



# 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.



Ireland

Population: 4.83 millions (#123 out of countries)

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## Geography

**Area:** 70,273 square km. Nicknamed the “Emerald Isle” for its abundance of green vegetation, Ireland is an island to the west of Great Britain surrounded by the Irish Sea and North Atlantic Ocean. The United Kingdom controls the northeastern portion of the island as Northern Ireland. A wet temperate maritime climate characterized by mild winters and cool summers occurs throughout the country as a result of high latitude and the North Atlantic Current. The weather is often cloudy and humid. Terrain consists of rolling hills and small mountains with some coastal plains and interior plateaus. The western coastline is marked by numerous inlets and small peninsulas. Major rivers include the Shannon, Barrow, and Siur. Water pollution in lakes and acid rain are environmental issues. Ireland is administratively divided into twenty-eight counties and three cities.

## Peoples

Irish: 82.2%

Irish Travelers: 0.7%

Other white: 9.5%

Asian: 2.1%

Black: 1.4%

Other: 1.5%

Unspecified: 2.6%

The Irish constitute a strong majority. Other whites include peoples from the British Isles and other Europeans. Asian and African immigrants have arrived in greater numbers in recent years.

**Population:** 5,176,569 (July 2020)

**Annual Growth Rate:** 1.04% (2020)

**Fertility Rate:** 1.94 children born per woman (2020)

**Life Expectancy:** 78.9 male, 83.7 female (2020)

**Languages:** English (94%), Gaelic (3%), other (3%). English and Gaelic are the official languages. English is most commonly used as a result of centuries of English rule. According to the 2006 census, 1.66 million Irish claim some knowledge of Gaelic, although one million of these report speaking Gaelic less than once a week, and only 72,000 report speaking Gaelic on a daily basis outside of education.<sup>[1]</sup> The few fluent Gaelic speakers are concentrated along the west coast. Only English has over one million speakers (4.9 million).

**Literacy:** 99% (2011)

## History

Celtic tribes settled the island several centuries before the birth of Christ. Christianity arrived prior to the Middle Ages and flourished. Irish missionaries facilitated the spread of Christianity throughout Europe in the subsequent centuries. Norse and Viking invasions began in the eighth century and persisted for several hundred years. Dublin and most other coastal cities were founded as Viking settlements and trading posts. The English invaded in the twelfth century, and conflict continued until the end of the twentieth century as a result of colonial rule. In the 1840s, the Great Famine resulted in mass immigration to the United States and as many as one million deaths. In 1916, the Easter Monday Rebellion was an Irish insurrection that attempted to overthrow British rule but failed. Rebellion and guerrilla warfare persisted until 1921 when independence was obtained for twenty-six of the thirty-two Irish counties; the remaining six became Northern Ireland. Ireland left the British Commonwealth in 1949 and joined the European Community (today known as the European Union) in 1973. Irish nationalist groups seeking reunification with Northern Ireland challenged efforts by Irish and British governments to maintain law and order. In recent years, violence has declined, and greater dialogue between Irish and British governments has occurred. Rapid economic growth and development occurred from the mid-1990s until the start of the Global Financial Crisis in the late 2000s. Economic growth significantly rebounded in the mid-2010s.

## Culture

Ireland is renowned for its poetry, literature, music, folklore, and scenery. Due to remoteness and separation from the mainland resulting with little contact with Ireland proper, the Aran Islands have been instrumental in preserving many aspects of Irish culture, such as the Gaelic language, through the many centuries of English colonization.<sup>[2]</sup> Irish culture has influenced many nearby European nations. Halloween has its roots in Irish folklore, and Medieval Christianity was popularized in the United States following the mass immigration of Irish in the nineteenth century. Rugby and soccer are popular sports. Irish cuisine heavily uses potatoes, cabbage, wheat, and pork. Cigarette consumption rates are higher than the United Kingdom, but are representative for Western Europe. Alcohol consumption rates are comparable to most of Western Europe. Divorce rates are low.

