

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.



Argentina

Population: 43.02 millions (#33 out of countries)

By David Stewart and Matt Martinich

Geography

Area: 2,780,400 square km. Comprising the eastern half of southern South America, Argentina is geographically South America's second largest country and borders Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil, Uruguay and the South Pacific Ocean. The fertile grassland plains of the Pampas occupy northern areas whereas the plateaus and rolling hills of Patagonia comprise southern areas. The rugged Andes Mountains reach heights of nearly 7,000 meters and stretch along the entire western border. Temperate climate occurs in most areas, with arid conditions in the southeast and subantarctic in the extreme southwest. Several large rivers traverse the landscape. The Parana River is the largest river which enters Argentina from the north and empties into the ocean near the Uruguayan border. Earthquakes, windstorms, flooding, and volcanoes are natural hazards. Environmental issues include deforestation, soil degradation, desertification, and pollution. Argentina is administratively divided into 23 provinces and one autonomous city.

Population: 41,343,201 (July 2010)

Annual Growth Rate: 1.036% (2010)

Fertility Rate: 2.33 children born per woman (2010)

Life Expectancy: 73.52 male, 80.17 female (2010)

Peoples

white: 97%

other: 3%

White Europeans with primary Spanish and Italian ancestry account for 97% of the population; sizeable minorities are of Eastern European, English, French, and German extraction.. Mixed white and Amerindian, Amerindian, and other non-white groups account for 3% of the population.

Languages: Spanish (90%), Italian (3.5%), Arabic (2.5%), Quechua (2%), other (2%). Spanish is the official language and

spoken by nearly the entire population as a first or second language. Languages with over one million speakers include Spanish (37.2 million), Italian (1.5 million), and Arabic (1 million).

Literacy: 97.2% (2001)

History

Explorer Amerigo Vespucci was the first European to sight Argentina in 1502. Spanish explorers and colonists arrived shortly thereafter and the first permanent colony was established in Buenos Aires in 1580. In 1776, Spain formed the Vice Royalty of Rio de la Plata to govern present-day Argentina. Independence from Spain occurred in 1816 but infighting between centralist and federalist groups lasted for several decades. A constitution came into effect in 1853 and eight years later a national unity government was formed. Argentina quickly rose to become one of the ten wealthiest nations by 1930 as a result of introduced modern agricultural techniques, strong foreign investment, and steady immigration. The military intervened with political affairs in the 1930s and political instability followed for much of the remainder of the twentieth century. A military dictatorship ruled from 1976 to 1983 during which time thousands disappeared at the hands of the military government. Democratic rule was restored in 1983. Argentina experienced strong economic growth and development in the 1990s primarily as a result of economic reforms headed by President Menem. The revitalization of the economy began to slow in the late 1990s and political instability returned, resulting in the resignation of the president in 2001. Economic growth returned to Argentina shortly thereafter, but living conditions and wealth remain below the level of most developed nations.[1]

Culture

The Catholic Church has been the traditional dominant influence on society although participation has been limited and secular ideals have been propagated over the past several decades. Argentina is known internationally for its literature, dance, architecture, music, sports, and theater. The influence of the Mediterranean has been stronger on Argentina than other South American nations due to large-scale immigration from Spain and Italy during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Barbequed meat, bread, mashed potatoes, vegetables, salad, pasta, and Italian dishes are commonly eaten. Mate is a widely consumed drink made from the dried leaves of the yerba mate plant which is consumed from a calabash gourd through a metal straw.[2] Cigarette and alcohol consumption rates are slightly higher than the worldwide average rate of use for these substances. Argentina is renowned for its fine wines.

Economy

GDP per capita: $14,700 (2010) [31% of US]

Human Development Index: 0.775

Corruption Index: 2.9

With one of the most developed economies in South America, Argentina possesses an agricultural sector that is export-driven and benefits from diversified industry and a wealth of natural resources. A major economic crisis in the early 2000s has further stunted economic growth and development in addition to decades of political instability and inflation. The economy went into recession in the late 2000s as a result of the global financial crisis, but has since recovered. 30% of the population lived below the poverty line in 2010. Inflation is a continuing concern. Abundant farmland, industrial metals, petroleum, and uranium are natural resources. Services employ 72% of the labor force and generate 60% of the GDP whereas industry employs 23% of the labor force and generates 32% of the GDP. Food processing, car manufacturing, clothing, chemicals, printing, metallurgy, and steel are major industries. Agriculture employs 5% of the labor force and generates 8.5% of the GDP. Common agricultural products include sunflower seeds, lemons, soybeans, fruit, corn, tobacco, peanuts, wheat, and livestock. Brazil, China, and the United States are the primary trade partners.

