea are the primary trade partners. High government debt, approximately twice the nation's GDP, has contributed to the stagnation of economic growth in recent years. Corruption levels in Japan are among the lowest in the region.

Faiths

Shinto: 83.9%

Buddhist: 71.4%

Christian: 2%

other: 7.8%

Christians

Denominations Members Congregations

Catholic 509,000

Jehovah's Witnesses 218,698 3,118

Latter-day Saints 124,041 286

Seventh Day Adventists 15,371 115

Religion

The majority of the population doubly affiliates as Shinto and Buddhist, resulting in the number of religious members totaling approximately 206 million, nearly twice the Japanese population. There are six major schools of Buddhism (Tendai, Shingon, Jodo, Zen, Nichiren, and Narabukkyo) and two main schools of Shintoism (Jinjahoncho and Kyohashinto). The Agency for Cultural Affairs reports that there are 105 million Shinto, 89 million Buddhists, two million Christians, and nine million that follow other religions. Most Christians are Protestants. There are an estimated 100,000 Muslims, one-tenth of which are citizens.[2]

Religious Freedom

Persecution Index:

The constitution protects religious freedom which is upheld by the government. Religious groups are not required to register with the government to operate, but registration is required to receive tax benefits. The government reserves the right under the Religious Juridical Persons Law to investigate and supervise certified religious groups and suspend for-profit activities if the group violates government regulations. There have been some societal abuses of religious freedom reported in recent years which have targeted religious minority groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses and the Unification Church. Acts of abuse have included abductions and negative rhetoric by a government official.[3]

Largest Cities

Urban: 66%

Tokyo, Yokohama, Osaka, Nagoya, Sapporo, Kobe, Kyoto, Fukuoka, Kawasaki, Saitama, Hiroshima, Sendai, Kitakyushu, Chiba, Sakai, Niigata, Hamamatsu, Kumamoto, Shizuoka, Sagamihara, Okayama, Kagoshima, **Funabashi**, Hachioji, Himeji Matsuyama, Utsunomiya, Higashiosaka, **Kawaguchi**.

27 of the 29 cities with over half a million inhabitants have an LDS congregation. 31% of the national population resides in the 29 most populous cities.

LDS History

The LDS Church opened the Japanese Mission in 1901 and closed the mission 1924 following deteriorating American-Japanese relations; the 1923 earthquake and fire that destroyed most of Tokyo and Yokoham; and extremely low success baptizing and retaining converts. The first Japanese member to graduate from Brigham Young University was Takeo

Fujiwara in the early 1930s. LDS outreach performed by local Japanese members was successful among Japanese Americans in Hawaii during the 1930s, resulting in the formation of the Japanese Mission in Hawaii in1937. LDS American servicemen facilitated the reestablishment of the Church following the close of World War II and baptized the first Japanese converts in 1946 in Nagoya. The Japanese Mission in Japan was reorganized in 1948 with headquarters in Tokyo. During the 24-year absence of LDS missionaries, some members remained faithful to the Church as indicated by 43 attending a Sunday School class organized by local members. The outbreak of the Korean War threatened the Japanese Mission's ability to staff its missionary force due to many young Latter-day Saint men being drafted for the American military, resulting in mission leaders focusing on developing a native full-time missionary force that include 20 Japanese full-time missionaries called in 1953 alone. At this time, the Japanese Mission also administered Korea, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Guam, and Okinawa. Seminary began in 1963 and institute commenced in 1971. In 1991, Japan was assigned to the Asia North Area and area headquarters were established in Tokyo.[4] President Hinckley visited Japan in 1996.[5] In 2004, Keiko Itokazu became the first Latter-day Saint elected to a national office in Japan.[6]

Missions

The Japanese Mission was renamed the Northern Far East Mission in 1955. The Northern Far East Mission divided to create the Japan [renamed Japan Tokyo in 1974 and Japan Tokyo North in 1978] and Japan-Okinawa Missions [renamed Japan Kobe in 1974] in 1968. Additional missions were organized in Japan East [renamed Japan Sapporo] (1970), Japan West [renamed Japan Fukuoka] (1970), Nagoya (1973), Sendai (1974), Okayama [relocated to Hiroshima in 1998] (1976), Tokyo South (1978), Osaka (1980), and Okinawa (1990). In 1996, the Japan Okinawa Mission closed and in 2001, the Japan Kobe Mission was closed.[7] In 2007, the two Tokyo missions were consolidated into a single mission and the Japan Osaka Mission was renamed the Japan Kobe Mission.[8] In 2010, the Japan Hiroshima Mission was consolidated with missions based in Fukuoka and Kobe.[9] In early 2011, there were six missions.