## Economy

**GDP per capita:** \$73,200 (2017) [122% of U.S.]

**Human Development Index:** 0.942 (2018)

**Corruption Index: 74 (2019)**

Ireland has a small, developed economy that relies on trade with other nations for revenue. The global financial crisis severely affected Ireland, resulting in acute recession. Average home prices fell 50% from 2007 levels, and the GDP declined by 7.5% in 2009. Unemployment nearly doubled, reaching 11.8% in 2009. The economy rapidly recovered in the 2010s and by the end of the decade the GDP per capita of Ireland was the highest in Europe with the exception of a few European microstates such as Monaco and Luxembourg. Low corporate tax rates have attracted business and investment. Services employ 84% of the workforce and generate 60% of the GDP. Industry employs 11% of the workforce and generates 39% of the GDP. Primary industries include industrial and valuable metals, food products, clothing, pharmaceuticals, machinery, glass, software, and tourism. Agriculture constitutes approximately 1% of the GDP and employs a similar percentage of the workforce. Major crops include barley, potatoes, sugar beets, and wheat. Natural resources include natural gas, peat, and a variety of minerals and metals. The United Kingdom and the United States are Ireland's primary trade partners. Perceived corruption in Ireland is among the lowest worldwide and compares to Scandinavia and Western Europe. However, drug trafficking and money laundering are concerns.

**Faiths**

Christian: 83%

Muslim: 1%

Other: 2%

None: 10%

Unspecified: 4%

**Christians**

**Denominations – Members – Congregations**

Roman Catholic – 4,037,724

Church of Ireland (Anglican) – 155,297

Evangelical – 71,080

Orthodox – 51,766

Presbyterian – 23,546

Methodist – 12,160

Jehovah's Witnesses – 7,059 – 121

Lutheran – 5,279

Latter-day Saints – 3,985 – 13

Seventh Day Adventists – 929 – 21

## Religion

Ireland exhibits one of the most religiously active populations in Europe. Most Irish are Catholic (86.8%). Sixty percent (60%) of Irish Catholics reportedly attended mass weekly in the late 2000s. However, by 2016 only 35% of Irish Catholics attended mass weekly.<sup>[3]</sup> The second largest religious group is the Church of Ireland (3%) followed by Muslims (1%). Presbyterians, Orthodox Christians, and Methodists each constitute less than 1% of the population. A 2005 survey estimated the number of active Evangelical Christians at around 30,000 (0.7%). Ten percent (10%) of Irish describe their religious affiliation as none.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Religious Freedom

The constitution protects religious freedom, which is upheld by governmental policy and law. Abuse of religious freedom is not tolerated. There is no state religion, and it is illegal for one religious group to be promoted over another. Missionaries may proselyte freely. Religious groups are not required to register with the government. Religious instruction in public schools is allowed but not mandatory. Instances of societal abuses of religious freedom are infrequent and usually target Muslims.<sup>[5]</sup>

## Largest Cities

**Urban: 63.7% (2020)**

Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway, Waterford, **Drogheda, Swords**, Dundalk, **Bray, Navan**.

Six of the ten most populous cities have a congregation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of the national population resides in the ten most populous cities.

## Latter-day Saint History

Ireland was among the first destinations for Latter-day Saint missionaries in Europe following the commencement of missionary work outside the United States in the late 1830s. In 1840, future Church President John Taylor visited Ireland shortly after the first missionaries arrived and preached to over 600. By the fall, the Church created its first branch in Hillsborough with thirty-five members. In the 1840s, nearly all the approximately one hundred Irish Latter-day Saints immigrated to Utah. Missionary work was reestablished following the Great Famine in the 1850s, and by 1856, there were 300 members.<sup>[6]</sup>

Missionary work progressed slowly for the following century. Catholics were admonished to never attend the religious meeting of another faith.<sup>[7]</sup> Starting from the beginning of the twentieth century, missionaries found success working among German immigrants, leading to a preponderance of ethnic Germans among church members in many areas. In 1946, only one Latter-day Saint in the Dublin Branch was a former Catholic; most were German immigrants or former Protestants. Many of the German immigrants later immigrated to the United States.<sup>[8]</sup>

The Irish Mission was organized in 1962. Seminary and institute began in the mid-1970s. In 1983, the Ireland Dublin Mission pioneered a stop smoking program that was later utilized in other missions. In 2010, the Church consolidated the Ireland Dublin Mission with the Scotland Edinburgh Mission into the Scotland/Ireland Mission headquartered in Edinburgh.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Membership Growth

## **Church Membership: 3,985 (2019)**

There were 300 Latter-day Saints by 1900. In 1978, there were 750 members, most of whom were baptized in the past two decades.<sup>[10]</sup> In 1995, membership totaled 2,300 in the Republic of Ireland, 1,700 of whom resided within the boundaries of the Dublin Ireland Stake.<sup>[11]</sup>

By year-end 2000, there were 2,332 members. In the 2000s, membership grew slowly and totaled 2,610 in 2002, 2,710 in 2006, and 2,772 in 2008. Most years experienced either annual membership decline of less than 1% or membership increase of up to 2%. In the 2010s, membership growth rates accelerated to 2-4% for most years. Some years experienced significant increases in membership, such as 2014 and 2016 when membership increased by 12.4% and 11.0%, respectively. Church membership totaled 3,071 in 2013, 3,816 in 2016, and 4,042 in 2018. Most recent growth has been among non-Irish immigrants, including Chinese, other Asians, Africans, Middle Easterners, and Eastern Europeans.