Corruption is perceived as widespread and a serious deterrent to greater economic development. Argentina is a transshipment country for illicit drugs destined for Europe, the United States, and Mexico. Domestic consumption of illegal drugs has increased in recent years. The Tri-Border area by Paraguay and Brazil is a common site for illegal activity, including money laundering, funding for extremist groups, drug trafficking, and arms smuggling. Corruption allegations against law enforcement have been commonly reported. Argentina disputes sovereignty of several islands with the United Kingdom including the Falkland Islands, South Georgia, and the South Sandwich Islands, all of which are under British control.

Faiths

Christian: 88%

agnostic/atheist: 11%

other (mainly Muslim): 1%

Christians

Denominations Members Congregations

Catholic 31,420,832

Pentecostal 3,307,456

Latter-day Saints 380,669 841

Jehovah's Witnesses 142,012 1,953

Seventh Day Adventists 105,882 510

Religion

The National Council of Scientific and Technical Research estimates that 76% of the Argentine population is Catholic, eight percent is Pentecostal, and all other religious groups account for less than five percent of the population. There are approximately half a million Muslims.[3] Approximately 20% of Catholics are observant. Argentina has one of the largest Jewish communities in Latin America, with up to two percent of the population estimated as Jewish although many are not observant.

Religious Freedom

Persecution Index:

The constitution protects religious freedom which is upheld by the government for citizens and foreigners alike. The government grants special tax-exempt subsidies to the Catholic Church. Religious organizations must register with the government as civic associations and provide periodic reports to maintain registration. Registration is only required for religious organizations that hold public services and to obtain tax-exempt status. Foreign missionaries may serve and must obtain needed documents from immigration authorities. Public schools are secular and students may take religious classes in schools or religious institutions. Societal abuse of religious freedom has been minimal and has targeted Jews. Several prominent social leaders have taken steps in recent years to encourage tolerance toward religious minorities.[4]

Largest Cities

Urban: 92%

Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Rosario, Mendoza, San Miguel de Tucumán, La Plata, Mar del Plata, Salta, Santa Fe, Corrientes, Bahía Blanca, Posadas, Resistencia, San Salvador de Jujuy, Paraná, Santiago del Estero, Formosa, Neuquén, San Luis, La Rioja, Catamarca, Río Cuarto, Concordia, Comodoro Rivadavia, San Nicolás de los Arroyos , San Rafael, Villa Mercedes, San Juan, Tandil, Santa Rosa, Trelew.

All 31 cities with over 100,000 inhabitants have an LDS congregation. 61% of the national population resides in the 31 most populous cities.

LDS History

Latter-day Saint mission outreach in South America commenced in Argentina in the early twentieth century. Accompanied by two General Authorities, LDS Apostle Elder Melvin J. Ballard met with several German members who joined the Church in Germany and immigrated to Argentina in late 1925. Elder Ballard dedicated the whole of South America for missionary work before the end of the year and predicted that missionary work would begin slowly in South America and Argentina, but strong growth would ultimately unfold and the region would become a center of strength for the Church.[5] World War II dramatically slowed missionary progress and resulted in all but three missionaries returning home by 1944.[6] Missionary work began to expand to southern provinces by the 1950s.[7] The Argentine Mission facilitated the commencement of missionary activity in Uruguay and Chile during the 1940s and 1950s. International LDS Church leaders have regularly visited Argentina for over half

a century and have devoted considerable missionary resources to the nation.

Missions

The South American Mission was organized with headquarters in Buenos Aires in 1925. The mission divided into Argentine and Brazilian Missions in 1935. The North Argentine Mission [renamed the Argentina Cordoba Mission] was organized in 1962. Additional missions were formed in Argentina East [renamed Argentina Rosario] (1972), Buenos Aires South (1974), Bahia Blanca (1980), Salta (1988), Mendoza (1990), Resistencia (1990), Trelew [relocated to Neuquen in 1993] (1990), and Buenos Aires West (1992). The original Argentine Mission was renamed the Buenos Aires North Mission in 1974. The number of missions in Argentina increased from one in 1960 to two in 1970, five in 1980, nine in 1990, and ten in 2000.

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: 380,669 (2009)

There were 3,500 Latter-day Saints in 1959 and 35,000 in 1975.[8] Membership totaled 79,212 in 1983, 114,000 in 1987, 205,000 in 1993, and 268,000 in 1997. By year-end 2000, there were 297,976 Latter-day Saints.