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: 124,041 (2009)

There were 51 Latter-day Saints in 1911, which increased to 105 in 1918 and 174 in 1924. LDS Japanese-American membership in Hawaii increased from 17 in 1937 to 150 in 1941. By year-end 1948, there were 22 postwar LDS Japanese converts. Membership reached 600 in 1951. The average number of converts annually baptized per missionary increased from 0.7 in 1955 to 5.8 in 1957. There were 6,600 Latter-day Saints by 1962 and 12,000 members in mid-1968. Membership reached 70,998 in 1983, 85,000 in 1987, 103,000 in 1993, 108,000 in 1997, and 112,203 in 2000.

Membership growth slowed in the 2000s as membership totaled 118,508 in 2002, 120,197 in 2004, 121,744 in 2006, and 123,245 in 2008. Annual membership growth rates have ranged from 0.6% to 1% since 2002. Membership generally increases by between 700 and 1,000 a year.

Although receptivity has been higher among women, 66% of converts baptized in 1987 in the Japan Tokyo Mission were men.[10] There are few full-member families as approximately 75% of church membership was single in 2000.[11] In 2009, one in 1,022 was nominally LDS.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 161 Branches: 125

In 1948, there was one branch and four Sunday Schools. By August 1949, full-time missionaries were assigned to ten major cities. In 1951, there were 25 branches.[12] The first cities which opened to missionary work were primarily on Honshu. By the 1960s, several cities were opened on Honshu and other islands, such as Nagasaki in 1966.[13] There were 258 congregations in 1987, increasing to 289 in 1993, 295 in 1997, and 317 in 2000.

Congregation consolidates decreased the number of LDS congregations in the 2000s as there were 314 congregations in 2001, 309 in 2003, 308 in 2004, 298 in 2006, 294 in 2007, and 288 in 2008, and 286 in 2010. The number of wards declined from 175 in 2000 to 167 in 2005 and 163 in 2008 whereas the number of branches declined from 142 in 2000 to 141 in 2005 and 125 in 2008. Approximately 75% of congregations consolidated during the 2000s were in the Tokyo and Osaka areas. There were no congregations consolidated on Hokkaido and only one unit was closed on Okinawa during this period.

In 1970, the first stake was organized in Tokyo. Seven additional stakes were organized in the 1970s in Osaka (1972), Yokohama (1974), Saitama (1977), Osaka North (1977), Nagoya (1978), Sapporo (1978), and Fukuoka (1979). In the 1980s, eleven new stakes were organized in Kobe (1980), Machida (1980), Nagoya West (1980), Sendai (1980), Shizuoka (1981), Hiroshima (1981), Takamatsu (1981), Tokyo South (1981), Osaka Sakai (1982), Musashino (1982), and Okayama (1983). In the 1990s, nine new stakes were organized in Kyoto North (1992), Kyoto South (1992), Matsudo (1992), Osaka East (1992), Kumamoto (1997), Fujisawa (1998), Asahikawa (1998), Nagoya East (1998), Ginowan (1999). In the 2000s, stakes were organized in Kanazawa (2000) and Tokyo Japan South [English] (2003).

Six stakes have been discontinued since 1990 in Takamatsu (1991), Kyoto South (1993), Osaka East (2001), Tokyo South (2003), Nagoya West (2006), and Tokyo South [English] (2010). The Tokyo Japan South (English) Stake was organized as a district for three English-speaking branches in the downtown Tokyo area in 2010.

There were 15 districts in 1984.[14] By 1987, there were 23 stakes and 15 districts which increased to 25 stakes and 21 districts in 1993. There were 26 stakes and 22 districts in 1997 and 31 stakes and 19 districts in 2000. In early 2011, there were 28 stakes and 15 districts. Districts discontinued in the 2000s were headquartered in Akita, Mie, Gobo, Nara, and Utsunomiya. With the exception of the Matsuyama Japan District, all districts functioning in early 2011 were organized in the 1970s and 1980s.

