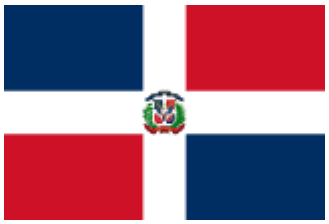


Reaching the Nations International Church Growth Almanac

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.



Dominican Republic

Population: 10.35 millions (#87 out of countries)

By David Stewart and Matt Martinich

Geography

Area: 48,670 square km. Located in the Caribbean, the Dominican Republic occupies the eastern two-thirds of Hispaniola and borders Haiti. Rough mountains and valleys traverse most of the landscape. The tropical climate stays the consistent temperature year-round, but higher rainfall occurs in mountainous regions and during wet seasons (generally May through November). Hurricanes and flooding are the greatest natural hazards. Water shortages, soil erosion and deforestation are environmental issues. The Dominican Republic is divided into 31 administrative provinces and one district.

Population: 9,650,054 (July 2009)

Annual Growth Rate: 1.489% (2009)

Fertility Rate: 2.76 children born per woman (2009)

Life Expectancy: male 71.88, female 75.6 (2009)

Peoples

Mixed: 73%

White: 16%

Black: 11%

Most Dominicans have mixed heritage from European, Africa and native Taino Amerindian sources. Whites mainly consist of Europeans who settled the island centuries before and have not mixed with local populations. Many blacks are Haitians.

Languages: Spanish (98.4%), Haitian Creole (1.6%). Spanish is the official language and the only language with more than one million speakers (9.5 million).

Literacy: 87% (2002)

History

Taino Amerindians settled the island prior to the exploration of the island by Christopher Columbus in 1492. Hispaniola played an important role in Spanish expansion in the Caribbean and Americas. In 1697, Spain recognized French control of the western third of the island, which became independent in 1804 as Haiti. The Spanish colony was named Santo Domingo and failed to become independent from Spain. Haiti controlled the territory for 22 years. The Dominican Republic became independent in 1844, but thend temporarily returned to Spanish rule during the 1860s. Dictators marked Dominican history for the following century, notably Rafael Leonidas Trujillo. The United States intervened in the 1960s when the military overthrew President Bosch. In 1966, Joaquin Balaguer won an election and stayed in power for the following 30 years. A return to democratic rule occurred in 1996.

Culture

Dominican culture draws upon Spanish, Caribbean, and native influences. Culture differs by socio-economic class. Many Dominicans drink heavily. Tobacco consumption is similar to other Latin American countries and lower than United States and Europe. The Catholic Church has influenced local culture and customs. Baseball is the most popular sport. Dominicans take pride in their own form of music, merengue.

Economy

GDP per capita: $8,200 (2009) [17.7% of US]

Human Development Index: 0.777

Corruption Index: 3.0

The economy has been heavily dependent on agriculture, but recently services have grown increasingly important. Services account for 68% of the GDP and employ 63% of the workforce. Agriculture produces 11% of the GDP and employs 15% of the population. Tourism is the primary industry followed by sugar processing and mining. Primary agricultural products include sugarcane, coffee and cotton. There is high inequality of wealth. The employment rate sits at 15%. 42% of the population lives below the poverty line. Most exports and 39% of imports are trafficked with the United States. Other prominent import and export partners include Venezuela, Mexico, and Haiti.

Faiths

Christian: 89%

Other: 11%

Christians

Denominations Members Congregations

Catholic 9,170,000

Seventh Day Adventists 260,805 618

Latter-Day Saints 110,036 197

Jehovah's Witnesses 29,158 382

Religion

Most Dominicans are Christian. Catholics form the majority. Surveys indicate that practicing Catholics make up 40% of the population whereas 29% of Dominicans are non-practicing Catholics. 18% of the population consists of Evangelical

Protestants. Nearly 11% of Dominicans do not adhere to any religion.

Religious Freedom

Persecution Index:

The constitution protects religious freedom which is upheld by the government. The Catholic Church receives preferential treatment despite the constitution declaring that there is no state religion. Government provides financial support for Catholic institutions. Christian groups may operate freely in the Dominican Republic and must register with the government.[1]

Largest Cities

Urban: 69%

Santo Domingo, Santiago, La Romana, San Pedro de Macoris, Puerto Plata, San Francisco de Macoris, La Vega, San Cristobal, Bonao, Bajos de Haina.

All 10 of the largest cities have a congregation. 39% of the national population lives in the 10 largest cities.

LDS History

The first Dominicans joined the Church in the United States and returned to the Dominican Republic in 1978. In August 1978, the first converts were baptized in the country. The first branch was organized in Santo Domingo in September 1978 and in December, Elder M. Russell Ballard dedicated the country for missionary work.[2] Missionaries arrived in 1979. In 1979, 350 converts joined the Church. Seminary and institute began in the early 1980s. In 2006, Santo Domingo became the headquaters of the newly organized Caribbean Area.