Membership growth rates slowed in the 2000s. There were 320,038 members in 2002, 339,929 in 2004, 355,987 in 2006, and 371,885 in 2008. Annual membership growth rates in the 2000s ranged from a high of 3.8% in 2002 to a low of 2.2% in 2008. Membership generally increases by between 8,000 and 10,000 a year. The Argentina Buenos Aires West Mission baptized approximately 200 new converts in February 2011. In 1990, nominal Latter-day Saints comprised approximately four percent of the population of Buenos Aires.[9] In 2009, one in 109 was nominally LDS.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 481 Branches: 360

LDS meetings occurred in 20 rented halls in 1938.[10] The number of LDS congregations reached 347 in 1987, 625 in 1993, and 806 in 1997. There were 792 wards and branches by year-end 2000. Congregational growth continued for most of the 2000s as there were 804 congregations in 2002, 833 in 2004, 849 in 2006, and 863 in 2007. The number of congregations declined to 855 in 2008, 853 in 2009, and 841 in early 2011.

There were 194 wards in 1993, 376 in 1997, and 393 in 2000. The number of wards increased to 415 in 2002, 442 in 2004, 458 in 2006, and 469 in 2008. By early 2011, there were 481 wards. The number of branches declined in the 1990s from 431 in 1993 to 430 in 1997 and 399 in 2000. There were 389 branches in 2002, 391 in 2004, 391 in 2006, 386 in 2008, and 360 in early 2011. The decline of branches in the late 2000s was primary due to branches maturing into wards or consolidating into other congregations.

The first stake was organized in 1966 in Buenos Aires. Additional stakes were organized in Cordoba (1972), Mendoza (1972), Rosario (1974), Buenos Aires West (1974), and Quilmes (1975) bringing the total of stakes to six. There were 13 stakes by 1980 as the first stakes were organized in Mar del Plata, San Nicolas, and Godoy Cruz. There were 23 stakes by 1985 and the first stakes were organized in Tucuman, Bahia Blanca, Santa Fe, La Plata, Resistencia, and Salta. There were 25 stakes in 1990 as two additional stakes were organized in the late 1980s in Jujuy and Trelew. 21 new stakes were organized between 1991 and year-end 1995, three-quarters of which were outside of Buenos Aires. There were 46 stakes in 1995 increasing to 64 by year-end 2000. Of the 18 new stakes organized between 1996 and 2000, one-third were in Buenos Aires. Six additional stakes were organized between 2000 and 2005 in Parana, Buenos Aires, San Luis, Formosa, La Rioja, and Cordoba. No new stakes were organized between 2005 and 2010. In early 2011, there were 70 stakes.

Most districts operating in early 2011 were organized between 1988 and 1993 and between 2001 and 2006. There were 13 districts in 1987, 54 in 1993, 40 in 1997, 36 in 2000, 37 in 2004, and 38 in 2008. In early 2011, there were 37 districts.

Activity and Retention

The Argentina Buenos Aires North Mission baptized 163 converts in December 1987, the highest monthly total since 1982. Increase in the number of converts baptized came as a result of greater member involvement in missionary work.[11] In early 1988, 4,814 students were enrolled in seminary and 5,222 were enrolled in institute in the South America South Area.[12] Instituting the Boy Scout program in some LDS stakes increased LDS youth involvement in church in the late 1980s.[13] An Argentine stake president produced a video emphasizing the role of local leaders in retaining youth converts and sending prepared members on full-time missions in 1988.[14] Full-time missionaries have regularly participated in reactivation work. In 1992, the Argentina Buenos Aires South Mission renewed gospel interest in 50 to 75 less-active members a month and often baptized many new converts while performing reactivation work with part-member families.[15] In 1994, 13,000 members from

14 stakes in the Buenos Aires area attended a regional conference.[16] 50,000 attended a special conference with President Hinckley in 1996 with some in attendance traveling from outside of Argentina.[17] In 2004, approximately 1,000 attended the dedicatory services of a new meetinghouse in Trelew.[18] In 2010, 500 local priesthood holders and their families attended the Cordoba Argentina Temple groundbreaking ceremony.[19]

The average number of members per congregation increased from 329 in 1987 to 376 in 2000 and 446 in 2009. 11,218 were enrolled in seminary and institute during the 2009-2010 school year. The number of active members in wards and branches varies dramatically. In early 2011, the Villegas Ward in the Buenos Aires Aldo Bonzi Stake had over 100 active members whereas another ward meeting in the same building, the Ciudad Evita 2nd Ward, had fewer than 50. In 2010, one of the branches in Lujan had 90 attending church meetings, the General Rodriguez Branch had over 120 attending church meetings, and a branch in the Chivilcoy District had approximately 30 active members. The Libertador Ward in Cordoba had approximately 50 active members in early 2011. The Casilda Branch in the Cañada de Gomez District had approximately 30 active members in early 2010. The Coronel Brandsen Branch had approximately 30 attending church meetings in 2010. Most branches have between 25 and 75 active members whereas most wards appear to have between 50 and 150 active members. Nationwide active membership is estimated at approximately 70,000, or 18-20% of total church membership.