Activity and Retention

Only a small number of Japanese LDS converts baptized prior to 1924 were active when the mission closed whereas nearly all the 150 Japanese-American converts in Hawaii in the late 1930s and early 1940s were active in 1941. By August 1949, there were nearly 1,000 attending church meetings in Japan. [15]

254 students were enrolled in seminary in 1988.[16] The Kyoto Ward had approximately 80 active members in 1991 and 70% of active members held a temple recommend.[17] 6,700 attended a special meeting with President Hinckley in 1996.[18] 2,500 attended a meeting with President Hinckley in Fukuoka in 1996. At the time there were approximately seven or eight thousand members on Kyushu.[19] 500 attended the groundbreaking of the Fukuoka Japan Temple in 1999.[20] Convert retention rates over the short term were has high as 75% in some areas in 2000.[21] 4,800 attended the three-day Fukuoka Japan Temple open house and 3,280 attended the dedicatory services.[22] During the construction of the Fukuoka Japan Temple over 150 less-active members were reactivated as a result of local leaders preparing members in the temple district to attend the temple.[23] 1,200 young men assembled in Aaronic Priesthood camps as part of the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Church in Japan in 2001.[24]

The number of active members varies dramatically by congregation. The Yanai Branch had approximately 100 attending church in 2000.[25] In early 2011, the Lizuka Branch had 19 active members. As many as 50 once attended the branch, but many active members moved. One ward in the Kobe area had 45 active members in late 2010. In early 2010, the Miki Branch had 20 active members. Less than 100 of the nearly 300 members in the Kita Rokko Ward in the Kobe Japan Stake were active in late 2009. In early 2011, the Sumoto Branch had fewer than ten active members. In late 2009, the Shingu Branch had one active member. Approximately 50 attended church meetings in the Morioka Branch in early 2011. The Iwade Branch in the Osaka Japan Sakai Stake had fewer than 10 active members in early 2011. Most branches have fewer than 50 active members whereas most wards have between 50 and 100 active members. The average number of members per congregation increased from 354 in 2000 to 431 in 2009. 4,608 were enrolled in seminary and institute during the 2008-2009 school year. Nationwide active membership is estimated to range between 20,000 and 24,000, or 15-20% of total church membership.

Finding

The Japan Sapporo Mission distributed 32,000 copies of the Book of Mormon in 1987.[26] One Tokyo area stake called 43 stake missionaries in 1987.[27] 150 of the 500 attending a special fireside with Brigham Young University Football athletes in 1992.[28] In 1993, members and missionary in Tokyo coordinated a Christmas program open to the public that was designed to introduce Christianity to the general population.[29] 200,000 copies of the Japanese retranslation of the Book of Mormon were sold between August 1995 and December 1996.[30] In 2004, the BYU-Hawaii Concert Choir performed a concert in the famous Meiji Shinto Shrine in Tokyo.[31] In the mid-2000s, the Church produced a DVD which provided a culturally-tailored introduction to LDS beliefs that identified similarities in Japanese culture with LDS teachings and taught basic church doctrine with a family-focused approach.

Language Materials

Languages with LDS Scripture: Japanese, Korean, Chinese (traditional and simplified characters), Spanish, Portuguese

All LDS scriptures and most church materials are available in Japanese, Korean, Chinese (traditional and simplified characters), Spanish, and Portuguese. The Church completed its third translation of the Book of Mormon in Japanese in 1996 and also retranslated the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price. The retranslation accommodated societal changes in the Japanese language that had occurred in the latter portion of the twentieth century.[32]

Meetinghouses

There were 183 LDS meetinghouses in 2002.[33] There were approximately 240 LDS meetinghouses in early 2011. Most congregations meet in church-built meetinghouses. Small branches often meet in rented spaces or renovated buildings.

Humanitarian and Development Work

LDS meetinghouses were utilized as emergency shelters in the Kobe area following a major earthquake in 1995[34] and Latter-day Saints in California donated quilts to earthquake victims.[35] In 2001, members in Yokohama visited a nursing home, socialized with seniors, and gifted cards and lap quilts.[36] The Church has also donated wheelchairs to the disabled, food and medicine for the homeless, and furniture and medical items for hospitals in recent years.[37]

Opportunities, Challenges and Prospects

Religious Freedom

Latter-day Saints benefit from full religious freedom to proselyte, worship, and assemble without governmental or societal interference. Foreign missionaries serve regularly in Japan with no major challenges obtaining visas and needed documentation.

