

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.



Colombia

Population: 46.25 millions (#30 out of countries)

By David Stewart and Matt Martinich

Geography

Area: 1,138,914 square km. Located in northwestern South America, Colombia borders Venezuela, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, and Panama. Colombia is the only South American nation which borders both the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean. Tropical climate occurs in coastal areas and in the eastern interior whereas highland or mountainous areas experience cooler weather. Tropical rainforests and plains of the Amazon Basin constitute the eastern half of the country. The Andes Mountains stretch north to south in the western and central areas with several peaks over 5,000 meters. Lowlands occupy most coastal areas. Several large rivers originating in the Andes traverse the nation. Volcanoes, earthquakes, and droughts are natural hazards. Environmental issues include deforestation, overuse of pesticides, air pollution, and water pollution. Colombia is administratively divided into 32 departments and one capital district.

Population: 43,677,372 (July 2010)

Annual Growth Rate: 1.219% (2010)

Fertility Rate: 2.18 children born per woman (2010)

Life Expectancy: 70.69 male, 77.64 female (2010)

Peoples

Mestizo: 58%

White: 20%

mulatto: 14%

black: 4%

mixed black-Amerindian: 3%

Amerindian: 1%

Mestizos are of mixed Amerindian and European ancestry. Those of mixed African and European ancestry are called mulattos. Mixed black-Amerindians are also referred to as Zambo.

Languages: Spanish (99%), Amerindian languages (1%). 80 indigenous languages are spoken in Colombia, most with fewer than 10,000 speakers. Speakers of Amerindian languages number half a million. Amerindian languages with the most speakers include Embera dialects and Paez. Only Spanish has over one million speakers (43.1 million).

Literacy: 90.4% (2005)

History

Several different Amerindian groups populated Colombia prior to Spanish discovery and colonization in the early sixteenth century. The Spanish founded Bogota shortly thereafter. Bogata became the capital of the Viceroyalty of New Granada which also included Ecuador, Panama, and Venezuela. In the early nineteenth century, Colombians rebelled against Spanish rule and declared independence, resulting in the formation of the Republic of Greater Colombia in 1819 which included Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, and Venezuela. Ecuador and Venezuela became separate countries shortly thereafter, with Panama becoming independent in 1903. Violence and political turmoil have occurred regularly throughout Colombia's history, largely due to conflicts between the Conservative and Liberal parties. An estimated 400,000 people perished in two civil wars from 1899 to 1903 and 1946 to 1957. During the last 50 years, large rural areas been under the control of narco-terrorist paramilitary groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).[1] These groups have lacked the manpower and resources to overthrow the government, but the unstable central government has been unable to maintain control of rugged terrain in remote areas. In 2010, the Colombian government had regained a presence in all its administrative departments, but continued to struggle to fight rebel groups, reduce violence, and adequately address the booming illicit drug installations in many rural areas. The illicit drug trade and paramilitary activity from guerilla groups spill over into all neighboring countries and contribute to ongoing conflict in the region.

Culture

Positioned between Central America, South America, and the Caribbean, Colombia fuses cultural characteristics from all these regions. Colombia is well known for its rich literary, musical, and sports traditions and influence throughout Latin America. Cuisine draws upon Latin American, European, and Caribbean influences. Soccer is the most popular sport. Cigarette and alcohol consumption rates are moderate to low compared to the worldwide average.

Economy

GDP per capita: $9,200 (2009) [19.8% of US]

Human Development Index: 0.807

Corruption Index: 3.7

The Colombian economy experienced growth and development for much of the 2000s due to economic reforms, emphasis on increasing exports, and improvement in national security regarding illicit drug trafficking and terrorism. The global financial crisis halted economic growth in 2009 and the government is currently stressing the need to diversify the economy. Services employ 63% of the work force and generate 53% of the GDP whereas industry employs 19% of the work force and generates 37% of the GDP. Primary industries include textiles, food processing, oil, chemicals, cement, gold, coal, and emeralds. Agriculture employs 18% of the work force and constitutes 10% of the GDP. Coffee, flowers, fruit, rice, tobacco, corn, cocoa beans, and vegetables are major crops. Forest products and shrimp are additional common agricultural goods. Primary trade partners include the United States, Venezuela, and China.

Colombia is the world's leading producer of cocaine and is the primary distributor of cocaine into the United States and many other countries. Other illicit drugs such as marijuana and heroin are also trafficked into the United States. Separatist movements in rural areas contribute to corruption and regional instability.

