



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.

Austria

Population: 8.22 millions (#95 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 83,871 square km. Landlocked in Central Europe, Austria borders the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Italy, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and Germany. The Alps dominate most the terrain, with some plains and hills in the northeast. Temperate climate prevails due to distance from the ocean, high elevation, and high latitude that is characterized by cold, wet winters and mild summers. In northern Austria, the Danube enters from Germany, flows through Vienna, and exits into Slovakia. Landslides, avalanches, and earthquakes are natural hazards. Air and water pollution affecting native forests and soil contamination are environmental issues. Austria is divided into nine administrative states.

Peoples

Austrians: 80.8%

German: 2.6%

Bosnian and Herzegovinian: 1.9%

Turks: 1.8%

Serbian: 1.6%

Romanian: 1.3%

Other/unspecified: 10.0%

Austrians share many demographic similarities with Germans. Turks have arrived relatively recently through immigration.

Population: 8,793,370 (July 2018)

Annual Growth Rate: 0.42% (2018)

Fertility Rate: 1.48 children born per woman (2018)

Life Expectancy: 79.0 male, 84.5 female (2018)

Languages: German (93.0%), Turkish (2.3%), Serbian (2.0%), Croatian (1.6%), other (1.1%). German is the official national language. Several minority languages have official status in some Austrian states such as Croatian (Burgenland), Slovene (southern Carinthia), and Hungarian (Burgenland). Only German has over one million speakers (8.1 million).

Literacy: 98% (2011)

History

The Romans conquered an early Celtic kingdom on the territory of modern Austria in 15 BC and established the province of Noricum. In the eighth century, Charlemagne gained control of Austria and introduced Christianity. The Habsburgs emerged as the ruling dynasty in the late thirteenth century and governed until the early twentieth century. During this period, Austria gained additional territory. In 1867, Austria united with Hungary to form the Austro-Hungarian Empire. During the early twentieth century, the empire stretched from Bosnia in the south to Bohemia in the north and from eastern Italy in the west to Transylvania in the east. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was dismantled into independent states along ethnic lines at the end of World War I, and Austria became a small republic nestled in the Alps. Austria was annexed by Nazi Germany in 1938 and remained under Nazi rule until occupation by Allied forces in 1945. In 1955, Austria gained total independence from Germany and remained neutral on political affairs to appease Western and Soviet interests. During the latter half of the twentieth century, the economy grew rapidly and reached Western European levels. Austria joined the European Union in 1995.

Culture

Austria, and especially Vienna, became a center of scholarship and music for centuries for Europe. Vienna was the frequent residence for many famous musicians such as Mozart and Beethoven. Many scientific disciplines including psychology, physics, and economics achieved significant advances through the efforts of intellectuals in Vienna. A wide range of Austrian novelists and writers have influenced culture and academia worldwide publishing poetry, novels, and plays. Well-known cuisine consists of pastries, meat dishes, and cheeses. Skiing is one of the most popular sports. Alcohol and cigarette consumption rates are high compared to most nations. Austrians have grown more secular over the past half century.

Economy

GDP per capita: \$50,000 (2017) [83.6% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.908 (2017)

Corruption Index: 76 (2018)

Austria possesses a strong, industrialized economy that is well integrated with neighboring countries, especially Germany. The government subsidized economic reforms aimed at maintaining economic growth and reducing the influence of the world financial crisis in the late 2000s. Steady economic growth has occurred in recent years. Due to its central location, Austria plays an important role in international banking and insurance for both Eastern and Western Europe. The aging population and low birth rates are demographic conditions that pose challenges for future economic health and stability. The recent influx in refugees has also posed challenges with unemployment rates. Services account for 74.1% of the workforce and 70.3% of the GDP, whereas industry employs 25.2% of the workforce and generates 28.4% of the GDP. The agriculture sector is small and specializes in grains, potatoes, sugar beets, dairy products, wine, and meat. Primary industries include construction, machinery, cars, food, chemicals, wood products, and tourism. Germany, Italy, and Switzerland are primary trade partners. Austria enjoys one of the lowest rates of perceived corruption worldwide. However, illegal drug consumption and the transshipment of heroin and cocaine through Austria to Western Europe are increasing concerns.