Cultural Issues

Curiosity and interest in foreign religions fostered a climate of high receptivity to the LDS Church in the latter half of the twentieth century during which time most Japanese members were baptized. Christianity remains a largely unknown religion due to its small number of adherents and some stigmatization in society that is homogenously Shinto and Buddhist. Most major Christian groups report struggles to develop regular church attendance among prospective converts and lackluster member activity rates. LDS missionaries report success in meeting and teaching interested individuals, but are often unable to motivate investigators follow through on commitments to attend church meetings. Male participation in church services for Latter-day Saints and other Christians is considerably lower than most nations and has resulted in challenges developing a sufficient number of local leaders in many areas. The aging population and low birth rates create assimilation challenges with youth and older adults in many congregations as generation gaps and age-based cultural differences have created significant obstacles toward retaining and fellowshipping individuals from both populations within the same congregations, which oftentimes have few active members.

Increasing materialism and secularism has created a challenging environment for church members and full-time missionaries to navigate as sexual relations out of marriage, smoking, and fascination with the occult are commonplace. Abortion is widely accepted. Education is competitive and many youth spend large amounts of time attending school and studying, reducing opportunities for interaction with missionaries. Full-time missionaries in some areas report that local members have demonstrated a disinterest in missionary work as they believe that most prospective converts will ultimately not develop regular church attendance and a self-sustaining testimony of the Church, reflecting trends of nearly three decades of little increase in church attendance despite a large increase in nominal membership.[38] Consequently, LDS congregations have become increasingly tight-knit and entrenched as small numbers of active members limit their social interaction with nonmembers and rarely invite nonmember friends, family, and coworkers to church or to meet with full-time missionaries.

National Outreach

52% of the national population resides in a city over 150,000 inhabitants with an LDS congregation. 123 of the 160 cities with over 150,000 have an LDS congregation. With only a few exceptions, each of the 37 cities with over 150,000 without an LDS congregation is located within a major metropolitan area and most are within 10 kilometers of the nearest mission outreach center. As many as 60% of the population resides within 15 kilometers of an LDS meetinghouse. All 47 administrative prefectures have at least one LDS congregation. Okinawa is the prefecture that receives the most penetrating LDS mission outreach as evidenced by the lowest ratio of population to congregations of one LDS congregation for 81,513 inhabitants. Prefectures with fewer than 300,000 inhabitants per congregation are among the most reached by Latter-day Saints and include Wakayama, Tottori, Hokkaido, Shimane, Aomori, and Ehime. Prefectures with over 800,000 inhabitants per congregation are among the least reached and include Yamaguchi, Tochigi, Yamanashi, Saga, and Fukui. Six prefectures have only one LDS congregation (Yamaguchi, Yamanashi, Saga, Fukui, Tokushima, and Kochi) and have populations ranging from 770,000 to 1.5 million. Located on Hokkaido, Urakawa appears to be the least populated city with an LDS congregation, with approximately 15,000 inhabitants. There are hundreds of additional cities over 20,000 inhabitants without a mission outreach center.

The highly urbanized population provides an excellent opportunity for the Church to reach the majority of Japanese with fewer missionaries and congregations. An aggressive chapel-building program in the 1960s facilitated the expansion of national outreach[39] and occurred primarily in the largest cities, during a time when the Japanese population appeared was the most receptive to LDS mission outreach. During the peak of church growth and activity in Japan in the late twentieth century, missions allocated a large number of full-time missionaries to individual congregations. In 1991, 32 full-time missionaries were assigned to work in one ward and two branches in the Kyoto area.[40] While taking advantage of a time when the population was at a greater receptivity and providing adequate outreach to a large population were primary motives in allocating large numbers of full-time missionaries to a single congregation, this policy reduced local member involvement in missionary work, reinforced dependence on full-time missionaries for many ecclesiastical and administrative tasks, and contributed to the continuing trend of congregation consolidations that began in the early 2000s. While over 30 congregations were closed in the

2000s, the percentage of the national population residing in cities with mission outreach centers does not appear to have noticeably decreased as most discontinued units were in the largest cities which continue to be serviced by multiple LDS congregations. Holding cottage meetings and forming groups and dependent branches in lesser-reached cities and neighborhoods in the Tokyo and Osaka metropolitan areas may increase prospects of establishing additional self-sustainable congregations over the medium term. Congregations in smaller cities or urban areas with few active members are susceptible to closure in the coming years due to stagnant active membership growth, low receptivity, and continued reluctance of many local members to participate in missionary work.