Faiths

Christian: 93.5%

agnostic: 2%

other: 4.5%

Christians

Denominations Members Congregations

Catholic 39,309,635

Seventh Day Adventists 398,147 1,678

Latter-Day Saints 168,514 271

Jehovah's Witnesses 141,179 2,079

Anglicans 50,000

Presbyterians 50,000

Methodists 1,500

Religion

The government does not keep official religion statistics, but Catholics are estimated to constitute 80% of the population. Many Catholics are not religiously active. Non-Catholic Christians account for approximately 13.5% of Colombians, many of which are Evangelical. Small numbers of Muslims and Jews are concentrated on the Caribbean coast and in large cities, respectively. Some syncretism of Catholicism and indigenous African religious beliefs and practices occurs in Choco Department.[2]

Religious Freedom

Persecution Index:

The constitution protects religious freedom which is generally upheld by the government. Rebel groups have limited freedom of religion nationwide through killing, kidnapping, and extorting religious leaders and followers for political purposes in rural areas, generally outside of government control. Catholicism was the official religion until 1991 and today there is no state religion. Most Catholic or Christian holidays are recognized by the government. Foreign religious groups desiring to establish a presence must verify official recognition in the home country of the religious group. The government readily grants recognition to religious groups which apply, although the process can be lengthy. Missionaries face no restrictions regarding proselytism.[3]

Largest Cities

Urban: 74%

Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, Barranquilla, Cartagena, Cúcuta , Soledad, Bucaramanga, Ibagué, Soacha, Santa Marta, Villavicencio, Bello, Pereira, Manizales, Valledupar, Pasto, **Buenaventura**, Montería, Neiva, Armenia, Floridablanca, Popayán, Sincelejo, Palmira, Itagüí, Envigado, Dos Quebradas, Barrancabermeja, Tulúa, Ríohacha, Tunja, Girón, Florencia, **Apartadó**, Cartago, Facatativá, Quibdó, Yopal, Piedecuesta, Malambo.

Cities listed in **bold** have no LDS congregations.

39 of the 41 cities with over 100,000 inhabitants have an LDS congregation. 54% of the national population resides in the 41 largest cities.

LDS History

The first two full-time missionaries were assigned to Bogota to begin missionary work in May 1966. Later that year, the Colombian government granted the LDS Church legal status.[4] Seminary and institute began in 1972. In March 1977, an area conference in Bogota for members in Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela.[5] The Church extended early releases or transfers to other countries for some missionaries in 1989 due to perceived threats of violence directed toward Americans.[6] By 1992, Latin Americans constituted the entire full-time missionary force.[7] A full-time missionary training center administering Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela was opened in Bogota in 1992.[8] In 2000, three meetinghouses in Cali were inadvertently damaged by bombs placed by the rebel group National Liberation Army (ELN).[9] In 2005, the Church received recognition from the Colombian Congress for its humanitarian activities in the country.[10] Colombia's First Lady toured LDS Church headquarters in Salt Lake City in 2006.[11]

Missions

In 1968, the Church created the Colombia-Venezuela Mission which was renamed the Colombia Mission in 1971 when the Venezuela Mission was organized. The mission was headquartered in Bogota and in 1975 divided to create the Colombia Cali Mission. In 1998, a third mission was created in Barranquilla from the Colombia Bogota Mission. In 1992, the Church organized the fourth Colombian mission in Bogota North, created from the Colombia Bogota Mission.

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: 168,514 (2009)

By 1968, there were 200 members and in 1977, there were nearly 12,000 Latter-day Saints in Colombia.[12] The most rapid membership growth experienced to date in Colombia occurred in the 1980s as membership increased from 17,507 in 1980 to 76,000 in 1990, a 334% increase. Most years in the 1980s experienced annual membership growth rates between 10 and 20 percent. Annual membership growth rates declined in the 1990s from 11% in 1990 to 3.8% in 1998. Membership totaled 98,000 in 1994 and 122,000 in 1998.

By year-end 2000, LDS membership totaled 132,405 nationwide, increasing steadily to 139,351 in 2002, 149,973 in 2005, and 163,764 in 2008. Membership increased by 3,000 to 5,000 per year during much of the 2000s. Annual membership growth rates ranged from two to three percent during the 2000s. In 2009, one in 259 Colombians was nominally LDS.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 173 Branches: 100

In 1968, there were three branches.[13] By the beginning of 1977, there were five districts and 26 branches.[14] The Church created the first stake in Bogota later that year. By year-end 1980, there were three stakes in Bogota and two in Cali. During the 1980s, four additional stakes were created in Bucaramanga, Barranquilla, Bogota, and Medellin, bringing the total number of stakes to nine by 1990.