The census counted 833 self-identifying Latter-day Saints in 2002 and 1,237 in 2006; a 48% increase.<sup>[12]</sup> Officially reported LDS membership for Ireland increased by only 3.8% during this period. However, the 2011 census reported only 1,202 Mormons and the 2016 census numbered only 1,209 Mormons (46% male, 54% female) of whom 693 were White Irish, 233 were White non-Irish, 87 were Black or Black Irish (African), 86 were “mixed background,” 82 were Asian or Asian Irish (non-Chinese), 11 were Black or Black Irish (any other Black background), 4 were Asian or Asian Irish (Chinese), and 1 was White Irish Traveller.<sup>[13]</sup> Thus, census-reported Mormons as a percentage of Church-reported membership decreased from 46% in 2006 to 32% in 2016.

In 2019, one in 1,285 people was a Latter-day Saint on Church records.

## **Congregational Growth**

### **Wards: 5 Branches: 8 (June 2020)**

The Church has maintained a branch in Dublin since 1900. The Cork Branch was created in 1964. The Dublin Branch divided in 1975 to create a second congregation in the city.<sup>[14]</sup> Additional branches were later organized in Waterford (1970), Limerick (1975), Tralee (1976), Galway (1981), Bray (1989), Dundalk (1982), Mullingar (1993), and Sligo (1993). The Dublin Ireland Stake was created in 1995. In the late 1990s, there were four wards and fifteen branches nationwide. The Limerick Ireland District has operated since 1985. In 2000, there were four wards and nine branches. In 2002, one new branch was created, but one branch was discontinued the following year: the Dungarvan Branch. In 2010, there were four wards and nine branches. In 2015, the Bray Branch was upgraded to a ward and renamed the Terenure 2nd Ward. In 2019, there were five wards and eight branches.

## **Activity and Retention**

One thousand one hundred members from Ireland and Northern Ireland attended a special conference with President Hinckley in 1995.<sup>[15]</sup> During the 2008–2009 school year, 134 were enrolled in seminary or institute. Member activity rates have appeared to steadily decrease since approximately 2000 as the average number of members per congregation increased from 180 in 1999 to 215 in 2009 and 307 in 2019.

Seventy members from the Terenure Ward gathered to clean and perform maintenance work on their chapel in 2003.<sup>[16]</sup> In 2009, the Galway Branch had sixty attending Sunday meetings, doubling sacrament attendance in a short period of time. In the mid- to late 2010s, the approximate number of active members by congregation was as follows: Clonsilla Ward (100), Limerick Branch (80-120), Cork Branch (80-100), Finglas Ward (60-80), Terenure 1st Ward (50-85), Galway Branch (40-50), Dundalk

Branch (30), Waterford Branch (25), and Tralee Branch (6). Most other wards appear to have between fifty and one hundred active members, whereas most other branches appear to have 25-50 active members. Returned missionaries who served in the Scotland/Ireland Mission in the 2010s reported that approximately half of new converts continued to attend church one year after baptism. Moreover, the annual number of convert baptisms in the mission also increased in the 2010s from 100-200 to 300-400. Nationwide active membership is estimated at 700, or 18% of total membership.

## **Language Materials**

**Languages with Latter-day Saint Scripture:** English.

All Church materials and scriptures are available in English. Church materials are available in many of the first or second languages spoken by immigrant groups from Europe and Africa.

## **Meetinghouses**

In 2020, congregations met in twelve meetinghouses, which included several Church-built meetinghouses. Some smaller branches met in rented spaces.

## **Humanitarian and Development Work**

The Church has conducted little humanitarian service in Ireland due to high standards of living and few natural disasters. Between 1985 and 2019, the Church had conducted only eleven community projects in Ireland.[\[17\]](#)

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

### **Religious Freedom**

The Church faces no governmental restrictions regarding worship or proselytism. Foreign missionaries may serve in Ireland and report no challenges in obtaining visas.