Finding and Public Affairs

In 1988, Local members and full-time missionaries in Santa Fe presented a musical version of one of the missionary discussions for the public which was publicized by two newspapers and a radio station.[20] That same year there were 38 public affairs directors for the Church in Argentina and Uruguay which facilitated exposure of LDS activities such as meetinghouse dedications, conferences, and community service projects in local and national media.[21] In 1988, 2,000 members and 400 nonmembers attended a musical performed by local members in three cities in the Resistencia region.[22] In the early 1990s, missionaries in Buenos Aires relied on local members and street contacting to find new investigators instead of door-to-door contacting.[23] Today missionaries generally rely on member referrals, investigator referrals, and street contracting to find new investigators.

Language Materials

Languages with LDS Scripture: Spanish, Italian, Arabic, Quechua, Guarani, Aymara.

All LDS scriptures and most church materials are available in Spanish, Italian, and Arabic. The Church recently completed a Spanish-translation of the LDS-edition of the Bible complete with full LDS footnotes, Bible dictionary, and topical guide. The Book of Mormon is translated in full into Aymara and Guarani. Selections of the Book of Mormon are translated into Quechua. Limited numbers of church materials for most or all auxiliary organizations are translated into Aymara, Guarani, and Quechua. Church materials translated into Nivacle include Gospel Principles Simplified and The Prophet Joseph Smith's Testimony.

Meetinghouses

In the early 1990s, the Church constructed new meetinghouses for congregations that exhibited sustained increases in church attendance.[24] In early 2011, there were approximately 350-400 LDS meetinghouses. Most congregations meet in church-built meetinghouses. Small branches and dependent branches or groups often meet in rented facilities or renovated buildings converted into meetinghouses.

Health and Safety

Health care infrastructure is moderate with good accessibility in large and medium-sized cities. There have been several accidental missionary deaths in Argentina over the past three decades. LDS sister missionaries serving in Comodoro Rivadavia died by accidental asphyxiation while they slept in their apartment in 1989.[25] In 1997, a North American full-time missionary serving in Buenos Aires received a gunshot wound to the jaw but fully recovered.[26] In 2003, a North American full-time missionary died by electrocution in a failed attempt to rescue a boy in a deep puddle in Gualeguaychu.[27] In 2006, a North American full-time missionary was killed by a drunk driver in San Luis.[28]

Humanitarian and Development Work

At least 50 LDS humanitarian and development projects had been completed as of early 2011.[29] Local members have volunteered at orphanages and donated food and clothing.[30] In July 1997, over 50 stakes and districts participated in a worldwide day of service which included painting and repairing public buildings and cleaning communities.[31] Similar activities occurred in 1998 with thousands of members participating.[32] In 2000, more than 320 members from the Rosario Argentina Stake cleaned and painted several areas of a local hospital. Materials for the service project were donated by local businesses.[33] That same year 50 members in Posadas cleaned, painted, and replaced windows in several schools.[34] In early 2001, approximately 1,000 members from Cordoba cleaned a three-kilometer stretch of the Suquia River. The project was publicized by several local newspapers.[35] In 2002, members in Cordoba repaired small homes that housed 530 disabled children.[36] In 2003, the Church donated 100 tons of food, three shipping containers of medical supplies, two containers of clothing, and 400

mattresses to flood victims in Santa Fe.[37] In 2003, the Church donated a meetinghouse in Trelew to the city to serve as a health center in exchange for property for the Church to construct a new meetinghouse.[38] That same year, over 25,000 participated in city cleaning projects nationwide on September 27th.[39] Additional projects carried out by the Church in recent years have included donating wheelchairs, school kits, humanitarian supplies, medical equipment, Braille machines, computer parts, manual translations, dental equipment, agricultural machinery, and providing neonatal resuscitation training to medical professionals.[40]

Opportunities, Challenges and Prospects

Religious Freedom

The LDS Church benefits from full religious freedom to assemble, proselyte, and worship. Foreign missionaries regularly serve in Argentina with no significant challenges obtaining needed visas and documentation. Societal abuses of religious freedom are infrequent.

Cultural Issues

Many have a basic understanding of Christianity but lack strong affinity with a particular denomination or the Catholic Church, resulting in strong receptivity to missionary-minded Christian denominations. Strong cultural identification with the Catholic Church and increasing secularism are the primary cultural obstacles confronting mission outreach efforts as both these issues have lessened receptivity of many to the LDS Church. The percentage of regularly-attending Latter-day Saints is nearly identical with the percentage of practicing Catholics, suggesting that the level of participation in religious services is unchanged for Latter-day Saint converts from the Catholic Church. This statistic is worrisome as it demonstrates the failure of full-time missionaries to instill church-attending habits into nominal Catholics who join the LDS Church. Mounting secularism has manifested itself through the passing of recent legislation that recognizes same-sex marriages and increasing identification of youth with agnosticism and atheism. Male participation in religious matters is lower than female participation across most denominations, resulting in a gender imbalance in many Latter-day Saint congregations which are predominately female. Consequently, limited male leadership has reduced the rate of church growth for Latter-day Saints as congregations rely on active male members to hold many leadership positions.