In 1992, two additional stakes were created in Barranquilla, one of which was discontinued in 1998. In the 1990s, Pereira, Pasto, Neiva, and Cartagena received their first stakes, and additional stakes were created in Medellin, Cali, and Bogota. There were eight stakes just in the Bogota area by the end of 1997. A stake functioned for just four years in Ibague from 1996 to 2000 until it was discontinued and returned to district status. By mid-1999, there were 23 stakes and 21 districts.[15]

Modest growth in the number of stakes and sharp declines in the number of districts characterized the 2000s as seven new stakes were created (Soacha, Cartagena Los Alpes, Bucaramanga Terrazas, Cucuta, Monteria, Valledupar, and Duitama) but nine districts were discontinued. One stake was discontinued during this period in Cali in 2008. By September 2010, there were 28 stakes and 12 districts. All 12 operating districts were created prior to 1994 and are located in Armenia, Barrancabermeja, Florencia, Giradot, Ibague, Manizales, Palmira, Popayan, Santa Marta, Sincelejo, Tulua, and Villavicencio.

In Cartagena, there were 3,000 members in 1988 and around 1,000 new converts were joining the Church a year. Missionaries opened the city in 1975 and the first district was created in 1980 with five branches. By 1988, there were six well-attended branches which aspired to become a stake by the end of the year[16] yet the first stake in Cartagena was not organized until 1997. The district was divided in 1991, and each of the two districts had 10 branches and 2,000 members.[17]

The number of wards and branches in Colombia in 1997 was greater than the number of congregations at any time before or since due to the mass consolidations of congregations in the first half of the 2000s. There were 159 wards and 170 branches (329 total units) in 1997, which declined to 139 wards and 146 branches in 2000 (285 total units) and 144 wards and120 branches in 2003 (264 total units). In 2010, there were just nine more congregations than in 2003, but the number of wards increased by 29 during this period as a result of branches becoming wards as stakes were organized from districts.

Activity and Retention

In 1976, 900 youth were enrolled in seminary or institute.[18] 450 priesthood leaders from four Bogota stakes attended a regional conference in 1989. 4,000 attended the general sessions of the conference.[19] In 1996, 7,100 attended a special meeting with President Hinckley in Bogota at Estadio Deportista.[20] In 2005, Elder Claudio R. M. Costa reported that church attendance was increasing at a faster rate than convert baptisms, indicating progress in retaining new converts and reactivating less active members.[21] However, the average number of members per congregation rose rapidly in the 2000s from 465 in 2000 to 622 in 2009 as a result of congregational consolidation and continued struggles with inactivity. The majority of this increase occurred between 2000 and 2006. 7,543 were enrolled in seminary or institute during the 2008-2009 school year.

The number of active members in wards and branches varies by location. One of the branches in Armenia had fewer than 50 active members in 2010. Most wards appear to have over 100 active members and most branches likely have between 50 and 100 active members. Nationwide active membership is estimated at 33,000 to 35,000, or 20% of total membership.

Language Materials

Languages with LDS Scripture: Spanish, Quechua, Kuna.

All LDS scriptures are available in Spanish, including an LDS edition of the Bible complete with full LDS footnotes, bible dictionary, and topical guide. Selections of the Book of Mormon are translated into Quechua and Kuna. Other Church materials in Kuna include The Prophet Joseph Smith's Testimony, Gospel Principles, the Articles of Faith, hymns and children's songs, and a family guidebook. Bolivian Quechua translation materials are limited to The Prophet Joseph Smith's Testimony and hymns and children's songs. Gospel Principles in Peruvian Quechua is available.

Meetinghouses

In 2010, there were at least 160 meetinghouses in Colombia, most of which were build by the Church. Small or recently created branches commonly meet in renovated buildings or rented spaces.

Health and Safety

Instability in the government and lack of government control in many areas pose safety threats. High rates of violence in many larger cities in southwestern Colombia like Cali and Buenaventura are a concern. Kidnappings and narco-terrorism are common in several areas.

