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.

Guatemala

Population: 14.65 millions (#70 out of countries)

By David Stewart and Matt Martinich

Geography
Area: 108,889 square km. Stretching from the Pacific Ocean to the Caribbean Sea, Guatemala is located in Central America and borders Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, and Mexico. Tropical hot weather occurs year round, with cooler temperatures in the highlands of the Sierra Madre Mountains in the west. Mountainous terrain with rainforest and jungle covers most central and southern areas, with plains along the Pacific Coast and in the north. Several large lakes occupy central and northern areas, such as Lake Izabal. Natural hazards include volcanoes, earthquakes, and hurricanes. Deforestation, soil erosion and water pollution are environmental issues. Guatemala is divided into 22 administrative departments.

Population: 13,550,440 (July 2010)
Annual Growth Rate: 2.019% (2010)
Fertility Rate: 3.36 children born per woman (2010)
Life Expectancy: 68.76 male, 72.51 female (2010)

Peoples
Mestizo and European: 59.4%
K'iche': 9.1%
Kaqchikel: 8.4%
Mam: 7.9%
Q'eqchi: 6.3%
Other Mayan: 8.6%
Indigenous non-Mayan: 0.2%
Other: 0.1%

Europeans and Mestizo – those of mixed Amerindian and European ancestry – account for nearly 60% of the population and are concentrated in the larger cities. Mayan peoples consist of most of the remaining 40% of Guatemalans who usually live in rural, mountainous areas. K'iche' and Mam reside in the western highlands, Kaqchikel populate areas just west of Guatemala City, and Q'eqchi live in north central Guatemala.

Languages: Spanish (60%), Amerindian languages (40%). Spanish is the official language. 53 native languages are spoken in Guatemala, including 23 officially recognized Amerindian languages. Languages with over one million speakers include Spanish (8.1 million) and K'iche' dialects (2.33 million). Other commonly spoken Amerindian languages include Kaqchikel (0.524 million), Mam (0.510 million), and Q'eqchi' (0.4 million).
Literacy: 69.1% (2002)

History
The Mayans settled and founded several populous city states in Guatemala and nearby countries before 1000 AD. Most cities were abandoned around AD 1000. The Spanish began exploring and colonizing the area in the early 16th century. Independence from Spain occurred in 1821, and for the following two years Guatemala was part of the Mexican Empire. Several efforts to unify Central America into one entity failed in the 19th century and gave rise to political instability and a revolution. During the latter half of the 20th century, the Guatemalan military received American support to restrict the spread of communism. Many coups, guerrilla groups, and massacres occurred during a 36-year long conflict primarily between Mayan peoples and the central government. By 1996, the conflict formally ended after 100,000 deaths and up to one million refugees.

Greater democratization has occurred in the past two decades and political ties with other Central American nations and the United States have been strengthened.

Culture
Cultural practices vary widely based on location and ethnicity. Both indigenous and Spanish influence shape modern culture in both urban and rural areas. Catholicism was a major historical influence which has weakened in recent years with the rise of Protestant denominations. Wealthier Guatemalans tend to include Mestizos living in the largest cities, whereas the poor primarily consist of rural Mayan peoples. Mayan peoples wear colorful clothing which features designs unique to each village. Food staples include corn, beans, and vegetables. Ruins of ancient Mayan cities dot the landscape of northern Guatemala. Alcohol and cigarette consumption rates are lower than most nations.[1]

Economy
GDP per capita: $5,200 (2009) [11.2% of US]
Human Development Index: 0.704
Corruption Index: 3.4
Guatemala is one of the poorer nations in Central American and the Caribbean. A long lasting civil war, lack of skilled workers, and corruption have dissuaded foreign investment and economic development. Wealth is unevenly distributed. Remittances from the large expatriate Guatemalan community in the United States and elsewhere equate to approximately two-thirds of export earnings. In 2004, 56% of the population lived below the poverty line. Poverty among indigenous peoples is most pronounced, as 76% live in poverty and many children suffer from malnutrition. Agriculture employs half the workforce and accounts for only 13.5% of the GDP whereas services employ 35% of the labor force and generate 61% of the GDP. Primary crops include sugarcane, corn, bananas, and coffee. The largest industries include sugar refining, textiles, and furniture. The United States is the primary trade partner. Other major trade partners include El Salvador and Mexico.

Endemic corruption has deterred greater economic development and stability. Violent crime and illegal activity is widespread, includingmoney laundering, smuggling, drug trafficking, and human trafficking.. The government struggles to gather the needed resources and personnel to reduce corruption and to enforce laws equitably; accusations of corruption have been made against the police, judicial system, and recent presidents. .[2] Highway robberies in rural areas occur frequently.