National Outreach

78% of the national population resides in cities of over 20,000 inhabitants with an LDS congregation. All cities with over 50,000 inhabitants have an LDS congregation. 153 of the 169 cities with between 20,000 and 100,000 inhabitants have an LDS congregation. The 16 cities with over 20,000 inhabitants without an LDS congregation account for one percent of the national population, are primarily located in Buenos Aires and Entre Rios Provinces, and include, in order of descending population, Santa Lucía, Gualeguay, Chajarí, Villaguay, General Güemes, Fontana, Lincoln, Juan José Castelli, Pérez, Monte Caseros, San Justo, Quitilipi, Leandro N. Alem, Avellaneda, Laboulaye, and Machagai. Dozens of cities with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants also have an LDS congregation, possibly raising the percentage of the population reached by mission outreach to 80%. Ascertaining the ratio of province population to LDS congregations provides insight into how mission outreach differs by province as congregations must meet certain numerical standards to operate, the percentage of Latter-day Saints will tend to be greatest in provinces with lower ratios of population to LDS congregations, and provinces with lower ratios of population to congregations generally receive greater mission outreach. Chubut, Tierra del Fuego, and Neuquen are the provinces that receive the greatest mission outreach (one LDS congregation per 25,000 or fewer inhabitants) whereas Catamarca, Santiago del Estero, and San Luis receive the least mission outreach (one LDS congregation per 70,000 or more inhabitants). Generally southern provinces receive higher levels of mission outreach whereas northern provinces are lesser reached. Nationally, there is an average of 47,700 inhabitants per LDS congregation.

The slight decline in the number of LDS congregations in the late 2000s has not significantly affected the extent of national outreach as most discontinued units were in cities with multiple congregations. Prospects for expanding national outreach hinge on opening additional branches and dependent units in lesser-reached communities in and surrounding the largest cities. The success of these small congregations and their maturation into independent congregations and wards relies heavily upon the training and abilities of local priesthood leaders assigned to preside over such congregations, as well as practices of full-time missionaries in ensuring that prospective converts have established firm gospel habits of church attendance and scripture reading prior to baptism. Full-time missionaries serving in the Argentina Mendoza Mission reported in 2006 that local branch presidents or group leaders made major contributions to the ultimate destiny of these starter congregations as to whether or not self-sufficient branches and wards were later established. Organizing dependent units to expand national outreach in lesser-reached neighborhoods or small, distant cities allows for greater flexibility in creating LDS congregations as Area Presidency or First Presidency approval is not required for their creation and these units can be organized or discontinued according to the ebb and flow of member participation in leadership, convert baptisms, and local member activity rates. The official number of LDS congregations in Argentina is underreported as likely dozens of dependent branches and groups operate throughout the country, but these congregations continue to lack the needed number of active priesthood holders and members to become independent congregations which are officially reported. Buenos Aires, Cordoba, Rosario, Mendoza, La Plata, and Santa Fe appear to be the most favorable cities for the opening of additional LDS congregations. The most rapid

congregational growth in Argentina to date occurred during the late 1980s and early 1990s at a time when the number of LDS missions and congregations doubled. This finding suggests that past rapid congregational growth has depended strongly on full-time missionary involvement in the planting and mentoring of new congregations.

The Church maintains a website for the South America South Area in Spanish at http://www.countrywebsites.lds.org/ar/. The Internet site provides links to other Spanish-language LDS websites, local news, and information on church beliefs, the missionary program, and regional church leadership. Use of the website by local members and full-time missionaries provides opportunities to expand national outreach and invite others to learn about the Church individually if they are uncomfortable about meeting with missionaries or attending church meetings.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Much of the potential of the LDS Church in Argentina for rapid, long-term growth has been lost due to the hundreds of thousands of less-active and inactive members that have accumulated over the decades. Overstaffing small congregations with large numbers of full-time missionaries as well as quick-baptize policies centered on numerical baptismal goals rather than on genuine conversion and convert retention has contributed to lower member activity rates in some areas. The indifference of Argentine youth to religion and culturally-low levels of church activity among Catholics has carried over into the LDS Church, generating many nominal Latter-day Saints. Full-time missionaries report that some congregations are completely unable to meet the reactivation and retention needs and challenges currently faced, with some congregations listing over 1,000 members on the ward or branch records, resulting in reliance on full-time missionaries to update unit membership record lists. Many lost members remain on ward or branch membership rosters because they are unable to be found and an unwillingness to place these names on the "address unknown" file. The number of inactive members on church records who cannot be located may number as many as 100,000, in addition to approximately 200,000 known inactives on congregational membership rolls .