### **Cultural Issues**

The strength and size of the Roman Catholic Church has been a major challenge for Latter-day Saint mission outreach in Ireland since proselytism began in the 1840s. Efforts from Catholic authorities in the past to dissuade Catholics from investigating or participating in non-Catholic denominations have made outreach difficult. The influence of the Catholic Church has slightly waned in recent years, yet this has not been of much benefit to Latter-day Saints as secularism has filled this void. Nevertheless, returned missionaries in the late 2010s reported that the population in Ireland is generally receptive to the Latter-day Saint gospel message, but that there is little interest or commit to consider genuine conversion to the Church due to strong cultural ties to Catholicism.

High alcohol consumption rates pose an obstacle for missionary work In the early 1840s, Father Theobald Mathew, a Catholic

missionary, enrolled over three million Irish—more than half of the nation's adult population at the time—in a pledge of total abstinence from alcohol, but this pledge does not appear to have generated lasting results. The mission developed a stop smoking program to address smoking challenges manifested by investigators and the general population, although work with alcohol has been less successful.

## **National Outreach**

Ireland experiences modest levels of national outreach. Current Latter-day Saint mission outreach centers are established in twelve of the thirty-four administrative counties and cities of Ireland, home to approximately 60% of the national population. However, only 36% of the national population resides in a city with a ward or branch. Approximately forty cities with between 10,000 and 40,000 inhabitants have no ward or branch. Sligo is the city with the smallest population that has a Latter-day Saint congregation with approximately 19,000 inhabitants. The Church's sole mission in Ireland previously provided consistent full-time missionary outreach with typically over one hundred full-time missionaries for several decades administering a smaller population than most European missions. Overall, the scope of the Church's outreach in Ireland has not appeared to have noticeably decreased since the merger of the Ireland Dublin Mission with the Scotland Edinburgh Mission.

Dublin suburbs distant from Latter-day Saint meetinghouses and larger cities with at least a few active members provide the greatest potential for establishing additional congregations. However, the lack of any increase in congregations over the past two decades, the consolidation of the Ireland Dublin Mission with the Scotland Edinburgh Mission, and no increases in the number of self-affiliated Latter-day Saints on the census indicate that little expansion in national outreach will likely occur in the immediate future. The preponderance of baptisms among non-Irish immigrants who live primarily in Dublin and other large cities, in contrast to low receptivity among the native Irish, as well as limited missionary manpower, offer little rationale at present for expansion of mission outreach beyond currently established centers.

Any future strides gained in national outreach will be reflected in rates of member activity and convert retention and member involvement in missionary activity. With the downsizing of the full-time missionary force in the late 2000s, the Church has nevertheless increased the number of convert baptisms---an impressive feat for a nation that is rapidly secularizing. Nevertheless, there is little indication that many of these new converts become lifelong members in the Church given census data.

## **Member Activity and Convert Retention**

The Church in Ireland experiences low member activity rates. Church membership has increased by more than 1,000 in the past decade albeit the number of congregations has remained unchanged. Although convert retention rates appear moderate, it is likely that many new converts do not remain active in the Church several years after baptism given census data. The lack of any increase in congregations for several decades and only one branch maturing into a ward in the Dublin Ireland Stake during the past 25 years point to slow growth with modest convert retention and member activity. Furthermore, ongoing delays to advance the Limerick Ireland District into a stake also point to member inactivity problems. Non-Irish converts may experience some integration challenges, although Church membership, especially among young people, is much more diverse than the Irish population as a whole.

## **Ethnic Issues and Integration**

African and Asian immigrants have been more receptive to Latter-day Saint mission outreach efforts than the white population and have been highly represented among convert baptisms in recent years. In 2006, Africans numbered less than 40,000, and most originated from Nigeria or South Africa. Non-Irish Europeans most commonly emigrated from the United Kingdom, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Germany;<sup>[18]</sup> among Asians, many come from China although most Asian Latter-day Saints are not Chinese. Non-Irish Europeans present a challenging population for proselytism, as the most represented nations have been among the least receptive in their native lands. Overall, most congregations appear to accommodate non-Irish members without significant challenges.



## Language Issues

The common usage of English among the general population has eliminated potential conflicts at church regarding communication challenges between members. Some obstacles may exist for immigrant peoples who do not fluently speak English as a second language. The few Gaelic speakers generally speak English fluently, reducing the need for church materials in Gaelic. Moreover, most native Gaelic speakers live in areas without a nearby Latter-day Saint congregation.

## Missionary Service

Few Irish serve full-time missions, and Ireland remains dependent on other nations to staff its missionary force. In 1995, 160 missionaries served in the Ireland Dublin Mission, which administered the entire island of Ireland.<sup>[19]</sup> In 2010, the Scotland/Ireland Mission had a missionary complement of 146, enough for one pair for each congregation throughout the mission.<sup>[20]</sup> If each congregation were to have two missionaries assigned, fewer than thirty full-time missionaries would serve in Ireland. Stressing youth outreach programs and activities sponsored on a congregational level may facilitate increases in youth converts. Emphasis on missionary preparation courses and seminary and institute attendance may help to increase the local full-time missionary force over time.

