

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.



Guam

Population: 0.16 millions (#193 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 544 square km. The most southern and largest island of the Mariana Islands, Guam is a small island located in the North Pacific Ocean between Hawaii and the Philippines. The volcanic island is surrounded by coral reefs and experiences marine tropical climate with little fluctuation in temperature. A rainy season occurs from July to December and a dry season lasts from January to June. There are some mountains in the south, but most the terrain consists of a limestone plateau circumscribed by costal cliffs. Storms and typhoons are natural hazards. Fresh water scarcity, sewage treatment, and invasive species are environmental concerns. There are no administrative divisions.

Peoples

Chamorro: 37.3%

Filipino: 26.3%

White: 7.1%

Chuukese: 7.0%

Korean: 2.2%

Chinese: 1.6%

Palauan: 1.6%

Japanese: 1.5%

Pohnpeian: 1.4%

Other Pacific islander: 2.0%

Other Asian: 2.0%

Other: 0.6%

Mixed: 9.4%

Chamorro are a Micronesian ethnic group and the original settlers of Guam. Other ethnic groups arrived following Spanish colonization of the island.

Population: 167,772 (July 2018)

Annual Growth Rate: 0.23% (2018)

Fertility Rate: 2.92 children born per woman (2018)

Life Expectancy: 73.9 male, 78.9 female (2018)

Languages: English (43.6%), Philippine languages (21.2%), Chamorro (17.8%), other Pacific island languages (10.0%), Asian languages (6.3%), other languages (1.1%). English, Chamorro, and Philippine languages are most commonly spoken.

Literacy: 96% (2015)

History

Guam's first known inhabitants arrived around 2,000 BC. In the sixteenth century, Europeans first reached the island, which was claimed by Spain. For the following three centuries, Guam served as an important island trade post and resting point for Spanish ships traveling from Central America to the Philippines. The United States annexed Guam from Spain in 1898 during the Spanish-American War. Japan overtook the island from 1941 to 1944, and as many as 20,000 died due to the conflict and atrocities committed by the Japanese Imperial Army and Navy. Guam has been an unincorporated organized territory of the United States since 1950.[1] The United States maintains one of its most important strategic military bases in the Pacific on Guam.

Culture

Dance, seafaring, games, songs, and fishing are major aspects of traditional Chamorro society that continue to influence contemporary culture. Immigrant peoples from Europe, Asia, the United States, and other Pacific Islands have infused many of their traditions and customs into the culture, particularly from Spain during the over three hundred years of Spanish rule. As a result, most are Roman Catholic. Spanish has influenced some linguistic features of Chamorro. Cuisine consists of seafood and many dishes common to the Philippines, Oceania, and East Asia. The United States continues to expand its military installations on the island. There has been some past conflict and tension between the various ethnic groups, namely Chamorro, Filipinos, and Micronesians. Some aspects of indigenous Chamorro religious beliefs continue to be practiced and infused with Christianity. Like much of Micronesia and Southeast Asia, locals chew the red areca nut (betel) frequently, which is a known carcinogen, stains the teeth, and is addictive.[2]

Economy

GDP per capita: $35,600 (2016) [60.4% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: N/A (0.924 for U.S. [2017])

Corruption Index: N/A (71 for U.S. [2018])

The economy relies almost entirely upon U.S. military spending and tourism sectors. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of the workforce is employed in services, 21.6% in industry, and less than one percent in agriculture. Primary industries consist of national defense, tourism, construction, shipping, printing, food processing, and textiles. Agricultural products include fruit, copra, vegetables, meat, and eggs. Primary trade partners include Singapore, Japan, Palau, and Hong Kong.

Faiths

Christian: 94.2%

Other: 5.8%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Catholic – 140,000

Latter-day Saints – 2,572 – 4

Seventh Day Adventists – 1,355 – 9

Jehovah's Witnesses – 745 – 10

Religion

Eighty-three percent (83%) of the population is Catholic. Other Christian denominations constitute approximately 10% of the population. There are small communities of Buddhists and followers of Chinese religions among Asian immigrant peoples.

Religious Freedom

The United States constitution protects religious freedom and is upheld by national and local laws. There have been no reported instances of societal abuse of religious freedom.