Raising convert baptismal standards is of utmost priority toward ensuring long-term convert retention. Emphasizing the need for prospective converts to achieve sustained church attendance for several consecutive weeks or months prior to baptism can efficiently reduce convert attrition. Enlisting investigators, new converts, youth, and less-actives into seminary or institute programs can facilitate testimony building and gospel understanding that becomes self-sustaining and encourages spiritual independence. Enrollment in seminary and institute slightly decreased during the late 2000s, indicating recent challenges to maintain current levels of enrollment in Church Education System programs.

Organizing reactivation efforts headed by local leaders have a greater potential for a lasting impact on improving member activity rates than uncoordinated efforts by full-time missionaries to coax less-active members back into church activity. Full-time missionaries report that many inactive members claim to have left the Church ostensibly because they were offended by a church member. Efforts to reconcile past hurt, misunderstanding, and disagreement require sensitivity and care on the part of local priesthood leaders, home teachers, and visiting teachers to achieve successful reactivation that can withstand future possibilities of offense at church.

Increasing the member activity and convert retention rate among men has been a major challenge. Full-time missionaries serving in the General Rodriguez Branch in mid-2010 reported that of the 120 attending church meetings, only 19 were men over the age of 18. The development of more coordinated and organized missionary preparation programs for male youth and young adults may facilitate greater gender balance in LDS congregations over the long term as young men serve missions and remain active throughout adulthood. Several stakes and districts have recently begun youth-focused programs, such as girls' camp, to strengthen member testimonies and intra-member socialization.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

With a population of predominately European ancestry, Argentina has presented few ethnic integration issues. The greatest integration issues for most congregations are language or socio-economically based.

Language Issues

LDS scriptures and materials are available in the native language of more than 99% of the population. Widespread use of Spanish as a first and second language reduces the need for language-specific mission outreach. Non-Spanish language outreach appears most appropriate for native speakers of Arabic and some Amerindian languages, such as Quechua and Guarani. There have been no reported efforts to address these language issues by full-time missionaries in recent years, which may have resulted in limited receptivity among these ethnic groups.

Missionary Service

14 missionaries were assigned to the South American Mission in 1935. The number of missionaries increased to 45 in 1938.[41] In 1990, the Argentina Missionary Training Center serviced native missionaries serving from Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay. At the time, half of native full-time missionaries were converts of less than five years.[42] In 1994, a new missionary training center capable of housing up to 90 missionaries was dedicated.[43] 700 full-time missionaries served in the three

Buenos Aires missions in 1996.[44] In 1997, over 1,000 attended a training encouraging and educating youth on serving full-time missions.[45] In early 2011, there were likely over 1,000 LDS missionaries in Argentina and most missions appeared to be staffed half native Argentine or Latin American and half North American. Prospects for increasing the number of native full-time missionaries have been mixed in recent years as mission-aged youth often suffer from low activity rates and seminary and institute participation has dropped slightly. In early 2011, Elders Aidukaitis and Spitale performed a future missionary training for youth preparing to serve full-time missions in the Argentina Mendoza Mission. Over 500 youth attended the meeting and 100 were ready to fill out their mission paperwork. Similar programs in other missions, combined with strong emphasis on seminary and institute programs, may have the potential to increase the number of members serving full-time missions and reduce dependency on foreign missionary manpower.

Leadership

The strength of church leadership in Argentine stakes is exhibited by there never being a stake discontinued in Argentina despite low member activity rates. Argentine members began serving as branch presidents as early as 1949.[46] The first local member to serve as a mission president was called in 1974. By 1993, 21 Argentine couples had served as mission presidents and one Argentine member had been called as an LDS General Authority, Elder Angel Abrea.[47] Inadequate numbers of active male members in many congregations force full-time missionaries to fill empty leadership and administrative conditions, resulting in decreased self-sufficiency and long-term reliance on nonlocal leaders or full-time missionaries. Limited numbers of priesthood holders continues to delay the organization of additional stakes in Buenos Aires among stakes with a sufficient number of congregations to divide and among several districts. The Argentina Resistencia Mission appeared to have the greatest difficulty maintaining self-sufficiency among local priesthood holders as indicated by the closure of several congregations in the late 2000s and the discontinuation the Obera Argentina District in late 2009. Elder Richard G. Scott urged local leaders in the South America South Area to strengthen local stakes.[48] Notwithstanding these challenges, Argentine members have regularly served as mission presidents, regional representatives, area authorities, temple presidents, and General Authorities.