High cost of living and limited receptivity has increasingly made assigning large numbers of full-time missionaries unfeasible. The number of missions and missionary complement assigned to Japan have been reduced in recent years, and so the Church has attempted to expand outreach in other ways. Japan had the third most Internet users in 2007[41] and the Church has maintained Internet outreach to assist in proselytism efforts since the early 2000s. When the Church launched its first official website in 1997, Japan had the fourth most visitors.[42] A country website for Japan at http://www.ldschurch.jp/ provides local church news, meetinghouse locations, explanations on church doctrine and practices tailored for a nonmember audience, youth-directed outreach, and links to Japanese-language LDS websites such as http://www.mormon.jp/. Online member-missionary activity remains limited, but the Church will likely institute member profiles on mormon.org in Japanese in the near future as Japanese is spoken by over 100 million speakers the Internet is highly utilized by Japan.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Mission leaders, full-time missionaries, and local leadership significantly contributed to Japan's current low member activity rates by focusing on meeting arbitrary baptismal quotas during the past half century, which has produced impressive membership growth numbers but little growth in active membership. The high Japanese work ethic and capitalist mind frame has likely contributed to these mission practices. As a result of focusing on meeting baptismal quotas instead of developing goals centered around member participation in missionary work, the development of habitual weekly church attendance, and required enrollment and attendance in seminary or institute, the number of congregations declined by 31 during the 2000s as many ward and branches experienced a decline in active membership and self-sustaining membership growth was not achieved. The discontinuation of six stakes since 1990 further demonstrates worrisome sustainability of active membership and inability of local members and full-time missionaries to increase the number of active members. Cultural attitudes and practices regarding organized religion and daily or weekly participation in church services have further exacerbated low member activity rates not only among Latter-day Saints but among other major Christian groups. Church-going Latter-day Saints often exhibit a high degree of independence, strong devotion, and conviction to serve in the Church.

Holding youth-oriented activities and programs can facilitate member activity rates. In some areas the Church has organized the Boy Scout program,[43] providing opportunity for youth members to form friendships within the Church and to introduce nonmember friends to the Church by inviting them to scouting activities. Regular attendance in seminary and institute fosters greater doctrinal understanding, offers opportunity for socializing with fellow members, and provides additional missionary preparation. Full-time missionaries have regularly worked with local leaders on reactivation efforts, but report inconsistent effort and few results. Limited understanding of the church's teachings and practices among inactive members who were rushed into baptism and never experienced meaningful church activity creates a nearly insurmountable barrier to activation.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

The highly homogenous Japanese population reduces ethnic integration challenges among natives. Foreigners often struggle to assimilate into Japanese-majority congregations, resulting in the formation of English-speaking units in several areas. Only one non-Japanese and non-English-speaking unit appears to have ever operated in Japan. A Latino branch was created in early 2001 for Portuguese and Spanish-speaking members,[44] but was discontinued later in the 2000s. LDS members and new converts remain too limited to justify the creation of additional language units, but there may be some potential for Chinese-language congregations in some of the largest cities within the next decade. In the late 2000s and early 2010s, full-time missionaries reported that they regularly baptized non-Japanese Asians from China and Vietnam. Many of these converts temporarily reside in Japan and return to their home countries, creating challenges for developing self-sustainable congregations meeting the needs of these ethnic groups. There have been no reported LDS successes reaching Koreans in Japan as many belong to tight-knit communities.

Language Issues

Approximately 99% of the national population has LDS materials available in their native language. The lack of linguistic diversity has simplified LDS proselytism approaches, but difficultly in mastering the Japanese language, especially reading and writing, have created challenges for foreign full-time missionaries to function in Japanese society. The Church has regularly retranslated Japanese-language materials due to difficulties with prior translations and has a wide body of literature available in print and online in Japanese, including LDS scriptures at http://classic.scriptures.lds.org/jpn. Prospects are unlikely for the translation of LDS materials into additional languages indigenous to Japan as many speakers of these languages are also fluent in Japanese and the small number of speakers of these languages has steadily declined. Only Okinawan has any realistic possibility for the translation of LDS materials.