Largest Cities

Urban: 94.8% (2018)

Dededo, **Tamuning**, Yigo, Barrigada, **Agat, Ordot, Mongmong, Chalan Pago, Talofofo, Yona.**

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

Three of the ten largest settlements have a Church congregation. Forty-seven percent (47%) of the population resides the ten largest settlements.

Church History

The first Latter-day Saints known to live on Guam were members in the U.S. military fighting in World War II. In 1944, there were multiple congregations with between 50 and 300 servicemen who operated under the Far East Mission. In 1953, meetinghouse facilities were dedicated and Guam became a dependent branch in the Oahu Hawaii Stake, later renamed the Honolulu Hawaii Stake. Institute began in 1970, and seminary began in 1980. Latter-day Saints have held an annual relay race since 1974.[3] In 1977, the first Chamorro converts joined the Church. The first Chamorro member to serve a mission began his service in 1979. The Church created the Micronesia Guam Mission in 1980 from the Hawaii Honolulu and Fiji Suva Missions.[4] In 1988, the Church teamed up with other Christian groups in the support of legislation banning the use of poker machines in Guam.[5] Church President Gordon B. Hinckley visited Guam in 2000.[6] The Church organized its first stake in Guam in December 2010. Elder Quetin L. Cook visited members in Guam in 2016.[7] Elder Jeffrey R. Holland visited members in Guam in 2017.[8] In 2018, a temple was announced for Yigo, Guam.

Membership Growth

Church Membership: 2,572 (2018)

Church membership increased from 100 in 1940 to 271 in 1950, 300 in 1960, 469 in 1970, 826 in 1983, and 2,200 in 1989. There were 1,400 members in 1995.[9] In 2000, membership reached 1,574. Membership grew slowly for most of the 2000s, as

there were 1,653 members in 2002, 1,669 in 2005, 1,690 in 2007and 1,971 in 2009. Several years experienced a decline in the number of Latter-day Saints such as 2001, 2004, and 2006. Annual membership growth rates have varied from –7.3% to 9.2%. Steady membership growth occurred for most years in the 2010s as church membership totaled 2,294 in 2012, 2,431 in 2016, and 2,572 in 2018. In the past several decades, Church membership has become increasingly more Chamorro and nonwhite due to converts from these groups joining the church and the relocation of many American military members off the island.

In 2018, one in sixty-five, or 1.53% of the population, was nominally a member on Church records.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 4 Branches: 0 Groups: 1? (2018)

In 1970, the Guam Branch became a ward. A second congregation was created in 1976. A third congregation, the Agat Branch, was created in 1978. In 1980, the Church created the Guam District with four branches.[10] The district has included the Northern Mariana Islands since the creation of the Micronesia Guam Mission. In 2000, there were four branches in Guam. In 2006, the Church discontinued one of the branches, resulting in the number of branches declining to three. In 2009, a fourth branch was created named the Dededo Branch. In 2010, the first stake was organized and all four branches became wards. A member group was organized in Merizo sometime in the mid-2010s although it was unclear whether the group continued to meet as of 2019.

Activity and Retention

The average number of members per congregation has increased from 394 in 2000 to 493 in 2009 and 643 in 2018. During the 2007–2008 school year, 121 were enrolled in seminary or institute. In 2010, each of the four branches appeared to have over one hundred active members. When the first stake was organized in December 2010, there were almost 800 local members who attended the special conference.[11] In the early 2010s, the Yigo Ward had 90-140 active members, whereas the Talisay Ward had 100 active members. In the mid-2010s, the Barrigada Ward had 200 active members, the Dededo Ward had 80 active members, and the Yigo Ward had 150 active members. In the late 2010s, the Barrigada Ward had 200 active members, the Dededo Ward had 110 active members, and the Talisay Ward had 105 active members.

Active membership for Guam is estimated at no greater than 600, or 23% of total church membership.

Language Materials

Languages with Latter-day Saint Scripture: Chamorro, Tagalog, Cebuano, Ilokano, Hiligaynon, Bikolano, Waray-Waray, Pampango, Pangsinan, Chinese.