Jorge O. Abad from Bahia Blanca was called to preside over the Argentina Buenos Aires South Mission from 1984 to 1987.[49] In 1990, Daniel Pedro Alvarez from Buenos Aires[50] was called to preside over the Colombia Barranquilla Mission and Julio Eduardo Chumbita from Buenos Aires[51] was called to preside over the Colombia Cali Mission.[52] In 1991, Ricardo Oscar Michalek from Buenos Aires was called as a mission president.[53] In 1993, Luis C. Coronel from Santa Fe was called to preside over the Argentina Trelew Mission.[54] In 1994, Roberto Mazal from Buenos Aires was called to preside over the Colombia Bogota North Mission.[55] In 1994, Angel M. Fernandez from Buenos Aires was called as the Argentina Missionary Training Center president.[56] In 1996, Oscar A. Abrea from Buenos Aires was called to preside over the Argentina Cordoba Mission.[57] In 1997, Jorge A. Prieto from Rosario[58] was called to preside over the Spain Las Palmas Mission and Julio Cesar Alasia from Cordoba[59] was called to preside over the Peru Lima South Mission.[60] In 1998, Fernando D. Ortega from Buenos Aires[61] was called to preside over the Nicaragua Managua Mission.[62] In 1999, Daniel A. Moreno from Rosario was called to preside over the Bolivia Cochabamba Mission[63] and Hugo Nestor Salvioli from Buenos Aires was called to preside over the Guatemala Missionary Training Center.[64] In 2000, Ruben Sabatino Tidei from Neuquen was called to preside over the Argentina Buenos Aires West Mission[65] and Enrique Manuel Garcia from Buenos Aires was called to preside over the Argentina Cordoba Mission.[66] In 2001, Nicolas Luis Di Giovanni from Buenos Aires[67] was called to preside over the Peru Lima North Mission.[68] In 2002, Mario C. Romero C. from Posadas[69] was called to preside over the Argentina Mendoza Mission, Ruben Luis Spitale from Cordoba[70] was called to preside over the Argentina Resistencia Mission,[71] and David Lopez from Buenos Aires was called to preside over the Chile Osorno Mission.[72] In 2003, Luis Wajchman from Maipu de Cuyo[73] was called to preside over the Argentina Bahia Blanca Mission[74] and Claudio Daniel Zivic from Buenos Aires was called to preside over the Spain Bilbao Mission.[75] In 2005, Juan Carlos Avila from Buenos Aires was called to preside over the Argentina Mendoza Mission[76] and Horacio Jorge Nieto from Buenos Aires was called to preside over the Colombia Cali Mission.[77] In 2006, Sergio Alberto Gomez from Buenos Aires[78] was called to preside over the Honduras Comayaguela Mission[79] and Raul Hector Spitale from Cordoba was called to preside over the Argentina Bahia Blanca Mission.[80] In 2007, Esteban Gabriel Resek from Nequen was called to preside over the Chile Rancagua Mission.[81] In 2010, Alfredo Luis Salas from Buenos Aires was called to preside over the Argentina Cordoba Mission.[82]

In 1989, Miguel Angel Reginato from Bariloche was called as a regional representative.[83] In 1993, Hector Enrique Meijome from Buenos Aires,[84] Tomas F. Lindheimer from Buenos Aires, and James J. Wilson from Buenos Aires[85] were called as regional representatives.[86] In 1994, Ronaldo Juan Walker from Tucuman[87] and Jorge Luis del Castillo from Florencio Valera were called as regional representatives.[88] In 1995, Hugo A. Catron from Buenos Aires was called as a regional representative.[89] That same year, Hugo Angel Catron and David Lopez were called as area authorities.[90] In 1996, Carlos E. Aguero from Buenos Aires,[91] Jorge L. Del Castillo from Buenos Aires, and Claudio D. Zivic from Buenos Aires were called as area authorities.[92] In 2000, Jorge O. Abad from Buenos Aires was called as an Area Authority Seventy.[93] In 2001, Daniel P. Alvarez from Buenos Aires was called as an Area Authority Seventy.[94] In 2002, Carlos R. Fernandez from Resistencia was called as an Area Authority Seventy.[95] In 2003, Fernando D. Ortega from Buenos Aires was called as an Area Authority Seventy.[96] In 2005, Sergio E. Avila from Buenos Aires and Heber O. Diaz from Buenos Aires were called as area seventies.[97] In 2006, Daniel A. Moreno was called as an Area Seventy.[98] In 2007, Ruben V. Alliaud from Buenos Aires and Ruben L. Spitale from Cordoba were called as Area Seventies.[99]