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: 118,557 (2010)

Membership rapidly increased to 2,500 in 1981 and to 5,000 in mid-1983.[3] Five years later, membership reached 11,000. In 1990 there were 31,000 members.[4] Membership surpassed 50,000 in 1996.[5] By the end of 2000, membership grew to 73,280. Membership growth continued but at a slower pace in the 2000s. Membership reached 88,123 in 2003, 102,144 in 2006, and 115,000 by late 2009.

Membership growth rates slowed dramatically in the 2000s. In 2001 and 2002 membership grew between seven and eight percent annually, dropping to five to six percent in 2004 and 2005 and averaging between 3.5% and 4.5% from the end of 2006 to the end of 2008. Membership grew around 5,000 or 6,000 annually in the early 2000s and in the late 2000s usually grew by around 4,000 a year. 4,253 were enrolled in seminary and institute in 2008, or about 4% of total membership, comparable to most Latin American countries. The Dominican Republic has the highest percentage of LDS members in the Caribbean. In 2009, one in 88 Dominican was LDS.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 117 Branches: 80

In 1981, the Dominican Republic Santo Domingo Mission was created from the Puerto Rico San Juan Mission. Five years after the first branch was created, there were 23 branches and two districts.[6] The first stake was created in Santo Domingo in 1986. The Church created a second mission headquartered in Santiago in 1987. Two additional stakes were organized in the city in 1988 and 1989. By 1990 there were over 70 congregations, three stakes, and six districts.[7]

The first stake outside of Santo Domingo was created in Santiago in 1991. That same year the fifth stake was created in San Francisco de Macoris. The Dominican Republic Santo Domingo Mission was divided to create a second mission for the city. In 1992, two more stakes were created in Santo Domingo bringing the number of stakes to five and nationwide to seven. A second stake in Santiago was created in 1995 and a sixth stake in Santo Domingo in 1996. In 1996, there were eight stakes and nine districts.[8] Over 600 full-time missionaries attended the groundbreaking of the Santo Domingo Dominican Republic Temple.[9]

The Church organized two additional stakes in San Cristóbal and La Vega in 1997 and 1998 respectively. By the end of 2000,

there were 168 congregations, 61 of which were wards, and 11 stakes and 11 districts. By the early 2000s districts functioned in Azua, San Pedro, Navarrete, Barahona, San Juan, Bani, Dajabon, Santo Domingo Los Alcarrizos, La Romana, Puerto Plata, Mao, and Cotui. In the early to mid-2000s, the district in Mao was combined with the district in Navarette and the Cotui Dominican Republic District combined with the stake based in La Vega. A seventh stake was created in Santo Domingo in 2003 followed by districts maturing into stakes in Puerto Plata, Los Alcarrizos, and La Romana in 2005. A third stake was created in Santiago and Santo Domingo became the area headquarters of the newly created Caribbean Area in 2006. In 2008, three additional stakes were created in Santo Domingo on the northern and eastern portions of the city.

A district was created from mission branches in the Monte Plata area in 2007. In late 2009, the La Vega Dominican Republic Stake was discontinued. The former stake was divided into three districts in La Vega, Bonao, and Cotui. This was one of the few instances in which a stake was discontinued and divided into more than two districts. By the end of 2009, the number stakes increased to 18, whereas and the number of districts remained unchanged from 2000.

During the 2000s the number of wards nearly doubled and the number of branches declined by 22. The number of congregations reached 183 in 2003, 188 in 2006, and 197 in 2008. By early 2010 there were 201 congregations, including 115 wards.

Activity and Retention

Low member activity and poor convert retention have been poor for several decades and worsened in the 2000s. The average number of members per congregation increased from 436 in 2000 to 559 in 2008. Although some of this increase can be attributed to the large number of branches which grew into wards, this trend indicates worsening convert retention or long-term members increasing in inactivity. Some large meetings have seen few in attendance compared to total membership. 4,000 from the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Puerto Rico attended the groundbreaking of the temple in 1996.[10] Some congregations report as many as 150 to 200 attending meetings weekly. Other congregations have as few as 50 attending sacrament meeting. Activity rates differ drastically between men and women as men have higher inactivity rates and in many districts delay the creation of stakes. Active membership likely ranges between 20,000 and 25,000 or 18%-22%.

Language Materials

Languages with LDS Scripture: Spanish, Haitian Creole

All LDS scriptures are available in Spanish and Haitian Creole. Nearly all Church materials are translated into Spanish. The Church published an LDS translation of the Bible in Spanish in 2009. General Conference has had Haitian Creole translations since at least the early 1990s[11]. Most Church materials are translated into Haitian Creole, including mission, temple, youth, priesthood, primary, Relief Society, and unit resources.