Select passages of the Book of Mormon were translated into Chamorro in 1989.[12] The translation of the entire Book of Mormon into Chamorro appeared set for publication in mid-2019 as of May 2019. The Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith is translated into Chamorro. All Church scriptures are translated into Tagalog, Cebuano, Ilokano, Pangasinan, and Chinese. Translations of the Book of Mormon are available in Hiligaynon, Bikolano, Waray-Waray, and Pampango. The 2009 revised Gospel Principles book is translated in Tagalog, Cebuano, and Chinese (simplified and traditional characters), whereas the original version is available in Bikolano, Hiligaynon, Ilokano, Pampango, Pangasinan, and Waray-Waray. The missionary instruction manual Preach My Gospel is translated in Cebuano, Tagalog, and Chinese (traditional characters, Mandarin Romanized, and Cantonese Romanized). The Restoration DVD is available in Cebuano and Tagalog. The Liahona magazine has twelve Cebuano, Chinese, and Tagalog issues a year. Many Pacific Islander languages spoken on Guam have Church materials available.

Meetinghouses

In 2010, there were three meetinghouses on Guam, all of which appear to have been built by the Church. In 2019, the Yigo Ward meetinghouse was demolished in order to prepare the site for the construction of the Yigo Guam Temple. In May 2019, there were two meetinghouses on Guam.

Humanitarian and Development Work

The Church has conducted eighteen humanitarian and development projects in Guam since 1985.[13] In 1991, Latter-day Saint military personnel provided assistance to over 18,000 evacuated servicemen from the Philippines following the eruption of Mount Pinatubo.[14] Latter-day Saints have helped cleanup efforts following natural disasters. The Church's Emergency Preparedness Program provided assistance to many members in 1991 when nine typhoons hit the island in one year.[15] In 1993, missionaries provided service to victims of an 8.2 earthquake.[16] In 2003, the Church donated $10,000 to a Guam center providing mitigation kits to typhoon victims.[17] That same year, fifty wheelchairs were donated to the disabled.[18]

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

There are no restrictions on religious freedom. Latter-day Saints proselyte, worship, and assemble freely.

Cultural Issues

Latter-day Saint mission efforts benefit from a predominantly Catholic population that is tolerant of other Christian traditions. Worldwide Church proselytizing materials are tailored toward the needs and religious background of Christian nations or territories like Guam. The high degree of cultural diversity exhibited by the small population creates cultural challenges attracting and retaining converts from all major ethnic groups found on the island. Returned missionaries note concerns with many who do not recognize the importance or need of one “true church” as there is a belief that all church are “good.” Church leadership in the region has openly opposed the consumption of areca nut, which is frequently chewed as a social pastime.

National Outreach

Guam’s small geographic size has resulted in the creation of a stake despite few members and requires few established mission outreach centers to reach the majority of the population. However, there are only two meetinghouses that operate on the island. Distance to the nearest meetinghouse and transportation problems are common reasons for many who struggle to attend church more regularly. Additional congregations in many areas are needed and may help increase member activity and convert retention rates. The most populous urban areas without their own mission outreach centers or congregations provide opportunities for expanding national outreach and include Mangilao, Sinajana, South Acres, Talofofo, and Yona. Latter-day Saints live in most of these locations and can staff leadership positions in the event additional congregations are created once currently operating congregations grow large enough in active membership to divide.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Guam experiences low rates of member activity, possibly due to challenges meeting the high ethnic and cultural diversity of new converts and local traditions of nominalism and syncretism. Mission, district, and branch presidencies worked for many years to increase active membership and the strength of local membership to meet the requirements for a stake to be created. Continued low member activity rates and mediocre convert retention prevent the creation of additional congregations. Reactivation efforts headed by local members suited to the needs of inactive members and a mission emphasis on developing habits of regular church attendance before baptism may help increase member activity rates over time. Transportation poses a barrier for some to attend church. The overreliance on foreign missionaries to fill administrative positions may have reduced convert retention rates over the past few decades. The creation of the first stake in 2010 points toward some improvement in member activity and convert retention in recent years although as of May 2019 no additional wards or branches had been created on Guam since the stake was organized.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

The visible United States military presence has brought many American members to Guam, which has created some cultural challenges integrating with Chamorro, Filipinos, and other ethnic groups. Attracting nonwhites to a church perceived as predominately white or limited to certain ethnicities is one of the greatest ethnic integration issues. Today, there appear to be few conflicts at church as Church demographics have become more representative of the island’s ethnic composition. Filipinos constitute a large ethnic group in need of greater mission outreach focus. The creation of a military ward or branch may help reduce ethnic integration and linguistic challenges.

