



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.



Bahamas

Population: 0.32 millions (#182 out of countries)

By David Stewart and Matt Martinich

Geography

Area: 13,880 square km. Consisting of over two dozen islands and hundreds of cays and islets, the Bahamas are located in the North Atlantic Ocean southeast of Florida and northeast of Cuba. The islands are built upon ancient coral reefs and limestone, resulting in generally flat terrain or swamps on land, with coral reefs surrounding many islands. Tropical maritime climate prevails year round that is modified by the Gulf Stream. Brief periods of cool weather have occurred occasionally. Wind and flood damage resulting from hurricanes and tropical storms are natural hazards. Environmental issues include coral reef decay and waste disposal. The Bahamas are divided into thirty-one administrative districts.

Peoples

Black: 90.6%

White: 4.7%

Black and White: 2.1%

Other: 1.9%

Unspecified: 0.7%

Legal and illegal Haitian immigrants constitute a sizeable minority estimated between 30,000 and 60,000.[\[1\]](#)

Population: 332,634 (July 2018)

Annual Growth Rate: 0.79% (2018)

Fertility Rate: 1.94 children born per woman (2018)

Life Expectancy: 70.4 male, 75.4 female (2018)

Languages: English is the official language and spoken by nearly the entire population. Most speak Bahamas Creole English in

informal settings. Haitian Creole is spoken among Haitian immigrants.

Literacy: 97% (2017)

History

Lucayan Amerindians inhabited the Bahamas prior to the first arrival of Christopher Columbus to the New World on San Salvador Island in 1492. The entire Lucayan population vanished after twenty-five years following their relocation to Hispaniola to work in the gold mines. Due to the complexity of the islands' geography and proximity to major shipping lanes, the Bahamas became a haven for pirates in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The British began settling the islands in 1647, which were made a colony in 1783. Some American colonists who remained loyal to Britain following the Revolutionary War relocated to the Bahamas and helped establish plantations to improve the local economy. Slavery persisted until 1834, and many Bahamians today trace their genealogies to slaves brought from West Africa. Independence from the United Kingdom occurred in 1973. The Bahamas has achieved greater prosperity than much of the Caribbean due to tourism, geostrategic location between the United States and the Caribbean, and international banking. The Bahamas have also been a major drug and illegal immigrant trafficking location.

Culture

Bahamian culture blends European and African customs and traditions and shares many similarities with other English-speaking Caribbean nations regarding food, music, and language. Christianity is a dominant influence of daily life. Art and handcrafts are made from materials abundant in the islands, such as coral and straw.

Economy

GDP per capita: \$32,400 (2017) [54.2% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.807 (2017)

Corruption Index: 65 (2018)

Tourism and international banking drive the economy, together accounting for 65% of the GDP. Half of the workforce is employed in the tourism industry. Services account for 90% of the GDP, and industry generates 7.7% of the GDP. Limited agricultural activity produces citrus fruits, vegetables, seafood, and poultry. Major industries include tourism, banking, cement, oil bunkering, salt, and rum. The United States and Namibia are the primary trade partners.

Overall low levels of corruption and high levels of economic freedom compared to other Caribbean and Latin American nations have contributed to economic prosperity in recent decades. Official corruption is prosecuted, and anti-corruption laws are enforced. However, the level of perceived corruption in the Bahamas has appeared to worsen in recent years according to rankings published by Transparency International.

Faiths

Christian: 96.3%

Other: 3.7%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Baptist – 83,824

Catholic – 46,569

Anglican – 35,924

Seventh Day Adventists – 22,912 – 62

Pentecostal – 19,160

Church of God – 11,975

Methodist – 9,580

Jehovah's Witnesses – 1,762 – 27

Latter-day Saints – 1,042 – 2

Religion

Most of the population is Christian and is religiously active. Despite a small population, a mosaic of Christian denominations flourishes. Most Christian denominations are racially integrated. There are few non-Christians or Christians who maintain aspects of cultural religious worship, mainly Haitians and immigrants from other Caribbean nations.[\[2\]](#)

Religious Freedom

The constitution protects religious freedom, which is upheld by the government. Individuals are free to choose or change their religious status and legislation prohibits discrimination. The government observes major Christian holidays, and the constitution proscribes that Christian values are to be respected. There are no requirements for religious groups to register with the government, but a religious group must be legally incorporated to purchase land. Religion is studied in public schools, but is not mandatory. The only religious restrictions imposed are upon witchcraft and some aspects of voodoo. There have been no recent reports of societal abuses of religious freedom.[\[3\]](#)

Largest Cities

Urban: 83% (2018)

Nassau, Freeport, **Marsh Harbour**, **Dundas Town**, **Murphy Town**, **Dunmore Town**, **Spanish Wells**, **George Town**, **Bailey Town**.

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

Two of the nine largest cities have a Church congregation. Eighty-three percent (83%) of the national population resides in the five largest cities. Nassau accounts for 70% of the national population.

