



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.

Honduras



Population: 8.6 millions (#94 out of countries)

By David Stewart and Matt Martinich

Geography

Area: 112,090 square km. Honduras occupies a segment of Central America that reaches both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans and borders Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. Tropical rainforest covers most areas with temperate forest in higher elevations in the mountains. Mountainous terrain occupies most of the inland areas. Large areas along the Caribbean Sea are sparsely populated and consist of several national parks. Most people reside in valleys in the interior or along the northern coastline. Biodiversity is very high in rainforest areas. Urbanization and deforestation are great environmental concerns. Honduras is divided into 18 administrative departments.

Population: 8,143,564 (July 2011)

Annual Growth Rate: 1.888% (2011)

Fertility Rate: 3.09 children born per woman (2011)

Life Expectancy: 68.93 male, 72.37 female (2011)

Peoples

Mestizo: 90%

Amerindian: 7%

Black: 2%

White: 1%

Most Hondurans claim ancestry from Amerindians and Europeans and identify as Mestizo. Many blacks arrived from St. Vincent to escape slavery during the colonial period.

Languages: Spanish (97%), other (3%). Spanish is the official language (7.5 million speakers). 10 languages are spoken,

including eight Amerindian tongues, of which Garifuna (98,000) and Miskito (29,000) have the most speakers.

Literacy: 80% (2001)

History

The Mayan civilization had a strong presence in Honduras for nearly a thousand years following the birth of Christ. Christopher Columbus reached the Honduran coastline on his final voyage. Spanish colonialism began in the 16th century; many important ports were established along the Caribbean coastline. Independence was achieved in 1821. Military rule and border conflicts with El Salvador continued for most of the 1960s and 1970s. Militant groups from politically unstable El Salvador and Nicaragua sought refuge in mountainous areas along the borders in the 1980s. Hurricane Mitch caused widespread destruction in 1998 from flooding and landslides. In 2009, political instability worsened as a military coup overthrew President Manuel Zelaya. International condemnation of the incident has resulted with no countries recognizing the new government.

Culture

The Catholic Church heavily influences culture and daily life and claims 97% of the population. Many Catholic holidays are national holidays. Cuisine primarily includes tortillas, beans, rice, plantains, and meat. Hondurans are known for warmth and hospitality.

Economy

GDP per capita: \$4,200 (2010) [8.86% of US]

Human Development Index: 0.604

Corruption Index: 2.4

Honduras is the second poorest country in Central America with half the population living below the poverty line. Wealth is distributed very unequally. Half of the GDP comes from services and a third comes from industry. Bananas and coffee drive much of the economy as agriculture employs 39% of the workforce despite agriculture composing only 13% of the GDP. The economy is vulnerable to changes in world prices of bananas and coffee and natural disasters. The largest industries are sugar and coffee. The United States is the primary trade partner, with over half of import and exports in Honduras exchanged between the two countries. Neighboring Central American nations make up most of the remaining trade.

Corruption has been a major problem for the past several decades. Military leaders have not been transparent with money provided from other nations to fight corruption and defend against radical groups. Government began to better address the massive crime and drug issues in the early 2000s. The overthrow of President Zelaya resulted in the termination of anti-corruption assistance from the United States.[\[1\]](#)

Faiths

Christian: 100%

Christians

Denominations	Members	Congregations
---------------	---------	---------------

Catholic	7,500,000	
----------	-----------	--

Jehovah's Witnesses	19,009	302
---------------------	--------	-----

Seventh Day Adventists	227,660	321
------------------------	---------	-----

Latter-day Saints	131,098	222
-------------------	---------	-----

Religion

Centuries of Catholicism has resulted in most of the population nominally Catholic; as few as 20% of Catholics worship regularly. Some surveys report that the population is 47% Catholic and 36% evangelical Protestant. Protestant groups have grown rapidly in the past few decades.

Religious Freedom

Persecution Index:

The constitution protects religious freedom which is upheld by the government. Only the Catholic Church is recognized under law and religious groups are not required to register with the government. Missionaries may proselyte freely but are required to have residence visas.[\[2\]](#)

Largest Cities

Urban: 52%

San Pedro Sula, Tegucigalpa, La Ceiba, Choloma, El Progreso, Choluteca, Comayagua, Puerto Cortes, La Lima, Danli

All of the 10 largest cities have a congregation. All cities over 15,000 inhabitants have a congregation. 18% of the national population lives in the 10 largest cities.