Missionary Service

There were 200 full-time missionaries assigned to Japan in 1968. The Tokyo Missionary Training Center opened in 1979 and trained approximately 300 missionaries annually in the early 1990s.[45] One-third of the full-time missionary force in the Japan Kobe Mission was Japanese in 1990.[46] In 2000, there were approximately 1,000 full-time missionaries serving in Japan, 18% of which were native Japanese.[47] By early 2011, the number of full-time missionaries stationed in Japan was nearly half the number assigned in 2000. Despite declining numbers of full-time missionaries assigned to Japan, membership growth rates do not appear to have been adversely affected. The sustainability in the small native full-time missionary force is a positive development which has endured an era of congregation consolidations and stagnant membership growth. In the late 2000s and early 2010s, the number of Japanese full-time missionaries appears to have been generally stable despite low birth rates among Japanese Latter-day Saints and low member activity. However, the closure of the Japan Missionary Training Center in the late 2000s and is a troubling development that may indicate worsening problems maintaining the past rates of missionary service among Japanese members. Low member activity rates, poor convert retention, and small LDS family size challenge efforts to maintain or increase the current number of Japanese full-time missionaries.

Leadership

The LDS Church in Japan supports the largest and most well-developed priesthood leadership body in non-Christian Asia capable of supporting over two dozen stakes, soon-to-be three temples, nearly all operating wards and branches, and many of Japan's missions. Japanese LDS leaders have maintained a long-standing tradition of supplying local leadership for congregations since the 1960s. Many of the branches organized in the early 1950s were led by full-time missionaries initially. Accelerated local leadership development occurred in the late 1950s and early 1960s as the number of priesthood holders increased from 41 to 350 between 1955 and 1962.[48] Japanese-American Latter-day Saints from Hawaii have staffed various church leadership positions in Japan, such as mission and temple presidencies. A lack of active membership appears the primary barrier toward greater increases in the number of Japanese LDS leaders today. Japanese leaders have regularly served in many regional and international church leadership positions as mission presidents, missionary training center presidents, area authority seventies, and temple presidents.

In 1988, Masataka Kitamura from Takasaki[49] and Masaru Tsuchida from Nagoya[50] were called as mission presidents over the Japan Okayama and Japan Sapporo Missions, respectively.[51] In 1990, Seiichiro Utagawa from Tokyo[52] was called to preside over the Japan Okayama Mission.[53] In 1993, Yukio Kumazawa from Yokohama was called to preside over the Japan Tokyo North Mission and Yutaka Onda from Osaka was called to preside over the Japan Okayama Mission.[54] In 1994, Ryo Okamoto from Tokyo was called as the Japan Missionary Training Center President.[55] In 1995, Yasuhiro Matsushita from Tokyo was called as a mission president[56] over the Japan Kobe Mission.[57] In 1996, Kazuhiro Yoshino from Tokyo was called to preside over the Japan Sendai Mission.[58] In 1997, Tadashi Komatsu from Osaka was called to preside over the Japan Tokyo North Mission.[59] In 1997, Masaru Tsuchida from Nagoya was called to preside of the Japan Missionary Training Center.[60] In 2005, Yoshikazu Yokoyama from Tokyo[61] was called to preside over the Japan Sapporo Mission,[62] Akira Yafuso from Okinawa was called to preside over the Japan Hiroshima Mission,[63] and Asao Miyashita from Abiko was called to preside over the Japan Sendai Mission.[64] Koichi Aoyagi was called as the Japan Missionary Training Center president in 2005.[65] In 2006, David Brian Iwaasa from Tokyo was called to preside over the Japan Fukuoka Mission.[66]

In 1991, Seiya Tanaka from Yokohama was called as a regional representative.[67] In 1992, Seiji Katanuma from Atsubetsu was called as a regional representative.[68] In 1995, Hitoshi Kashikura from Kanagawa-ken, Seiji Katanuma from Hokkaido, and Gary Matsuda from Kanagawa-ken were called as area authorities.[69] In 2000, Haruyoshi Nakamura from Osaka was called as an Area Authority Seventy.[70] In 2001, Kazuhiko Yamashita from Fukuoka was called as an Area Authority Seventy.[71] In 2002, Masayuki Nakano from Osaka and Yasuo Niiyama from Tokyo were called as Area Authority Seventies.[72] In 2004, Tohru Hotta from Nagoya and Bin Kikuchi from Sapporo were called as Area Authority Seventies.[73] In 2007, Tetsuji Ishii from Toyohashi was called as an Area Seventy.[74] In 2010, Kouzou Tashiro from Kumamoto-ken was called as an Area Seventy.[75]