Faiths

Christian: 83.0%

Muslim: 8.0%

Other/unspecified/none: 9%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Catholic – 6,320,000

Orthodox – 190,000

Evangelicals – 40,524

Jehovah's Witnesses – 21,563 – 299

Latter-day Saints – 4,664 – 17

Seventh Day Adventists – 4,198 – 64

Religion

According to the 2001 census, 74% of the population adheres to Catholicism, 5% are Protestant, 2% are Orthodox, and 1% belong to other Christian denominations. Although the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life has estimated that Christians comprised 83% of the population in the early 2010s,^[1] other groups have estimated the percentage of Christians in the population as low as 64%.^[2] Muslims account for 8% of the population and primarily consist of Turks and Bosnians. According to a 2007 poll, 81% of respondents identified with a religious group, but only 12% attended religious services at least once a week. Fifty-three percent (53%) of respondents stated that they rarely attended religious meetings.^[3]

Religious Freedom

The constitution protects religious freedom, which is upheld by the government. The secular government refers to many religious minority groups as sects, which receive second-class status. The government classifies religious groups into three different categories based on rights and privileges entitled to each category: officially recognized religious societies, religious confessional communities, and associations. There are sixteen officially recognized religious societies that have obtained this status. Groups applying for this status today must have operated in Austria for twenty years and constitute 0.2% of the population. Eight groups are recognized as religious confessional communities, which must have 300 members and submit a statement regarding the beliefs and practices of the religious group. Muslims and Jews report the greatest societal harassment and persecution, and these incidents have increased in frequency in recent years.^[4]

Largest Cities

Urban: 58.3% (2018)

Wien (Vienna), Graz, Linz, Salzburg, Innsbruck, Klagenfurt am Wörthersee, **Villach**, Wels, Sankt Pölten, Dornbirn.

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

Nine of the ten largest cities have a Church congregation. Thirty-four percent (34%) of the national population resides in the ten largest cities.

Church History

In 1841, Orson Hyde visited Austria. Over two decades later, Orson Pratt and William R. Ritter began missionary work. The first Austrian joined the Church in 1870 in Germany, whereas the first Austrian was baptized in Austria in 1883. In 1901, the Church created its first Austrian congregation in Haag am Hausruck, followed by a second congregation in Vienna in 1909 and a third in Rottenback. Missionary activity ceased at the beginning of World War I. Missionaries in Vienna were mistaken for spies and forced to report to United States Army headquarters at the outbreak of the war. In 1922, the Church reestablished a district in Vienna that serviced all of Austria.^[5] Missionary work resumed shortly thereafter, expanding into additional cities such as Linz and Salzburg. Local members managed Church affairs during World War II as foreign missionaries returned to their home countries. The Church conducted humanitarian relief following the war.

Austria officially recognized the Church in 1955. The Swiss Austrian Mission administered Austria until 1960 when Austria

became its own mission. The greatest membership growth occurred for the following few decades and additional congregations were established.^[6] Seminary and institute began in the early 1970s. Missionary activity in Austria started focusing on expanding the Church's reach into Eastern Europe through efforts targeting ethnic minorities in Austria and later through the placement of missionaries in communist nations in Central Europe and Yugoslavia. In 1987, the Austria Vienna East Mission was organized to assist in missionary efforts among Eastern European nations until independent missions could be formed in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Greece; the Austria Vienna East mission was closed with the formation of the Ukraine Kyiv mission in February 1992.^[7] The Mormon Tabernacle Quorum performed in Austria in July 1992.^[8] In 1996, the Austria Vienna South Mission was organized to coordinate missionary efforts in the former Yugoslavia until relocated to Ljubljana, Slovenia in 1999. In 1998, the Austrian ambassador to the United States visited the Church's Family History Library.^[9] Austria became part of the Europe Central Area in 2000.^[10]

In 2002, the Church discontinued the Austria Vienna Mission, and Austria was assigned to the Germany Munich Mission. That same year, the Church and several hundred returned missionaries who served in Austria met with Austrian politicians and dignitaries as a result of the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City.^[11] In 2010, Austria joined the Alpine German-Speaking Mission and was assigned to the Europe Area. In 2016, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir performed in Vienna, Austria and the proceeds of ticket sales were given to the Caritas Austria charity to assist needy refugees.^[12] Apostle Elder Neil L. Andersen visited members in Vienna in early 2019.^[13]

Membership Growth

Church Membership: 4,664 (2017)

There were 259 members in 1930. Extremely slow membership growth occurred for the next three decades. Church membership totaled 200 in 1940, 326 in 1950, and 632 in 1960. The Church's most rapid membership growth in Austria occurred in the 1960s as membership reached 2,016 in 1965 and 2,691 in 1970. In 1972, missionaries baptized eighty-eight converts, and membership totaled 2,675 by the end of the year.^[14] Membership increased to 3,010 in 1979, 3,100 in 1986, 3,500 in 1990, and 3,900 in 1992. There were multiple periods during the last quarter of the twentieth century where membership did not increase year to year or membership decline occurred, such as in the early 1970s, early 1980s, and late 1990s.