LDS History

Elders Spencer W. Kimball and Marion G. Romney arrived in Honduras the early 1950s to evaluate prospects. The first missionaries arrived in December 1952. The Mexican Mission administered Central America prior to 1952 when the Central American Mission was created. Honduras remained part of the Central American Mission, later renamed the Costa Rica San Jose Mission in 1974, until the creation of the Honduras Tegucigalpa Mission in 1980. Seminary and Institute began in 1972. Honduras was dedicated for missionary work in June 1991.[\[3\]](#)

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: 142,258 (2010)

By 1977, Honduras had the highest membership out of the four countries in the Costa Rica San Jose Mission.[\[4\]](#) Membership increased to 6,300 by 1980.[\[5\]](#)

In the late 1980s, much of the rapid membership growth occurred in the north. In 1989, 3,200 were baptized in the northern portion of the Honduras Tegucigalpa Mission. Membership increased to 25,100 by early 1990. 14,600 members lived in the mission headquartered in Tegucigalpa.[\[6\]](#) Membership reached 65,000 in 1995.[\[7\]](#)

When the Honduras Comayaguela Mission was created in 1997, the Honduras Tegucigalpa Mission retained 16,500 members in six stakes, and the Honduras Comayaguela Mission included 16,300 members in five stakes.[\[8\]](#) By the end of 2000, membership totaled 100,270, increasing to 112,815 in 2004 and 131,098 in 2008.

Membership growth slowed during the first half of the 2000s to a low of 1.1% in 2003. Subsequent annual growth rates have averaged around three percent and have increased since 2007 to over four percent, the highest seen since before 2000. In 2010, one in 57 was LDS.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 138 Branches: 84

The first branch was created in Tegucigalpa in March 1953 and a branch was organized in San Pedro Sula in 1955. The San Pedro Sula Honduras District was created in 1961.[\[9\]](#)

By 1977, there was one district in San Pedro Sula and another district in Tegucigalpa.[\[10\]](#) Both the districts became stakes in 1977 and 1978 respectively. A third stake was created in Comayaguela in 1982. Rapid increase in the number of stakes began

occurred between 1986 and 1990 as six additional stakes were created in El Merendón, La Ceiba, La Lima, Valle de Sula, and Tegucigalpa. Three additional districts were created in the 1980s in Juticalpa, La Entrada, and Olanchito.

By 1990, there were nine stakes and seven districts. The Honduras San Pedro Sula Mission was created in 1990 and included Belize. North American missionaries were temporarily withdrawn in 1993.^[11] Over 400 missionaries were serving in the two missions by February 1997.^[12] The Honduras Comayaguela Mission was created later that year. Between 1994 and 1998, 11 new stakes were created in Comayaguela, Danli, Choluteca, Fesitranh, Tegucigalpa, Comayagua, Satélite, El Progreso, and Villa Nueva, and eight new districts were created in San Lorenzo, Guaymaca, Talanga, Santa Rosa de Copan, Catacamas, Santa Barbara, Tela, and Tocoa. By 2000, 20 stakes, 11 districts, 127 wards, and 92 branches operated. In 2004, there were 127 wards and 88 branches, increasing to 134 wards and 92 branches in 2008. In 2009, six branches were consolidated or closed.

In 2009, six districts were discontinued. Four of the districts only had two branches, and branches belonging to the former Santa Barbara and Tela Honduras Districts reported directly to the mission. Branches from the discontinued district in La Entrada joined the Santa Rosa de Copan Honduras District. The Olanchito Honduras District absorbed branches from the former district in Tocoa. Branches in discontinued districts in Guaymaca and Juticalpa joined districts in eastern Honduras. In 2010, a new district was organized in Monjaras and in early 2011, a new district was organized in Valle Verde. In 2011, the Tegucigalpa Loarque Stake was organized; the first new stake to be created since 1998.