Church History

The first known Bahamian to join the Church was Clarence E. Newry Jr., who was baptized in Utah in 1977.[\[4\]](#) Latter-day Saints have lived in the Bahamas since 1979 when two families moved to Nassau. Missionaries were first assigned in December 1979, but the government asked the missionaries to leave and refused visas. In 1981, the first branch conference occurred with forty-eight in attendance.[\[5\]](#) Seminary and institute began in the 1980s. Missionaries were sent to open Freeport to missionary work in 1988.[\[6\]](#) In 1992, senior missionaries placed Latter-day Saint scriptures and famous books authored by Church leaders in the library of the College of the Bahamas.[\[7\]](#) Elder Neal A. Maxwell dedicated the Bahamas for missionary work in November 1997.[\[8\]](#) The Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission administered the Bahamas until the creation of the Florida Tampa Mission in 1998.[\[9\]](#) In 2004, the Church gained national legal status. Prior to this point, legal status was only obtained on New Providence Island.[\[10\]](#) In 2006, the Bahamas became part of the newly created Caribbean Area.[\[11\]](#) The Jamaica Kingston Mission began to administer the Bahamas shortly thereafter.

Membership Growth

Church Membership: 1,042 (2017)

In 1988, membership stood at approximately eighty in the Nassau Branch, sixty in the Soldier Road Branch, and five in Freeport.[\[12\]](#) By year-end 2000, there were 608 members in the Bahamas. Membership grew slowly in the 2000s, with two years experiencing membership decline (2001 and 2005). The Church generally added twenty to eighty members per year and

annual membership growth rates ranged from –4% to 18%. In 2009, membership increased by 143, but much of this increase was due to convert baptisms in the Turks and Caicos Islands that the Church included in membership figures for the Bahamas. Bahamian membership was likely around 800 at the end of 2009. In 2006, there were seventy members on Grand Bahama Island.^[13] Slow membership growth occurred in the 2010s. Membership increased to 959 in 2012, 1,006 in 2015, and 1,042 in 2017.

In 2017, one in 317 was a Latter-day Saint on Church records.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 0 Branches: 2 (2018)

Branches operated in Nassau and on Grand Bahama in the late 1970s. In 1986, the Soldier Road Branch was created.^[14] In 1998, two branches functioned in the Bahamas in Nassau: the Nassau Branch (English speaking) and the Soldier Road Branch (French and Haitian Creole-speaking).^[15] However, by the end of the year the branches were consolidated into the New Providence Branch with services in English with Haitian Creole translation available.^[16] The Grand Bahama Branch was reinstated in 2000. The first district was created in 2002.

During the 2000s, the New Providence Bahamas District Branch administered members meeting in small groups outside of Nassau and Grand Bahama. In 2010, the Church discontinued the New Providence Bahamas District, and groups meeting on isolated islands fell under the Jamaica Kingston Mission Branch, as the district branch was discontinued. At the time, one area known to have a small group of Latter-day Saints was Exuma Island.^[17] In 2018, the Church organized the Nassau Caribbean District with four branches, including two in the Bahamas, one in the Cayman Islands, and one in the Turks and Caicos Islands. Although the district has Nassau in its name, the district has been headquartered in the Cayman Islands.

Activity and Retention

Member activity and convert retention rates appear low. In 2010, missionaries reported only a few baptisms per month in Nassau. The consolidation of the two branches in Nassau in 1998 and discontinuance of the district in 2010 also likely indicate poor member activity throughout the country. In 2006, sixty attended the groundbreaking for the first meetinghouse on Grand Bahama Island.^[18] There was no increase in the number of active members in the New Providence Branch between the mid-2000s and the mid-2010s. Returned missionaries reported approximately seventy active members in the branch during both time periods even though the Church added approximately 300 members to the records for the country between 2006 and 2016. The Grand Bahama Branch likely has no more than fifty active members. Total active membership for the Bahamas appears no greater than 125, or 12%.

Language Materials

Languages with Latter-day Saint Scripture: English, Haitian Creole.

All Latter-day Saint scriptures are available in Haitian Creole. General Conference has had Haitian Creole translations at least since the early 1990s. Most Church materials are translated, including mission, temple, youth, priesthood, primary, Relief Society, and unit resources.

Meetinghouses

The first meetinghouse was dedicated in 1988 in Nassau.^[19] The New Providence Branch continues to meet in the same meetinghouse. In 2010, the Grand Bahama Branch met in a Church-built meetinghouse in Freeport. Church services in other locations likely meet in members' homes.

Humanitarian and Development Work

Little humanitarian or development work has occurred by Latter-day Saints. As of 2018, the Church had conducted nine projects since 1985.^[20] The Church donated \$250,000 worth in humanitarian supplies to Grand Bahama following the destruction left by Hurricane Francis in 2004.^[21]

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

The Church has been legally recognized in the Bahamas and faces no restrictions regarding proselytism or church activity. There have been past challenges obtaining visas for foreign missionaries, but it appears that these issues have been resolved. Misinformation about the Church has resulted in some isolation and ostracism from the rest of the Christian community.