Faiths
Christian: 99%
Other: 1%

Christians

Denominations	Members	Congregations
Catholic	8,807,786	
Latter-Day Saints	220,296	415
Seventh-Day Adventists	211,069	693
Jehovah's Witnesses	29,008	412

Religion
Estimates of Catholic and Protestant percentages vary. The Catholic Church claims 65-70% of the population, whereas Protestants estimate their numbers account for 35-40% of Guatemalans. Both Catholics and Protestants may be found throughout the country and are present in all major ethnic groups and political parties. Some syncretism between Amerindian indigenous religious beliefs and practices has occurred with Christianity.[3] Protestant groups have reported rapid growth over the past 50 years, and more Protestants than Catholics attend church each week.

Religious Freedom
Persecution Index:
The constitution protects religious freedom which is typically upheld by the government. The Catholic Church receives special legal status and does not have to register with the government due to its historical legacy. There is no state religion. Religious groups must have at least 25 members and keep public order to apply for formal recognition. Thousands of Protestant churches have not obtained official recognition because they regarded the process as too lengthy and difficult. Missionaries must initially work on tourist visas for three months prior to applying for temporary residence status. Protestant groups have tended to be less tolerant than Catholics of the indigenous practices of Amerindian groups.[4]

Largest Cities
Urban: 49%
Guatemala City, Mixco, Villa Nueva, Petapa, San Juan Sacatepéquez, Quetzaltenango, Villa Canales, Escuintla, Chinautla, Chimaltenango.

All of the 10 largest cities and all cities with over 20,000 inhabitants have a congregation. 20% of the national population lives in the 10 largest cities. The Guatemala City metropolitan area accounts for 20% of national population.

LDS History
In 1947, the first missionaries arrived and began to organize the Church with the assistance of a member living in Guatemala on United States' government business. The following year, 66 attended the first official church meeting. Three small congregations functioned with 250 members by 1956.[5] The Church received official recognition in 1966.[6] By the late 1970s, Guatemala had nearly twice as many members as all the other Central American countries combined. During this time period, the Church experienced some of its first successes reaching the indigenous inhabitants of Central America in small, remote villages in the Guatemalan highlands, prompting translations of selections of the Book of Mormon into multiple Mayan languages in the early 1980s. In 1990, two full-time missionaries from the United States drowned in Lake Atitlan when their boat capsized.[7] The same year, the Central America Area was created with headquarters in Guatemala City.[8] Although Central America as a whole was dedicated for missionary work in 1952, Guatemala was individually dedicated in 1991.[9] The

Guatemala North Mission administered Belize for a time in the 1990s. In 1993, the president of the Guatemala City North Mission and a mission counselor perished in a plane crash upon returning from a district conference in the remote Flores Guatemala District.[10] Some members postulate that many Book of Mormon events took place in Guatemala, leading to an emerging tourist industry catering to LDS members visiting ruins and archaeological sites.

Missions
In 1952, the Church organized the Central America Mission, which was headquartered in Guatemala City, with 12 missionaries. Headquarters were moved to Costa Rica in 1965 as the mission divided to create the Guatemala-El Salvador Mission.[11] In 1974, Guatemala gained its own mission with headquarters remaining in Guatemala City. In 1977, a second mission was organized in Quetzaltenango and a third mission named the Guatemala City North Mission was organized in 1988. In 1993, the Guatemala City Central Mission was organized. In 2010, a fifth mission was announced for Retalhuleu.

Membership Growth
LDS Membership: 220,296 (2009)
In 1977, there were approximately 14,000 members.[12] Rapid membership growth rates above 10% annually occurred through most of the 1980s and early 1990s. Membership increased to 30,177 in 1984, 99,000 in 1990, and 148,000 in 1994.

By year-end 2000, membership totaled 179,258. During the 2000s, membership grew two to three percent annually, numbering 188,531 in 2002, 200,537 in 2005, and 210,101 in 2007. For the past several years, membership has increased by approximately 5,000 per year.

Congregational Growth
Wards: 236 Branches: 179
The first stake in Central America was organized in 1967 in Guatemala City with six wards.[13] In the 1970s, the Church created three additional stakes in Guatemala City and a stake in Quetzaltenango bringing the number of stakes to five. In the 1980s, five additional stakes were created in Guatemala City and seven stakes were organized in Retalhuleu, Quetzaltenango, San Marcos, Chimaltenango, Huehuetenango, Coatepeque, and Mazatenango. In the 1990s, Guatemala added 10 new stakes in the capital and 12 stakes in Jalapa, Malacatán, San Felipe, Huehuetenango, Quetzaltenango, Coban, Zacapa, Momostenango, Patzicia, San Pedro, and Retalhuleu. The number of stakes reached 40 in 2000.