Humanitarian and Development Work

At least 50 service projects have been carried out by the Church since 1985 which have provided humanitarian aid, desks for school children, vision care, wheelchair donations, seeds for agriculture, bicycles, and neonatal resuscitation training.[22] The Church used meetinghouses as temporarily shelters for the homeless and Colombian members from Bogota and Cali donated food, clothing, and bedding supplies to victims of the 1999 earthquake in Armenia, Colombia.[23] In 2003, the Church began making greater progressing carrying out humanitarian and development projects in conjunction with the Colombian government. Projects included buying thousands of desks for school children in impoverished areas, funding scores of eye surgery operations, and purchasing over a hundred hearing aids for the hearing impaired.[24] In 2004, hundreds of wheelchairs were donated to the disabled.[25]

Opportunities, Challenges and Prospects

Religious Freedom

The Church faces no legal restrictions regarding proselytism, worship, or assembly. The lack of government control over some rebel-held rural regions has deterred the expansion of national outreach and establishment of mission outreach centers in these areas. Social discrimination or harassment directed toward the Church has been minimal.

Cultural Issues

High unemployment and underemployment have been major challenges for Colombians to face.[26] Missionaries serving in several areas report that many Colombian investigators and members face significant challenges refraining from extramarital

sexual relations. Church members participating in illicit sexual relations are subject to church discipline, which may include excommunication, and investigators or recent converts face the challenge of fully ending such relations. Violence and organized crime have dissipated in many areas recently, but remain vulnerable to future escalations in violence spurred by organized crime and paramilitary illicit drug trafficking.

National Outreach

61% of the national population resides in cities with mission outreach centers. Colombia has a large urban population with many medium-sized cities unreached by Latter-day Saints. The only two cities with over 100,000 inhabitants without an official church presence are Buenaventura and Apartadó, both of which are coastal cities with high rates of violent crime, rampant illicit drug trafficking, and frequent paramilitary activity. Of the 84 cities between 30,000 and 100,000 inhabitants, 43 have a mission outreach center (51%). Only a handful of the more than 50 cities between 20,000 and 30,000 have mission outreach centers. Efforts to expand LDS mission outreach will most likely concentrate on the nearly 100 cities with over 20,000 people which remain without LDS congregations and missionaries. Dependent branches or groups may meet in some of these locations but are unreported. Six of Colombia's 32 administrative departments have no LDS congregations (Arauca, Guania, Guaviare, Putumayo, Vichada, and Vaupes). These departments all rank among the nine least populated, are concentrated in the interior, and account for less than two percent of the national population.

The Church achieved rapid national outreach expansion of missionary work in the 1980s and 1990s as most cities with congregations had their first mission outreach centers established during this period. Mission outreach centers were established in few unreached cities during the 2000s and in 2010 and were concentrated in northern Colombia. Some cities opened during this period include Montelibano, Ríohacha, and Quibdó. Large sectors of many of the largest Colombian cities receive little to no mission outreach, which may have been a result of missionaries and church leaders avoiding violent or unstable areas.

The Church operates an Internet site for the South America Northwest Area at http://www.iglesiadejesucristo.org.co/. The website offers Spanish language information regarding church doctrines, news, temples, and missionary contact information. Use of the website by local members and missionaries can assist proselytizing efforts both in reached and unreached areas.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Local member and leadership involvement in pre- and post-baptismal teaching and fellowshipping appears to be a major factor contributing to improved convert retention and member activity rates in the mid-2000s. New members received a collection of church materials and manuals, such as For the Strength of Youth, in addition to a personalized welcome letter from the local branch presidency or bishopric. Home and visiting teachers and local leaders tracked the progress made by new converts and taught them how to use these materials. Teacher improvement classes were also held regularly.[27]

Full-time missionaries reported that they were not permitted until 2010 to perform convert baptism to encourage local members to participate in the ordinance and to build stronger relations with new converts in order to improve convert retention.

Convert retention has demonstrated some improvement, but activity rates around 20%, slow congregational growth, and continued struggles to retain converts and active members demonstrate that much work is still needed. Programs encouraging missionaries to baptize investigators quickly, usually after attending just two to three sacrament meeting and often before positive gospel habits have been firmly established and before negative habits are fully overcome, are major factors in ongoing low rates of convert retention notwithstanding some increased emphasis on member fellowshipping.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Missionaries report few instances of ethnic integration issues due to the large mixed-race population. The greatest likelihood for ethnic conflict at church would be integrating Amerindian groups into predominantly mestizo congregations due to linguistic and cultural differences. However, geography generally separates these groups. The greatest social integration challenges appear to be socio-economic.