In 1994, Hugo Nestor Salvioli from Buenos Aires was called as the Buenos Aires Argentina Temple president.[100] In 2000, Hugo Ruben Gazzoni from San Nicolas was called as the Buenos Aires Argentina Temple president.[101] In 2005, Angel Jose Sule from San Nicolas was called as the Buenos Aires Argentina Temple president.[102] In 2007, Elder Claudio D. Zivic was called to the First Quorum of the Seventy.[103]

Temple

Buenos Aires, north, north-central, and southern Argentina are assigned to the Buenos Aires Argentina Temple district. Some western areas near the Chilean border are assigned to the Santiago Chile Temple district whereas some northeastern areas are assigned to the Asuncion Paraguay Temple district. Argentina was assigned to the Sao Paulo Brazil Temple district following the temple's completion in 1978. Announced in 1980 and dedicated in 1986, the Buenos Aires Argentina Temple serviced Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay until temples were completed in Uruguay (2001) and Paraguay (2002). In 2008, a second temple in Argentina was announced for Cordoba. Construction on the new temple began in late 2010. The Church closed the Buenos Aires Argentina Temple in November 2009 to remodel and expand the temple for a period lasting approximately 18 months. Temple attendance has been moderate among active membership in Buenos Aires and lower in many other areas of the country. To address challenges for members residing far from the temple in Buenos Aires, a patron housing facility for was dedicated in 1994 to accommodate up to 154 people.[104] The announcement of a second temple in 2008 may indicate an increasing number of temple-attending members capable of staffing and utilizing additional temples. Low member activity rates in many areas have delayed the announcement of additional temples. Concentrated numbers of members in distant cities generate favorable prospects for the construction of additional temples. Cities with prospects for a temple over the medium to long term include Mendoza, Neuquen, Rosario, and Tucuman.

Comparative Growth

Argentina is the country with the seventh largest number of LDS members, seventh most stakes, third most districts, fifth most congregations, and sixth most missions, although Argentina ranks thirty-second in the world by population. LDS member activity rates are comparable to the region and are lower than the world LDS average notwithstanding Argentina has maintained a lower average number of members per congregation than most of Latin America. The quality and size of the Argentine priesthood leadership body and dedication to the Church among active members has been more sustainable than other Latin American countries as evidenced by no LDS stake consolidations as of early 2011. Buenos Aires had the fifth most LDS stakes of any metropolitan area outside the United States in 1988[105] and the Church in Argentina had the eighth most stakes in 1989.[106] Stagnant congregational growth occurred much later in Argentina than in most Latin American nations. With the exception of a brief period between 1997 and 2000 when the number of congregations slightly declined, new wards and branches were regularly created in Argentina whereas hundreds of LDS congregations were consolidated in several Latin American nations such as Peru, Brazil, and Chile between the late 1990s and mid-2000s. As of early 2011, Argentina was the country with the most Latter-day Saints that had never had an LDS stake discontinued. No other South American country with a larger population than Argentina receives as extensive of mission outreach as indicated by the ratio of LDS missions to population. In 2011, the ratio of LDS mission to population was one mission per 4.1 million people in 2011; lower than for Brazil (one mission per 7.4 million) and Colombia (one per 10.9 million). Membership growth rates in Argentina lagged behind most South American nations in the 2000s but the increase in the number of LDS congregations in Argentina was the third highest for the continent (49) following Brazil (156) and Venezuela (53). The percentage of Latter-day Saints in the general population is lower than in most South American nations.

Missionary-minded Christian denominations report moderate to strong levels of church growth. Evangelicals are the most successful group, increasing from one or two percent of the population in the mid-twentieth century to nearly 10% in 2011. Jehovah's Witnesses baptized over 5,000 converts and maintained nearly 2,000 congregations in 2010.[107] Seventh Day Adventists report steady membership and congregational growth. These denominations have taken a church-planting approach headed by locals whereas the LDS Church has concentrated on a centers of strength approach largely dependent on outsourced missionary manpower.

Future Prospects

Continued convert retention challenges, low member activity rates, and limited numbers of active men capable of staffing leadership positions generate a mixed outlook for LDS growth in Argentina. The organization of additional stakes in Buenos Aires will likely signal some improvement and progress in addressing these issues as over half a dozen stakes in the Buenos Aires area had enough congregations to divide in early 2011, but had too few active priesthood holder to staff additional stakes or turn some branches into wards. Receptivity remains favorable in many areas, but few new congregations have been organized since the late 2000s despite increasing membership. Greater emphasis on developing habitual church attendance will be needed to sustain greater growth over the medium term. Prospects for additional temples are possible in coming years in the largest cities.

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