Language Issues

Nearly the entire population has translations of materials in their native language, but English and Chamorro materials are most frequently used by missionaries. Widespread use of English has facilitated interethnic communication, reducing the need for language-specific congregations. The creation of Chamorro-speaking or Tagalog-speaking congregations may increase member activity rates and accomplish greater breakthroughs with these ethnic groups. Greater numbers of active members are likely needed for such congregations to be organized.

Missionary Service

Local members serve full-time missions regularly, but are insufficient in numbers to staff the full-time missionary force assigned

to Guam.

Leadership

Local church leadership on Guam has faced challenges transitioning from primarily American military-staffed church administration to Chamorro and non-Americans filling most local leadership positions. The lack of additional congregations on Guam is attributed in part to inadequate numbers of active priesthood holders capable of serving in a branch presidency or other administrative callings. The creation of the first stake in late 2010 indicates that local membership is maturing in faith and numbers as a stake requires at least 120 active, full-tithe paying Melchizedek Priesthood holders. However, many households have no Melchizedek Priesthood holder. Generating additional leadership remains a challenge as the creation of the Barrigada Guam Stake depended on the inclusion of the congregation in Saipan, which in 2010 was one of the strongest branches in the Micronesia Guam Mission with 150–200 active members. There has also been some reliance on Church employees to meet leadership needs for members. When the stake was first organized, one of the members of the stake presidency was a Church employee.[19] In 2017, the reorganized Barrigada Guam Stake presidency included one Church employee who was the seminaries and institutes coordinator.[20]

Temple

The Church announced a temple for Yigo, Guam in October 2018 and broke ground for the new temple in May 2019. Until the dedication of the temple, Guam is assigned to the Cebu City Philippines Temple district. Temple trips occur regularly but are time consuming due to the island's remote location.

Comparative Growth

Latter-day Saints have one of the smallest church presences among Micronesian nations or territories in Guam. The neighboring Federated States of Micronesia has more than twice as many members, more than five times as many congregations, and four times the percentage of Latter-day Saints in the population. The Church in the Marshall Islands constitutes 13% of the national population despite the first missionaries arriving two decades later than Guam. The Church in Kiribati boasts two stakes and two districts, and today Latter-day Saints are among the largest Christian denominations in the nation. Church-reported membership in Kiribati constitutes nearly 19% of the national population. Suggesting slow membership growth over the past two decades and the small percentage of Latter-day Saints in the general population is due to the small size of the general population is unsupported, as nations with smaller populations in Micronesia (Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, and Federated States of Micronesia) have experienced steady membership growth and marked church growth over the past quarter century, exceeding that which has occurred on Guam. The headquarters of the Micronesia Guam Mission on Guam, which serves several surrounding island nations, and the longstanding presence of American Latter-day Saints serving with the U.S. military on Guam, has not led to improvement in church growth compared to neighboring Pacific nations without such apparently favorable factors. Receptivity to the Church appears lower than in other nations and territories in the region, perhaps due to the impact of secularism, nominalism, the large number of non-Micronesian ethnic groups, and strong foreign influence on culture. Member activity rates and membership growth rates are lower than in most Pacific nations. In 2010, Guam became the nation with the second fewest Latter-day Saints to have a stake after Bahrain.

Many Christian groups headquarter their missionary activity for Micronesia in Guam like Latter-day Saints. Most of these groups have gained few converts in recent years. Several denominations have similarly-sized nominal church memberships to the Church on Guam but have higher member activity and convert retention rates and operate more congregations. Foreign Christian missionaries from many churches frequently visit and serve on Guam.

Future Prospects

The creation of the first stake in late 2010, increases in nominal and active membership in the 2000s and 2010s, and the announcement of a temple in 2018 indicate the Church has experienced some recent progress on Guam. As a result of the current expansion of United States military installations, white Latter-day Saint military personnel may come to the islands in larger numbers. The self-sufficiency of local members in church administration matters has taken years to achieve. The creation of additional congregations will most clearly indicate improved member activity and convert retention rates, and may help alleviate potential ethnic integration challenges. However, there appears a need to open additional meetinghouses that service more congregations in communities closer to members and populations targeted by proselytism efforts.

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