By 2000, there were 3,917 members. Membership slowly increased in the 2000s to 4,038 in 2003, 4,176 in 2007, and 4,294 in 2010. Membership growth rates ranged from -0.3% to 2% during the 2000s. Membership generally increased by twenty to fifty a year during this period. In the 2010s, membership increased to 4,469 in 2013 and 4,664 in 2017. Annual membership growth rates in the 2010s ranged from -0.5% to 3.1%.

In 2017, one in 1,877 was a Latter-day Saint on Church records.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 14 Branches: 3 (April 2019)

The first district was organized in 1920 for branches in Austria.^[15] There were at least five cities or towns with a branch by the 1923: Haag am Hausruck, Linz, Neumarkt am Wallersee, Salzburg, and Vienna. No additional cities appeared to have branches organized until the late 1950s when branches were organized in Innsbruck (1958), Dornbirn (1960), Klagenfurt (1961), and Wiener Neustadt (1964). By 1972, there were eleven branches and four districts.^[16] The Church organized at least four additional branches in the 1970s in Graz (1970), Bruck an der Mur (1970), Wels (1974), and St Pölten (1975).

The Church created the first stake in 1980 in Vienna. The Church had seven wards and eleven branches in 1987. In 1997, a second stake was created in Salzburg from a district – thirteen years after the initial proposal to organize the stake.^[17] In 1997, the number of congregations reached an all-time high of twenty-three, twelve of which were wards. The number of congregations decreased to twenty-two in 1999, twenty in 2002, nineteen in 2004, eighteen in 2005, and seventeen in 2008. Some of the locations where branches closed included Judenburg and Villach. The number of wards decreased from thirteen in 2007 to ten in 2008. The number of wards increased to twelve in 2009, thirteen in 2011, and fourteen in 2016.

In 2001, the Vienna Austria Stake had six wards and four branches and the Salzburg Austria Stake had six wards and five branches. In early 2019, the Vienna Austria Stake had seven wards and two branches, and the Salzburg Austria Stake had six wards and one branch. The Dornbirn Ward pertains to the St Gallen Switzerland Stake.

Activity and Retention

Although church activity has been the exception rather than the rule among Latter-day Saints in Austria throughout the Church's history there, active members have demonstrated strong zeal and dedication to the Church. In 1972, 250 youth were enrolled in seminary, and Austrian members completed over 2,000 proxy endowment ordinances in the Bern Switzerland Temple.^[18] In

the Salzburg Austria Stake, 70% of the 120 youth were active in 1997.^[19] One thousand, one hundred (1,100) German-speaking young adults from Austria, Germany, and Switzerland assembled in Salzburg in 2006 for a young single adult conference.^[20] Two hundred ninety-two were enrolled in seminary or institute during the 2008–2009 school year.

The Church has reported stable numbers of people who attend church for multiple decades according to reports from returned missionaries. Returned missionaries have provided extensive data on church attendance by congregation over the past three decades. In the early 1990s, church attendance by congregation was as follows: Graz (250), Linz (100), Innsbruck (60), Villach (30), and Judenburg (20). In the early 2000s, church attendance by congregation was as follows: Vienna 1st (80) and Vienna 2nd (140). In the early to mid 2010s, church attendance by congregation was as follows: Vienna 2nd (200), Vienna 5th (150), Graz (110), Vienna 4th (100), Wiener Neustadt (80), Vienna 1st (50-75), Klagenfurt (50), St Pölten (30), and Haag am Hausruck (25-30). In the mid to late 2010s, church attendance by congregation was as follows: Graz (170), Salzburg (120), Neumarkt am Wallersee (170), Wiener Neustadt (90), and Bruck an der Mur (30). Church attendance for the five wards in Vienna in the late 2010s significantly varied by ward from as low as 50 to as high as 250.

Nationwide active membership is likely between 1,600 and 1,800, or 35-37% of total membership.

Language Materials

Languages with Latter-day Saint Scripture: German, Turkish, Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, Hungarian, Polish.