In 1994, Elder Yoshihiko Kikuchi from Hokkaido was called as the Tokyo Japan Temple president.[76] In 1997, Kensei Nagamine from Okinawa was called as the Tokyo Japan Temple president.[77] In 2000, Masaru Tshuchida from Fukuoka was called as the Fukuoka Japan Temple president.[78] In 2003, Kiyoshi Tokuzawa from Kanazawa was called as the Fukuoka Japan Temple president[79] and Makoto Fukuda from Musashino was called as the Tokyo Japan Temple president.[80] In 2006, Ryoushou Nakamura from Kumamoto was called as the Fukuoka Japan Temple president and Masayuki Nakano from Osaka was called as the Tokyo Japan Temple president.[81] Elder Yoshihiko Kikuchi was called to the First Quorum of the Seventy in 1977 and served in various area presidencies. In early 2011, he served as the Assistant Executive Director in the Temple Department.[82]

Temple

Announced in 1975 and completed in 1980, the Tokyo Japan Temple services the northern half of Japan and Okinawa whereas the Fukuoka Japan Temple (announced in 1998 and completed in 2000) services members living in southern Japan. In 2009, a temple was announced for Sapporo which in early 2011 was still undergoing planning and approval. Prior to the completion of the temple in Tokyo, yearly temple trips occurred for Japanese members from 1965 to 1980.[83] High rates of temple attendance among active members and greater self-sufficiency in monetary donations by local members has contributed to the announcement of three temples in Japan despite the small number of active members. In 2011, the Tokyo Japan Temple scheduled six endowment sessions on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, seven sessions on Fridays, and eight sessions on Saturdays. The Fukuoka Japan Temple scheduled at least one endowment session on Thursday, two on Fridays, and six on

Saturdays. Both temples appear moderately busy on Saturdays whereas only the Tokyo Japan Temple is moderately utilized on weekdays. Many congregations have held monthly temple trips since the 1990s.[84] Additional temples appear possible over the medium term for small temples on Okinawa or in Osaka or Nagoya, but stagnant active membership and congregational growth may delay the construction of any additional temples for many years.

Comparative Growth

The LDS Church in Japan has the seventeenth most members, thirteenth most congregations, eleventh most missions, sixth most temples, fourteenth most stakes in the world. Japan is the tenth most populous country. The Church in Japan experienced greater growth than any other Asian country except for the Philippines and was among the most rapidly growing nations for church membership during the twentieth century. In mid-1989, Japan had the eighth most stakes among countries outside the United States.[85] Stagnant membership growth and congregational decline in Japan in the early 2000s was among the most pronounced in the world as annual membership growth rates were generally less than one percent and over 30 congregations were discontinued. Japan in many areas experienced the same phenomenon as in several islands in the Caribbean (such as Aruba and Curacao) where missions flooded congregations with several missionary companionships despite limited receptivity, which over time has resulted in poor member-missionary participation. The long record of quick baptism tactics advocated by local missions and resulting low convert retention rates have in many cases further sapped member enthusiasm for outreach. Consequently the Church in Japan today remains among the most resistant to member-missionary efforts despite a well-developed local leadership infrastructure present in many areas.

Most Christian denominations report few members and slow or stagnant membership growth. Seventh Day Adventists generally baptized between 200 and 300 new converts annually and the number of Adventist congregations did not increase between 2000 and 2009.[86] Jehovah's Witnesses are the most successful Christian group, maintaining over 3,100 congregations and claiming nearly 220,000 active members. Witnesses have developed self-sustainable congregations and maintain strong member-missionary participation.

Future Prospects

Secularism, limited member-missionary activity, low birth rates among Latter-day Saint families, and the continuing trend of congregation consolidations create an unfavorable outlook for the future growth of the LDS Church in Japan. Congregation consolidations may continue for many more years as growth in active membership fails to keep pace with member attrition. Overcoming local members' reluctance, indifference, or anxiety about member-missionary work will be essential toward reversing current stagnant membership and congregational growth trends. The construction of additional small temples in Osaka or Nagoya and Okinawa appears likely over the medium term. Some district may consolidate with neighboring stakes or combine with nearby districts to organize additional stakes in coming years.

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