Mission branches operate near the Pacific coast in Los Llanitos, El Triunfo, Marcovia, and Pespire; in the west in Santa Barbara, Galeras, Marcala, Intibuca, and Jesus de Otoro; in the north in Tela and Telamar; and on the islands in Utila and Roatan.

Activity and Retention

The average number of members per congregation increased from 457 in 2000 to 650 in 2010. Congregations increased by seven between 2000 and 2008 but membership increased by 30,000. When President Hinckley visited in early 1997, 8,100 Hondurans attended in San Pedro Sula and 15,000 attended in Tegucigalpa. The largest stake in the country, the Tegucigalpa Honduras Tocontin Stake, had 1,300 to 1,400 active members in 12 congregations in 2009. The average number of active members per congregation is likely around 100, indicating that active membership is likely between 22,000 and 25,000 or 15% to 20% of total membership. During the 2009-2010 school year, 7,388 were enrolled in institute or seminary, or one in 19 Honduran members.

Language Materials

Languages with LDS Scripture: Spanish

All LDS scriptures, an LDS edition of the Bible, and a wide range of materials are available in Spanish. No materials are translated into Honduran Amerindian languages.

Meetinghouses

Most congregations meet in Church built meetinghouses. Smaller branches meet in rented spaces or remodeled buildings.

Health and Safety

Honduras has one of the highest homicide rates in the world. Safety concerns have resulted in non-native missionaries withdrawn in the past and have threatened their nationwide evacuation recently. HIV/AIDS infects 0.7% of the population and presents no greater threat than other Latin American nations.

Humanitarian and Development Work

The Church has provided micro-loans to increase local economic development.^[13]

Opportunities, Challenges and Prospects

Religious Freedom

There are no legal or cultural restrictions which limit proselytism.

Cultural Issues

The lack of activity among Catholics has carried over into the LDS Church. Activity rates between Catholics and Latter-Day Saints are similar, although Latter-day Saints who do participate are typically more involved.

National Outreach

Approximately half the population resides in cities or towns with an LDS congregation. The greatest outreach occurs in the largest cities and towns and their peripheries. Very few communities do not have a nearby congregation. Cities with the most inhabitants without a congregation include Yoro, Gracias, Puerto Lempira, and Yuscarán, all of which have less than 15,000 inhabitants. Of the 18 departments, 16 have at least one congregation. There are no congregations in the Gracias a Dios (67,000) or Lempira (250,000) Departments, indicating that at least four percent of the national population is unreached. Ocotepeque (108,000) is the only department with one congregation. These departments are remote and have limited accessibility. Honduras is well-reached by fulltime missionaries with three missions serving a country of eight million.

Outreach is most limited among the rural populations. The departments of Francisco Morazan (includes Tegucigalpa and eight stakes and one district) and Cortes (includes San Pedro Sula and seven stakes) each have about 1.2 million people, averaging one stake per 150,000 people. Each stake has an average around eight congregations, indicating each congregation averages around 19,000 people within its boundaries.

During the decade of the 2000s, little net congregational growth occurred, with congregations being consolidated at nearly the same rate that new congregations were organized. Few congregations have been organized in new cities over the past decade; almost all new cities entered have been on the outskirts of San Pedro Sula or Tegucigalpa.

The greatest growth and outreach will likely continue in urban centers and in the more populated rural departments, such as Yoro and Olancho. Only one large stake in Tegucigalpa appeared close to splitting in 2009, yet many stakes have a large number of branches preparing to become wards. The consolidation of six districts in late 2009 may indicate preparation for future stakes in rural areas such as Olanchito, Santa Rosa de Copan, and San Lorenzo. A district may be organized for remote branches in La Esperanza and some of the recently discontinued districts may be reorganized if greater activity or membership growth occurs. Some members likely reside in unreached departments and could provide potential strength for future outreach.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Poor member activity and convert retention likely contributed to the announcement of the first temple in the country despite Honduras having had over 100,000 members for six years. Very rarely have countries had over 100,000 members and no operating or announced temple

Much of the high inactivity began during the 1990s when membership grew from 29,000 to 96,000 in ten years. Although the receptivity of Hondurans was quickly addressed with the creation of two additional missions to provide better teaching, outreach, and leadership development, inactivity problems persisted and worsened in the 2000s. The latest increase in membership growth has failed to show indication that retention has improved as there has been no increase in congregations between 2007 and 2009. Poor member activity continues to limit the Church's congregational growth and outreach in rural areas.