The Church has translated all Latter-day Saint scriptures and many Church materials into German, Croatian, Hungarian, Polish, Serbian, and Slovenian. Only the Book of Mormon has been translated into Turkish although plans were announced in 2017 to translate the remainder of Latter-day Saint scriptures into Turkish.^[21] German and Hungarian materials include the Church Handbook of Instructions, missionary, priesthood, unit, young men, young women, primary, Relief Society, temple, and audiovisual materials. The Liahona has twelve issues in German and Hungarian, four issues in Polish, two issues in Croatian, and one Slovenian issue produced per year. Many unit, temple, Priesthood, Relief Society, Sunday School, young women, primary, missionary, and family history materials are available in Turkish, Serbian, and Slovenian.

Meetinghouses

In 1972, there were seven chapels.^[22] Congregations meet in at least sixteen different locations. Most wards and branches meet in Church-built meetinghouses.

Humanitarian and Development Work

Due to high living standards over the past several decades, the Church has not conducted widespread humanitarian service in Austria. Only fifteen humanitarian and development projects have occurred since 1985, and twelve of these projects were refugee response initiatives.^[23] Austrian Latter-day Saints have participated in relief efforts for other European nations. In 1992, members prepared and sent food and clothing donations to Croatia.^[24] In 2002, the Church donated \$635,000 to assist flood cleanup efforts in Central Europe, which included Austria. Missionaries and local member participated in the cleanup efforts.^[25]

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

The Church maintains a strong relationship with the government and is registered as an officially recognized religious society, the highest level of government recognition. This status was received prior to requirements that the membership of religious groups must constitute at least 0.2% of the national population.^[26] There are no restrictions on proselytism or other church activity.

Cultural Issues

Many Austrians are proud of their Catholic religious heritage, which can sometimes become an obstacle for Latter-day Saint proselytism efforts. Many are unwilling to consider learning about the Church from full-time missionaries due a lack of interest in organized religion, negative public opinions concerning Latter-day Saints and their beliefs and practices, or the persistent cultural influence of the Catholic Church on the general population. Returned missionaries consistently reported most Austrians demonstrate low receptivity to the Latter-day Saint gospel message during the 2000s and 2010s. High alcohol and cigarette consumption rates present challenges for Latter-day Saint teachings. Increased materialism over the past half century has further exacerbated secular thought and practice, creating additional barriers to missionary work. Member-missionary work

encounters challenges with religious traditionalism and secularism. Austrian Latter-day Saints appear to have made progress correcting false perceptions about the Church and improving public awareness through activities such as family history research.

National Outreach

Thirty-four percent (34%) of the Austrian population resides in a city or town with a ward or a branch. All administrative states have a mission outreach center except Burgenland, which accounts for 3.3% of the national population. Nineteen percent (19%) of the national population resides in administrative states with only one congregation (Vorarlberg, Tirol, and Carinthia).

The number of congregations has declined by 26% between 1998 and 2008, reducing national outreach in cities and large towns. Many smaller cities or towns that supported mission outreach centers in the 1980s and 1990s no longer have congregations or missionaries consistently assigned, including Steyr, Judenburg, Villach, and St. Johann-im-Pongau. Approximately 1.5% of the population resides in cities that once had mission outreach centers. Cities that once had two wards, including Salzburg and Linz, today have only one ward. With over 1.5 million inhabitants, Vienna has five wards providing outreach to many areas of the largest city. Leaders have expressed that decisions to consolidate congregations allow members from smaller congregations to enjoy a greater number of church programs, although the Church is no longer accessible in some former outreach centers where congregations have been closed. Transportation systems in Austria are well developed. However, travel times for members have generally increased as a result of congregational consolidation, and have presented challenges for members with marginal testimonies to remain engaged when congregations become less accessible.

The greatest medium-term potential for expanding national outreach and multiplying congregations appears to be in the largest cities; significant progress may be made in many of the largest cities without mission outreach centers and multiple active members. 13.4% of the national population resides in the seventy-five cities between 10,000 and 40,000 inhabitants without a mission outreach center, and some of these cities have active members who commute to other cities for church. The establishment of groups or dependent branches in some of these locations provides a flexible means for testing whether certain cities are more receptive to mission outreach initiatives. Much of the success with the cottage meeting paradigm results from the dedication of local members in missionary activity in harmony with receptivity of the local population. It does not appear that the Church has experimented with cottage meetings or establishing small congregations in unreached areas for many years.