Language Issues

Spanish language LDS scriptures and church materials provide outreach for at least 99% of the Colombian population. Kuna and Quechua appear to be the only Amerindian languages with church materials. Prospects for church material translations in additional Amerindian languages appears unlikely for the foreseeable future due to sparse Amerindian Latter-day Saint membership, few Amerindian language speakers, bilingualism in Spanish, and lack of literature in most Amerindian languages spoken in Colombia. Only a handful of mission outreach centers are established near rural areas predominantly populated by Amerindians.

Finding

Colombia has been successful in coordinating missionary efforts between full-time missionaries and local members in the past. In 1988, over 500 baptisms resulted from a mission program in the Colombia Bogota Mission in which missionaries accompanied members to present a copy of the Book of Mormon to relatives or friends.[28] The temple open house in 1999 was a successful missionary opportunity as 10,000 individuals who attended the open house requested visits from the full-time missionaries.[29] In 2000, missionaries and members in Cartagena participated in a service project in which they offered free car washes which resulted in some asking to learn more about the Church.[30]

Missionary Service

The Church experienced rapid increases in the number of local full-time missionaries in the 1970s. In October 1976, there were 30 Colombians serving missions and by the following February, there were 150.[31] In 1996, there were almost 500 missionaries serving in Colombia, 300 of which were in the Colombia Bogota North and South Missions.[32] By 2005, nearly 800 missionaries serving in Colombia, all of whom were Latin Americans.[33] In the late 2000s, North American missionaries began to be reintroduced to the Colombian missions. In 2010, there were around 35 North American missionaries in the Colombia Cali Mission. Only Latin Americans are known to have attended the Colombian Missionary Training Center in 2010. Colombia has been able to maintain mission outreach reached by both local and foreign full-time missionaries since the early 1990s, but has experienced only limited gains over the past 15 years as manifested by the limited increase in national outreach with full-time missionaries.

Leadership

Church employees have periodically served in stake presidencies, but the Church has not been dependent on CES employees for leadership. In 2003, church employees held two of the three positions in the Soacha Colombia Stake presidency,[34] yet the Cartagena Colombia Los Alpes Stake had no church employees in the stake presidency.[35]

Colombian members have served in many international church positions. In 1991, Julio E. Davila was called to the Second Quorum of the Seventy.[36] In 1992, Jaime Fereira from Bogota[37] and Roberto Juliao from Barranquilla[38] were called as regional representatives. In 1993, Roberto Rubio from Bogota was called as a mission president.[39] In 1993, Jaime Ferreira became the mission president of the Colombia Cali Mission.[40] In 1993, Cesar A. Davila from Bogota was called as a regional representative.[41] In 1994, Jose Leopoldo Ramos Ospino from Soacha was called as a regional representative.[42] In 1996, Roberto Garcia A. from Bogota began presiding over the Ecuador Quito Mission.[43] In 1999, Noel Alberto Diaz from Bogota was called to preside over the Colombia Cali Mission.[44] In 2000, Jaime Ferreira (Bogota), Roberto Garcia (Bogota), and Jose L. Gonzalez (Pereira) were called as Area Authority Seventies.[45] In 2001, Elder Walter F. Gonzalez from Bogota was called to the First Quorum of the Seventy.[46] In 2001, Cesar Augusto Davila Penaloza from Bogota began presiding over the Colombia Barranquilla Mission.[47] In 2002, Jorge Eduardo Trujillo from Bogota began his tenure over the Colombia Cali Mission.[48] In 2002, a Colombian member was called as the temple president for the Bogota Colombia Temple for the first time, Roberto Rubio Ramirez.[49] In 2003, Edgar Angel Mantilla (Bucaramanga) was called to preside over the Colombia Bogota South Mission.[50] In 2004, Cesar A. Davila was called as an Area Authority Seventy.[51] In 2004, Pedro Nel Cardona Zuluaga from Medellin became the Colombia Missionary Training Center President.[52] In 2006, Hernando Camargo Pedraza from Piedecuesta began presiding over the Colombia Bogota North Mission.[53] In 2008, Ruben D. Torres from Bogota was called as an Area Authority.[54] In 2008, Jose Wilson Gamboa from Bogota was called to preside over the Ecuador Guayaquil North Mission.[55] In 2008, Jorge Julio Escobar Vidal from Bogota was called to as the temple president for the Bogota Colombia Temple.[56] In 2010, Carlos Alberto Gaviria from Bogota was called as a mission president[57] over the Colombia Barranquilla Mission.