Low member activity and convert retention problems are serious concerns which have not improved over the past decade. The lack of any increase in stakes and districts since 1998 also points to low activity and poor retention. It appears that the number of members lost to activity is similar to the number who joined the Church and retained, with little "real growth" occurring even as membership rolls continue to expand. The decision to discontinue six districts in late 2009 was influenced by poor member activity.

Severe member activity and convert retention problems in Honduras mirror those in neighboring nations. The Honduran average of 580 members per congregation in 2008 closely parallels those in Nicaragua (688), El Salvador (634), and Guatemala (515).

Very low retention and member activity rates in Honduras, as in other Latin American nations, reflect decades of proselytism focused primarily on achieving high baptismal numbers through rapid baptisms rather than on fostering life-changing conversion and habits of discipleship. Although awareness of retention problems has increased, standards for baptism in most areas remain low or are inconsistently enforced, and an increased focus on reclaiming inactives has borne little fruit. Progress in improving retention and reactivation efforts appears to have occurred in the late 2000s as indicated by enrollment in seminary and institute increasing from 5,905 to 7,388 during a two-year period.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

The relative homogeneity of Honduras' population has created few problems of integration. Amerindian groups and immigrants have had difficulty integrating into the Church as they speak different languages and make up less than 10% of the population.

Language Issues

The wide use of the Spanish language has facilitated church growth and outreach. The small population of Amerindians has received limited attention due to their limited numbers. The greatest potential for outreach may be among the Garifuna. Missionaries already meet with the Garifuna, but it does not appear that many have joined the Church. The Church has no congregation in the Gracias a Dios Department, where most Miskito speakers live.

Missionary Service

The Central America Area reported in 2009 that it had become self-sufficient in sending missionaries, indicating strength among core members. The number of Honduran members serving missionaries appears to have increased in recent years and contributed to sustainable numbers of Central American Latter-day Saint missionary manpower. Increasing seminary and institute attendance in the late 2000s may indicate greater missionary preparation for prospective full-time missionaries. North American members regularly serve in Honduras and likely comprise around one-third of the missionary force.

Leadership

The rapid growth in the 1990s occurred with a large number of adult men capable of leading congregations. A quarter of convert baptisms in the Honduras Tegucigalpa Mission were adult males in the early 1990s.^[14] Honduras has the second highest number of stakes in Central America after Guatemala and has not had a stake discontinued. Roberto Ocampo R. from San Pedro Sula was called as a regional representative in 1994.^[15] Area Authority Seventies have been called, including Salomon Jaar from Tegucigalpa in 1996,^[16] Armando A. Sierra from Tegucigalpa in 2001,^[17] Luis G. Duarte from Comayagua in 2005,^[18] Rafael E. Castro from La Ceiba in 2007,^[19] and German Laboriel from Tegucigalpa in 2009.^[20] Hondurans have also served as mission presidents in their native country.

Temple

Honduras belongs to the Guatemala City Guatemala Temple District.^[21] Members travel by bus for 12 hours from most areas in Honduras to Guatemala City. Honduras was the country with the most members without a temple announced between 1995 and 2006.

The Tegucigalpa Honduras Temple was announced in June 2006. Construction began exactly one year following the announcement but was halted the following fall due to opposition from officials and citizens who feared that the temple would overshadow the neighboring Catholic Our Lady of Suyapa Basilica. Construction remained on hold for over two years and resulted in the Church abandoning its decision to build on the previously designated site to maintain positive community relations. The Church allocated a new site and broke ground in September. Although the official groundbreaking occurred in September 2009 no construction had begun as of the end of 2009.

A second temple in San Pedro Sula appears highly likely as the bulk of membership resides either in San Pedro Sula or Tegucigalpa. Before the second groundbreaking for the Tegucigalpa Honduras Temple there was some speculation that the temple would be relocated to San Pedro Sula. An additional temple will only be announced once the temple in Tegucigalpa is functioning at capacity.