By 2003, the Church had established an Internet site for Austria at <http://www.hlt.at>.^[27] The current official Church website for Austria is now located at: <https://www.kirche-jesu-christi.at/>. The site provides doctrinal information, explanations on church history and services, and meetinghouse locations. The Internet site is a useful tool for members and missionaries to provide an accessible means for Austrians to learn about the Church and request additional information if desired.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Member activity appears to have remained constant or perhaps slightly fallen over the past several decades. The number enrolled in seminary has fallen by more than half from 250 in 1972 to 106 in 2008–2009, which indicates lower activity among youth and perhaps fewer youth compared to the 1970s as a result of small family size and few youth converts today. Current convert retention rates appear average or higher than most European nations.

The consolidating of congregations that stretch over wide regions can often contribute to decreased member activity. However, in 2003, six months after the Church discontinued the Villach Branch, all active members in the former branch were actively attending the Klagenfurt Ward despite some initial member opposition. Members living in Villach travel twenty-five miles each way for Sunday meetings.^[28] It is unclear whether these results have held up over the intervening years. Other branches that have been discontinued may not have experienced as positive results regarding member activity.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Historically, the Church has reached out to lesser-reached peoples in Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe through missions based in Austria because of its central location, well-developed infrastructure, and role as a crossroads between East and West. The majority of convert baptisms in Austria have been among non-Austrian immigrants for some years due to the greater receptivity of immigrant groups. The disproportionate number of converts among minority immigrant groups generates challenges for congregational integration and fellowship; immigrants also tend to be more transient, and many have limited proficiency with German or English. In 1993, missionaries baptized an Armenian couple who later immigrated to the United States.^[29]

Language Issues

German is widely spoken and contains a vast array of Church materials. The Church has translated materials in most minority languages spoken in Austria. To accommodate the language needs of non-German speakers, the Vienna 4th (English) Ward allows for outreach to occur among minority groups who can speak English.

Finding

Due to initial disinterest of many Austrians in religion, finding approaches must be creative and allow for Austrians to feel comfortable discussing religious matters in a manner in which they will commit to learn more or make commitments to attend Church. In 2000, Austrians demonstrated significant interest in the Church's genealogy program, resulting in Church members clarifying Latter-day Saint beliefs and practices.^[30] Musical firesides or performances may also provide culturally appropriate methods to introduce the Church to Austrians. Similar programs may help increase the number of Austrians investigating the Church and lead to more successful finding than traditional methods such as street contacting.

Missionary Service

The Church has significantly reduced the number of full-time missionaries serving in Austria over the past few decades. In 1972, 136 full-time missionaries were serving in Austria.^[31] In 2010, the full-time missionary force was less than one-third of the 1972 missionary complement. Austria has received fewer mission resources in response to low receptivity and the redistribution of the limited missionary force to meet the needs of more receptive areas worldwide.

Leadership

Austria has demonstrated that local leadership can be developed without reliance on Church employees to fill leadership positions and that sufficient local leadership can endure for decades despite a relatively tiny membership and few convert baptisms. No Church employees appeared to have served in a stake presidency, which is uncommon for many nations with few convert baptisms and few members. All congregations appear to be led by local members, and a shortage of active priesthood holders does not appear to have been the primary issue for the discontinuance of many of Austria's smaller branches over the past decade. Even more impressive, Austrian Church leaders have also regularly served in international positions. In 1992, Johann A. Wondra from Vienna was called as the temple president for the Frankfurt Germany Temple.^[32] In 1994, Ernst Husz from Vienna was called as a regional representative^[33] and the following year became an area authority.^[34] In 1996, Johann A. Wondra was called as the first mission president of the Austria Vienna South Mission.^[35] When the Salzburg Austria Stake was created in 1997, no Church employees served in the stake presidency.^[36] In 1997, August Schubert from Salzburg was called as the mission president for the Germany Berlin Mission.^[37] In 1999, Johann A. Wondra was called as an Area Seventy,^[38] and in 2003, Gerold Roth was called as an Area Seventy.^[39] An Austrian couple presided over the Bulgaria Sofia Mission in 2010. Ernst Husz from Vienna was called as the Freiberg Germany Temple president in 2011.^[40] Günther Werner Erlacher from Linz was called as the Freiberg Germany Temple president in 2014.^[41] Gerold Roth from Neumarkt am Wallersee was called as the Kyiv Ukraine Temple president in 2016.^[42] Viktor Wadosch from Vienna was called as the Freiberg Germany Temple president in 2018.^[43] There were no Church employees among members of the Vienna Austria Stake presidency when the stake presidency was reorganized in 2011^[44] or in 2018.^[45] In 2019, Paul Picard and Elodie Picard, a French couple who lived in Vienna, were called to preside over the Armenia/Georgia Mission.^[46]