Meetinghouses

Most congregations meet in Church-built meetinghouses. Smaller or recently created branches met in renovated buildings or rented spaces.

Humanitarian and Development Work

The Church has provided humanitarian and development assistance for many years. Local leaders utilized fast offering funds to provide food and essential items for members affected by severe flooding in 2007.[12] Neonatal resuscitation training and vision treatment projects occurred in 2008.[13] The Dominican Republic served as an initial base for aid destined to Haiti following the earthquake in January 2010. A refugee center with two assigned humanitarian missionaries opened in the Haitian-border town of Jimani in early 2010. In 2010, the Church joined other charitable organizations in donating 750 wheelchairs.

Opportunities, Challenges and Prospects

Religious Freedom

The Church has benefited from the freedom of religion enjoyed in the Dominican Republic. No legal obstacles curtail the Church's growth and activities.

Cultural Issues

Widespread and frequent use of alcohol among many Dominicans presents a cultural obstacle which challenges church growth. Missionaries report that many converts with families have not been married and must postpone their baptisms until a civil marriage is performed. Many Dominicans are nominally Catholic and join the LDS Church with little time to develop a habit of regular Church attendance. Many converts become inactive, nominal or disaffiliated Latter-Day Saints. The Dominican Republic has a high homicide rate which can pose some safety risks for members missionaries.

National Outreach

The Dominican Republic is a small country with two-thirds of the population living in urban areas. The Church has a widespread presence in urban areas. Of the 31 administrative provinces, 29 have a congregation. Only the provinces of Pedernales and Samana do not have a congregation. Eight provinces (Baoruco, Dajabon, El Seibo, Elías Piña, Hermanas Mirabal, Independencia, San Jose de Ocoa, and Santiago Rodríguez) have a very church limited presence with only one congregation. The population in provinces without congregations comprises only 1.3% of the national population, whereas the population in provinces with only one congregation account for 6.7% of the national population. The Church has multiple congregations in every province with over 100,000 inhabitants.

The rural population has only experienced limited outreach on the peripheries of Santo Domingo or outside other large cities. Establishing congregations and conducting missionary work in rural areas presents challenges for proselytism due to limited missionary resources and the small number of people in rural communities. Missionaries assigned to a rural setting may meet most of the inhabitants over a short period of time and have little opportunity to teach and convert if the people are unreceptive. Rural locations require longer travel times to reach fewer people. The placement of full-time missionaries in cities and urban places provides the greatest opportunities for teaching and baptizing as these typically benefit from an established Church infrastructure of local leaders and congregations.

Rural locations which have experienced some outreach often grow dependent on missionaries to run congregations. Leadership development is strained by the limited number of members in small communities. Cottage meetings periodically held to invite those interested in learning about the Church may assist in greater Church establishment in rural areas. Dependent groups have been reported to meet in several rural locations, which may have resulted from frequently held cottage meetings with local members, investigators and visiting missionaries from the nearest location with assigned missionaries. Overall, few cottage meetings appear to be held in the Dominican Republic. A Church-sponsored country website has function since the late 2000s and provides outreach to Internet uses in urban and remote areas.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Convert retention has suffered as a result of a rush to quickly baptize inadequately prepared converts and limited fellowshipping resources. Some congregational consolidations are possible in the coming years if convert retention does not improve. The number of active LDS members is estimated at 20,000-25,000, or approximately 20% of total membership.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Segregation, racism, and historical persecution of Haitians by Dominicans challenges outreach among the Haitian population in the Dominican Republic. Tens of thousands of Haitians were slaughtered in the 1930s by the Dominican military. Today, discrimination and persecution of blacks with predominate African or Haitian heritages continues. Haitians experience persecution as many cross the border illegally in search of employment and higher living standards. Little prejudice has carried over into the Church. Haitians have joined the Church in the Dominican Republic, assimilated into congregations and served full-time missions.

Language Issues

The widespread use of Spanish has greatly facilitated the Church's nationwide outreach and may have contributed to rapid growth in membership. The marginalized Haitian minority may face some challenges in assimilating into Spanish speaking congregations, although many Dominican Haitians speak Spanish with some level of proficiency.

Missionary Service

The Dominican Republic had its own Missionary Training Center established in the mid-1990s. Dominicans formed 30-40% of the missionary force of the two missions in the country in 1990.[14] By 1996 40% of the missionaries in the three missions were Dominicans.[15] In 1997, Dominicans accounted for half the missionary force.[16] By October 2009 the number of Dominicans serving full-time missionaries had increased to about 500, close to the size of the missionary force in the Dominican Republic.