Cultural Issues

Negative social attitudes and misinformation about the Church have been widely circulated in the Bahamas even prior to the establishment of the Church in the late 1970s. Senior missionaries assigned to Grand Bahama Island in the mid-2000s met with ministers throughout the island and helped improve relations with the general Christian community.^[22] Many Bahamians may be receptive to the Church but are too deeply entrenched in their current churches to consider learning about or attending the Church or have no interest based on false information propagated over the decades. Some investigators stop meeting with the missionaries once they encounter negative information from others or the Internet about the Church. The Church has also been historically seen as a “White” church, presenting difficulties for nine-tenths of the population who are Black to seriously consider joining the Church because of this perception. However, the strong Christian background of many provides a foundation of belief upon which Latter-day Saint local and full-time missionaries can build.

National Outreach

Mission outreach centers on New Providence and Grand Bahama Islands may potentially reach up to 78% of the national population. New Providence is key to national outreach, as 70% of the population resides on this small island. Most inhabitants on either of the two most populous islands know very little about the Church due to the lack of members and inconsistent missionary outreach over the past several decades. The nearly one-quarter of the population residing on small, remote islands will be challenging to reach, as few mission resources are dedicated to the Bahamas. Holding periodic cottage meetings with contacts of Church members and active church members in these locations may facilitate the expansion of national outreach in these remote, often difficult to access, areas.

Distance from mission headquarters ever since the commencement of missionary activity has been a major obstacle in assigning full-time missionaries and training members and leaders. High administrative maintenance and reliance on full-time missionaries in Jamaica may lead mission leaders to hesitate dedicating greater missionary resources to the Bahamas. Though Internet access may be limited in some areas, Church websites in English provide correct doctrinal and historical information for those seeking out the Church. A Bahamas Church website tailored toward the needs, concerns, and prospective of Bahamians may facilitate efforts to expand outreach and correct false information.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Sister missionaries and local priesthood leaders previously held firesides regularly with members and invited investigators and the community to attend. The Church has assigned few full-time missionaries in recent years, possibly in an effort for local members to rely less on full-time missionaries for church administration and finding investigators. Recent convert retention and member activity rates are low.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Missionaries report challenges with Bahamians and Haitians meeting in the same congregation, especially from investigators. Many Bahamians view the Church as Haitian or White and are unreceptive to missionaries. The reestablishment of a Haitian Creole-speaking branch may help strengthen membership among both ethnicities over time, although current leadership potential may be too limited to warrant such a decision.

Language Issues

The widespread use of Haitian Creole among Haitians has in the past warranted the creation of a Haitian Creole-speaking congregation. Assimilating English and Haitian Creole speakers in the same congregation may have reduced member activity rates due to miscommunications and language barriers.

Missionary Service

In 1988, there were six missionaries serving in Nassau and two missionaries serving in Freeport.^[23] In the summer of 2010, sister missionaries were assigned to the Bahamas for the first time and were the only full-time missionaries in Nassau. The Bahamas remains dependent on foreign missionaries to staff its full-time missionary force as few natives are currently serving missions. Youth-oriented proselytism approaches, trainings, and church education may help attract and retain youth converts who later serve full-time missions.

Leadership

Local members appear to lead both branches, but the branches likely do not have all leadership positions filled as a result of few active priesthood holders. Local leadership appears too underdeveloped to staff additional congregations on New Providence Island. The dissolution of the New Providence Bahamas District in 2010 likely occurred in order to have local and mission leaders focus on individual congregations rather than concentrate on the Bahamas collectively. The current headquarters of the Nassau Caribbean District in the Cayman Islands further suggests a lack of local priesthood leadership to staff district and branch callings. Returned missionaries are important in sustaining self-sufficiency.

Temple

In 1997, the first temple marriage for a Bahamian Latter-day Saint couple occurred followed by several others.^[24] In October 2009, the Church announced the construction of a temple in South Florida that would include the Bahamas in the future temple district.^[25] Temple trips do not appear to occur regularly for members in the Bahamas and likely occur on an individual or family basis. Entering the United States for some members may be a challenge due to visa regulations, especially for Haitian members who do not have citizenship in the Bahamas.

Comparative Growth

The Church has experienced slow growth in the Bahamas, characteristic of many other English-speaking island nations in the Caribbean, such as Barbados and the Virgin Islands. The percentage of Latter-day Saints in the population is comparable to Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago. The Church in the Bahamas reports more than one thousand members on the rolls – a much larger amount than most other islands in the region. However, member activity and convert retention rates rank among the lowest in the Caribbean.

Seventh-Day Adventists have achieved steady membership growth over the past decade, growing from 9,300 members in 1998 to 15,212 in 2008, yet only one new congregation was added during this period. Adventists have reported an increase in membership of approximately 50% in the past decade and several new congregations has been established. Jehovah's Witnesses have reported no noticeable increase in membership or congregations since 2010.

Future Prospects

Low receptivity, negative cultural attitudes concerning the Church, and a high rate of church attendance in other faiths create significant challenges for future growth. Prospects for the creation of additional congregations appear poor until member reactivation efforts improve member activity rates, a higher percentage of new converts remain active for the long-term, and increases in convert baptisms occur. Traveling missionaries holding cottage meetings while visiting members and investigators on currently unreached islands may be a means of beginning missionary work in these locations.

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