Temple

Austria belongs to the Frankfurt Germany Temple district. Organized temple trips occur regularly for the two stakes. Austrian members have demonstrated strong temple participation over the past several decades despite their limited numbers. Due to distance from Frankfurt and the resilience of the community in Vienna, a small temple may one day be built in Vienna to serve members from Austria and Southeastern Europe. However, the Frankfurt Germany temple has historically operated well under capacity, and Austrian members can travel to the temple without major sacrifice or expense.

Comparative Growth

The Church in Austria has experienced some of the slowest membership growth rates of any Central European nation over the past two decades. Church membership increased by only 300 between 1992 and 2009, less than an 8% increase. Some nations with a long-term Church presence and advanced, industrialized economy experienced greater membership growth and had fewer congregations discontinued during this period, such as Switzerland (18.6% membership increase of over 1,200 members). Church growth in Italy has greatly outpaced Austria, as in 1967 there were only sixty-six members, and today there are over 27,000. Between 1992 and 2009, the Church in the Czech Republic and Hungary grew from a couple hundred members to over 2,000 members and 4,000 members, respectively. Germany experienced slower membership growth than Austria during this period, as Germany had more members in 1992 than in 2009, but membership was heavily affected by American military emigration in addition to low convert baptismal rates. The percentage of the population residing in a city with mission outreach centers in Austria is comparable to many Central European nations. Two European nations have approximately as many members as Austria and have temples: Denmark and Finland. Member activity rates and the percentage of nominal Latter-day Saints in the general population compare to most of Central Europe.

Other missionary-oriented Christian churches report few convert baptisms and slow membership growth as a result of low receptivity, entrenched cultural Catholicism, and growing secularism. Evangelical groups report little growth. Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses report slow but consistent growth; Jehovah's Witnesses report over 21,000 active members. Starting with just a few members in the 1970s, the Jehovah's Witnesses have multiplied to achieve over ten times the active membership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Austria, whereas active Latter-day Saint membership has remained largely stagnant for decades. Witnesses reported an increase of more than 600 active members and five

congregations between 2010 and 2018. Adventists reported a net increase of four churches (large or well-established congregations). Adventist membership also increased by 12% between 2006 and 2016. Such data demonstrate that meaningful growth can be achieved even in a resistant nation like Austria, although different paradigms and programs may be needed for Latter-day Saints to achieve success.

Data from Austria and from many other nations around the world do not support the claim of the “Building from Centers of Strength” paradigm that a “critical mass” of members and mature local leadership serve as catalysts for more rapid growth and higher retention. Many congregations with large initial membership and well-developed local leadership have stagnated or experienced little growth, whereas great expansion of active membership and congregations has been achieved in regions the Church entered with few or no members. Such data demonstrate that growth is achieved primarily as the result of effective missionary and member-missionary programs, strong convert retention, and local receptivity and has much less to do with initial membership numbers or the length of tenure of church members.

Future Prospects

Long periods of nongrowth or low growth, low convert baptism rates, continued struggles with member activity, decline in seminary attendance to less than half of earlier levels, the reduction in the complement of full-time missionaries serving in Austria, and the consolidation of both congregations and missions since the early 2000s, demonstrate that expansion of church outreach is unlikely in the medium-term future. Austria demonstrates that Church growth is not guaranteed despite an established local Church leadership, a “critical mass” of local membership, freedom to proselyte, the Church obtaining the highest level of government recognition, and over a century of missionary activity. Nevertheless, Vienna appears a likely candidate for a temple one day due to distance to the nearest temple and a well-established, long-term community of strong members and leaders in the city.

Church leaders in Europe began to focus on working with youth and young adults during the mid-2000s in an effort to ensure a continued Church presence in the future once aging members pass away. Institute-oriented outreach programs in coordination with member-missionary initiatives appear to be one of the best options for the Church to maintain its current national outreach and presence while attempting to expand. The Church has yet to break out of the trend of no new wards or branches created since the late 1990s. Progress must be made in integrating new converts in greater numbers to ensure as strong of a Church presence in the decades to come.

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