The number of missionaries serving in the Dominican Republic increased in 2009 and 2010. The Dominican Republic Santo

Domingo West Mission set a new record of 195 for new missionaries serving in the mission in 2010. In 2010, the Dominican Republic Santo Domingo East Mission added the Netherland Antilles and Aruba to its jurisdiction. In early 2010, Dominican missionaries accounted for over half the missionary force in the Dominican Republic. North American missionaries comprised nearly 40% of the missionary force and the remaining 10% came from other countries.

Leadership

A lack in active Melchizedek priesthood holders has delayed the creation of additional stakes. The district in Azua was a couple dozen active Melchizedek priesthood holders short of qualifying for a stake in early 2010. Challenges also face the Church on a congregational level. Some small branches or dependent groups cannot generate their own leaders and have members assigned from nearby congregations to fill leadership positions.

Temple

The Santo Domingo Dominican Republic Temple was announced in 1993, began construction in 1996, and was dedicated in 2000. Members previously traveled to more distant temple such as in Lima, Peru or Orlando, Florida. Prior to the temple's completion, members set a goal of submitting 170,000 names for proxy ordinance work.[17] 39,520 attended the open house prior to the dedication and 9,630 attended the dedication.[18] In 2004, the fourth anniversary of the dedication of the temple was commemorated by a record 5,500 ordinances completed in one day by 1,200 members and 140 temple workers.[19]

The temple district serves members in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The temple has 67,000 square feet is the 24thlargest worldwide, including four endowment rooms and four sealing rooms. In 2010, the temple was closed on Mondays, and conducted three endowment sessions on weekday mornings, four endowment sessions on weekday evenings, and twelve on Saturdays between 6:00 AM and5:00 PM. The temple is well utilized on weekends and receives additional patrons from the nearby Dominican Republic Missionary Training Center. An additional temple in the Dominican Republic appears unlikely due to the small geographic size of the country amd the large size of the existing temple which is not used to capacity.

Comparative Growth

The Dominican Republic has experienced some of the strongest nominal membership and congregational growth worldwide over the past 30 years, although low convert retention and member activity have presented ongoing challenges. No other nation had fewer than 100 members in 1978 and in 2008 had over 100,000 members, although only about one in five members is active. The nation which has achieved the second highest growth in membership with less than 100 members in 1978 is Nigeria. However, Nigeria had 63 more congregations than the Dominican Republic and member activity rates are two and a half to three times greater. Activity rates in the Dominican Republic are comparable to or slightly less than most Latin American countries. No other nation in the Caribbean has as many members or stakes as the Dominican Republic.

Other Christian denominations achieve rapid membership growth in the Dominican Republic and also report difficulty retaining members. The Seventh Day Adventist Church reports around 10,000 baptisms a year and has experienced a greater increase (both increase and percentage) in the average number of members per congregation than the LDS Church over the past decade. This trend indicates retention difficulties, although the number of active Adventists remains substantially higher than the number of active Latter-day Saints.

Future Prospects

The outlook for continued membership and congregational growth appears favorable, although poor retention and low member activity remain major challenges. Missionaries reported that the district in Azua was one of the closest districts to become a stake in late 2009. The district in Barahona was also close to meeting the requirements to become a stake in 2009. The district in San Pedro may also become a stake as it is one of the most populous cities with several congregations. Additional stakes may be organized in Santo Domingo and Santiago. Accumulating inactivity and poor retention over the past three decades will likely continue to delay the creation of more congregations and stakes. Increasing baptismal standards to ensure that converts have established habits of regular church attendance and have firmly overcome substance abuse and other prohibited behaviors before baptism will be essential to long-term prospects for real growth. However, continued quick-baptism practices and an emphasis on achieving monthly baptismal goals over achieving "real growth" by retaining converts and strengthening congregations are ongoing factors in high convert turnover.

The Dominican Republic may one day play an integral role in the establishment of the Church in Cuba. The Caribbean Area gained jurisdiction over Cuba in late 2009. One of the missions in the Dominican Republic will likely administer to Cuba as the Dominican Republic is the closest nation to Cuba with the largest Spanish-speaking population.

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[3] Millett, Richard. "Missionary Couples-Sharing the Gospel through Service," Ensign, Aug 1983, 9

[4] "Dominican Republic," Deseret News 2010 Church Almanac, p. 472-3

[5] "News of the Church," Ensign, Apr 1996, 74-80

[6] Millett, Richard. "Missionary Couples-Sharing the Gospel through Service," Ensign, Aug 1983, 9

[7] VanDenBerghe, Elizabeth and Jed. "A Second Decade for Dominican Saints," Ensign, Oct 1990, 32

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