Comparative Growth

No other nation in Central America has the Church converted as large as a percentage of the population as Honduras, although the significance of this figure is unclear when less than one-fifth of nominal members remain active. The majority of this numerical membership growth occurred between 1989 and 1999. Other Central American countries experienced rapid growth during the 1990s, but saw greater growth prior to 1990. El Salvador originally had more members than Honduras before the early 1990s, and today has 30,000 fewer members. Guatemala saw its most rapid growth in the 1980s when membership grew from 18,000 to 99,000. Other Central American nations have greater outreach to the national population than Honduras, such as El Salvador.

Other Christian churches also experience rapid numerical growth, but struggle with member activity. Seventh Day Adventists typically have much lower ratios of members to congregations than Latter-Day Saints, but had a higher ratio in Honduras with 709 members per congregation in 2008. There were 17,549 Jehovah's Witnesses in 258 congregations (68 members per congregation). Jehovah's Witnesses have experienced significantly higher activity and retention rates due to lengthy pre-baptismal preparation demonstrating that poor convert retention is not inevitable.

Future Prospects

After decades of dependence on North American missionaries, the prospects for the Central America Area becoming self-sustaining with local missionaries are highly encouraging. Local leaders continue to mature and have assumed responsibility for administering almost all congregations, stakes, and districts. Nonetheless, the proliferation of paper membership numbers without meaningful increase in stakes or congregations over the past decade points to severe problems of member activity and convert retention, and outreach to inactives has born little fruit. Future prospects for increasing active membership and achieving commensurate growth of congregations will likely depend on the vision and discipline to implement and enforce scriptural standards of preparation and worthiness prior to baptism.

[1] "Background Note: Honduras," Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, November 2009.
<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/1922.htm>

[2] "Honduras," International Religious Freedom Report 2009, 26 October 2009.
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127395.htm>

[3] "Land of Honduras is dedicated," LDS Church News, 15 June 1991.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/20814/Land-of-Honduras-is-dedicated.html>

[4] "Central America: Saints in Six Nations Grow in the Gospel," Ensign, Feb 1977, 25

[5] "Land of Honduras is dedicated," LDS Church News, 15 June 1991.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/20814/Land-of-Honduras-is-dedicated.html>

[6] "Growth leads to four new missions," LDS Church News, 3 February 1990.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/19827/Growth-leads-to-four-new-missions.html>

[7] Deseret News 2003 Church Almanac p.347 "Honduras"

[8] "Church to create eight new missions," LDS Church News, 1 March 1997.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/29769/Church-to-create-eight-new-missions.html>

[9] Deseret News 2003 Church Almanac p.347 "Honduras"

[10] "Central America: Saints in Six Nations Grow in the Gospel," Ensign, Feb 1977, 25

[11] Brewerton, Ted E. "A Conversation about the Church in Central America," Liahona, Jun 1993, 21

[12] "An outpouring of love for Prophet: Pres. Hinckley addresses 88,000 in Central America," LDS Church News, 1 February 1997.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/29180/An-outpouring-of-love-for-Prophet--Pres-Hinckley-addresses-88000-in-Central-America.html>

[13] Avant, Gerry. "Lifting families from poverty," LDS Church News, 17 November 1990.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/19710/Lifting-families-from-poverty.html>

[14] "Church to create eight new missions," LDS Church News, 1 March 1997.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/29769/Church-to-create-eight-new-missions.html>

[15] "New regional representatives," LDS Church News, 23 July 1994.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/24462/New-regional-representatives.html>

[16] "First Presidency calls new area authorities," LDS Church News, 24 August 1996.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/28224/First-Presidency-calls-new-area-authorities.html>

[17] "New area authority seventies," LDS Church News, 14 April 2001.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/39723/New-Area-Authority-Seventies.html>

[18] "New area seventies," LDS Church News, 16 April 2005.

<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/47170/New-area-seventies.html>

[19] "New area seventies called," LDS Church News, 21 April 2007.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/50490/New-Area-Seventies-called.html>

[20] "New area seventies," LDS Church News, 11 April 2009.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/57123/New-Area-Seventies.html>

[21] Betancourth, Ramon. "Ground broken in Honduras," LDS Church News, 23 June 2007.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/50735/Ground-broken-in-Honduras.html>