Temple

Colombia pertains to the Bogota Colombia Temple district. Colombian Latter-day Saints attended the Lima Peru Temple between 1986 and 1999 prior to the completion of the temple in Bogota.[58] The Church announced the temple in 1984 but did not purchase the property until 1988.[59] Construction began in 1993.[60] 127,107 attended the open house[61] and 11,300 members attended the 11 dedicatory sessions.[62] The temple operates below capacity, but is more utilized than many other temples dedicated since the late 1990s as there are six endowment sessions scheduled on Tuesdays through Fridays. Only members in the Bogota area have convenient access to the temple. Organized temple trips from northern and southern areas can take as long as 20 hours by bus one way from Cartagena.[63] In October 2011, President Monson announced a new temple for Barranquilla. An additional temple may be built in Cali if warranted by temple attendance in southern Colombia.

Comparative Growth

Despite having the third largest population Latin America after Brazil and Mexico, Colombia has the eighth largest Latter-day Saint population in Latin America. Latter-day Saints constitute the smallest percentage in the general population in Colombia among Latin American countries with a church presence. The low percentage of Latter-day Saints has come partially from lower receptivity, but primarily stems from the small number of LDS missions and missionaries as only four missions function. Argentina operates 10 LDS missions, but has three million fewer people than Colombia and Chile has nine LDS missions and slightly over a third the size of the Colombian population. The percentage of members enrolled in seminary or institute is representative of most of Latin American at around four percent. In 2010, Colombia boasted the thirteenth largest number of

nominal Latter-day Saint members, thirteenth most stakes, and eleventh most districts worldwide. Prior to the announcement of the Barranquilla Colombia Temple, Colombia was the country with the second most members with only one temple. The initial establishment of the Church in Colombia occurred around the same time as most of northern South America.

Unlike other Latin American nations with a church presence, Colombia has been the only country in South America which had no North American missionaries for approximately fifteen years between 1992 and the late 2000s. Nations which rely upon local members to staff their full-time missionary force, such as Haiti, many African nations, Pakistan, and many nations in Asia, often report improvement in convert retention, member activity, membership growth, and congregational growth rates. Colombia has been an exception to this trend. Little progress has occurred in improving convert retention, member activity, or congregational growth over many years of North American missionary absence. Colombia has demonstrated the capability to carry out its church administration and missionary responsibilities without much international assistance, but may benefit from additional North American missionary manpower to spur greater progess. However, the plateauing of the full-time LDS missionary force due to declining LDS birth rates and heavy demands for missionary manpower in other areas make it unlikely that Colombia will experience a large increase in assigned missionary complement over the next decade.

The growth of many missionary-oriented Christian groups has outpaced Latter-day Saints. Seventh Day Adventists have recently experienced annual membership growth rates comparable to Latter-day Saints, but have experienced much higher retention and member activity. Seventh Day Adventists organize an average of 30-60 new congregations in Colombia annually, whereas the LDS church has organized few or no new congregations in recent years. Jehovah's Witnesses experience steady growth. Evangelical growth is moderate to strong in many areas.

Future Prospects

The outlook for church growth in Colombia is mixed with vast opportunities for expansion of national outreach and significant local receptivity, but little growth in active membership, little change in congregational numbers, continued struggles with poor convert retention and low member activity, and a self-sufficient but small missionary force which is proportionally much smaller than in comparable Latin American nations. The largest metropolitan areas have reported few new congregations organized in the past decade despite persistent missionary efforts to better establish the church in these areas. The size and past self-sufficiency of the local full-time missionary force indicates that the Church in Colombia has matured in an administrative and leadership sense, but not on a local level in many areas. Other Christian faiths have demonstrated that achieving both high growth rates and high retention is possible in Colombia while maintaining high standards, while the LDS Church has struggled with both growth and retention.

When Church President Spencer W. Kimball dedicated Colombia for missionary work, he stated in his prayer that the numbers of future converts would be so great that multiple temples would be built.[64] This statement has only been partially realized to date as the LDS Church continues to fall short of its potential in Colombia. Considerable effort and increased emphasis on growth, retention, and gospel standards will be needed to bridge the gap between performance and potential.

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