## Leadership

Local leadership and active priesthood holders have been sufficiently developed to support a small stake for fifteen years despite the small number of Latter-day Saints in Ireland. The Dublin Ireland Stake Presidency had no Church employees when reorganized in 2000,<sup>[21]</sup> 2009,<sup>[22]</sup> or 2018.<sup>[23]</sup> The absence of Church employees in the stake presidency indicates that local leadership has been developed without reliance on Church Education System staff or personnel. The continued operation of the Limerick Ireland District further demonstrates that some local leadership has been developed in smaller cities in the countryside.

## Temple

Ireland is assigned to the Preston England Temple. Temple trips occur regularly and are accessible for most members. The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland may one day support a small temple, as many European nations with small, long established Latter-day Saint communities have had temples constructed in the past decade.

## Comparative Growth

The extent of national outreach and duration of Latter-day Saint missionary activity are comparable to much of Western Europe. Historically, Ireland has experienced the slowest membership growth rates in the British Isles and ranks among the slowest for Western Europe over the past thirty years. Only Scandinavia and German-speaking Europe have experienced slower membership growth over this period. However, membership growth rates in Ireland the 2010s ranked among the highest in Europe. For some years, the Ireland Dublin Mission was the lowest baptizing mission in the world; more recently, several missions in Eastern Europe hold this dubious distinction. Membership growth in Northern Ireland greatly outpaced growth in the Republic of Ireland. By 1978, over 80% of Church membership on the island resided in Northern Ireland, home to just 30% of the island's population. In 2017, the percentage of nominal Latter-day Saints in Northern Ireland (0.28%) was three-and-a-half times higher than the percentage of nominal Latter-day Saints in the Republic of Ireland (0.08%). The percentage of Latter-day Saints in Ireland is comparable to many Western European nations, but much lower than the United Kingdom (one member per 1,285 people in Ireland versus one member per 348 people in the United Kingdom).

Muslims, Orthodox Christians, Pentecostals, Buddhists, Hindus, and Lutherans all have more adherents than Latter-day Saints and experienced at least a 50% increase in self-reported members during the 2000s, whereas Evangelicals, Baptists, and agnostics reported comparable growth rates to Latter-day Saints.<sup>[24]</sup> Increases in the followers of some of these faiths can be attributed at least in part to immigration, such as Orthodox Christians immigrating from Eastern Europe and Buddhists and Hindus from Asia. Seventh-Day Adventists gain few new converts from year to year. Adventists generally had fewer than twenty



convert baptisms annually during the 2000s. The number of Adventists and Latter-day Saints on the 2016 census was nearly identical. Jehovah's Witnesses have seen slow, steady growth in the number of self-reported members on the census and per official Witness statistics. Witnesses operate congregations in most commonly spoken immigrant languages and even operate several Gaelic-speaking congregations. There are scores of Irish cities with a Witness congregation. Jehovah's Witnesses have utilized missionary-oriented denominations utilize member-missionary approaches, reducing costs and increasing retention and productivity.

## **Future Prospects**

Accelerated membership growth rates in the 2010s were achieved despite the consolidation of the Ireland Dublin Mission with the Scotland Edinburgh Mission and the subsequent decrease in the number of missionaries assigned to Ireland. This finding indicates that the Irish population remains more receptive to the Latter-day Saint gospel message than the populations of many other Western European countries. However, the lack of a commensurate increase in the number of self-affiliated Latter-day Saints on the government censuses, combined with no increase in the number of congregations in the country for nearly thirty years, point to significant problems with member retention and member inactivity. Greater member and recent convert involvement in finding, teaching, and fellowshipping investigators will be necessary to achieve greater long term growth. The Limerick Ireland District may become a stake within the next decade although the district at present appears to have the minimum number of members to become stake, if this threshold has even been reached yet at all, and only two branches have enough members to become wards given the most recent data provided by returned missionaries. Consideration to organize congregations that hold services in common immigrant languages appears greatly needed to help improve outreach and foster a sense of community among more receptive immigrant people groups. Furthermore, holding cottage meetings and organizing member groups in the most populous cities without a Church presence also appears needed to expand outreach before greater secularization of Irish society likely results in even lower receptivity in the coming years. A future small temple in Dublin appears likely in the foreseeable future given distance to temples in England.

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