At year-end 2000, there were 24 districts, most of which were organized in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In 2010, seven districts met in small cities south and west of Guatemala City whereas six districts functioned between Guatemala City and the Caribbean Sea. Three districts operated north of Quetzaltenango and two districts functioned in San Benito and Poptun in the north.

During the 2000s, one new stake was organized in 2009 in Totonicapán and six districts were discontinued. The Church has discontinued three stakes in Escuintla (1994), Guatemala City (2008), and Mazatenango (2008).

In 1991, 331 congregations met throughout the country, increasing to a high of 451 in 2001. With the exception of 2006, every year after 2001 experienced a decline in the number of congregations to 436 in 2003, 428 in 2005, and 415 in 2009. Approximately 10 wards and 20 branches were consolidated between 2002 and 2010. Mission branches, dependent branches, and groups meet in several isolated, remote areas.

Activity and Retention
Despite adding 50,000 new members in the 2000s, the decline in total congregations over this period corresponds to poor convert retention and low member activity. . The average number of members per congregation increased during the 2000s from 397 in 2000 to 456 in 2004, 489 in 2007, and 531 in 2009. Some congregations have grown, whereas others have seen stagnation or even decline in the number of church attendees in spite of increases in nominal membership. In 2010, several congregations in the Quetzaltenango area had over 130 active members and one ward had over 200 active members. Activity rates appear to depend on location. In 1993, more than 75% of indigenous members in the mountains of the Guatemala City Central Mission were active.[14] 10,165 were enrolled in seminary or institute during the 2008-2009 school year. Although many wards have over 100 attending weekly, the average number of active members per congregation does not appear to be greater than 100. Total active membership is estimated at around 40,000, or 20%.

Meetings held on a regional or national level tend to be well attended. In 1998, 35,000 attended two sessions held for 29 stakes and districts in Guatemala City.[15] Approximately 500 youth from nine stakes attended a fireside introducing early morning seminary in 1988.[16] In 2004, the first national young women's conference had over 4,000 Guatemalan young women in attendance.[17] In 2006, 2,200 young adults attended a last minute meeting with President Boyd K. Packer and Elder Neil L. Andersen.[18]

Distance from members' homes to meetinghouses may be a factor that has reduced church attendance. Some members in western Guatemala walked three hours to attend Church meetings in 1990.[19]

Language Materials
Languages with LDS Scripture: Spanish, Q'eqchi', Kaqchikel, K'iche', Mam, Maya
All LDS scriptures are available in Spanish and Q'eqchi'. The Church recently translated a version of the Bible into Spanish with full LDS footnotes, bible dictionary, and topical guide. Only select passages of the Book of Mormon have been translated into Kaqchikel, K'iche', Mam, and Maya. A few unit, Priesthood, and missionary materials in addition to hymns and children's songs are translated in Q'eqchi' whereas translated materials in Mam are limited to the sacrament prayers, Gospel Principles, The Prophet Joseph Smith's Testimony, and hymns and children's songs. Mayan Church materials include The Prophet Joseph Smith's Testimony, hymns and children's songs. The sacrament prayers, one Relief Society resource, The Prophet Joseph Smith's Testimony, and a family guidebook are available in K'iche'. Materials in Kaqchikel consist of The Prophet Joseph Smith's Testimony and the sacrament prayers.

Meetinghouses

Most congregations meet in Church-built meetinghouses, including small branches and dependent branches or groups. In 2004, Q'eqchi'-speaking members met in 35 meetinghouses.[20]

Health and Safety
Guatemala experiences one of the highest homicide rates worldwide. Violent crime and illegal activity pose safety threats.

Humanitarian and Development Work
The Church has conducted at least 36 humanitarian and development projects including clean water projects[21] and the donation of wheelchairs, construction materials, medicine, emergency aid, school supplies, and toys to children. Education has been provided for neonatal resuscitation and health care.[22] In 2003, 250 wheelchairs were donated in Guatemala City.[23] In 2005, 7,500 members participated in nationwide service project by invitation of the minister of education to clean and repair schools throughout the country, contributing over 40,000 work hours.[24] The Church donated food and clothing and used a meetinghouse for shelter following a mudslide in northeastern Guatemala which claimed 23 lives, including three LDS members.[25] In 2007, 300 school kits were donated in Senahu.[26] In late 2009, over 7,000 members participated in nationwide Mormon Helping Hands service activities.[27]

Opportunities, Challenges and Prospects

Religious Freedom
The church faces no restrictions on holding meetings or on proselytism by full-time missionaries.

Cultural Issues
Increasing materialism in Guatemala City and strong traditional ties to Catholicism and indigenous religious and cultural practices in rural areas challenges mission outreach. A Catholic legacy combined with rapid growth in Protestant denominations indicates enduring interest in religion which facilitated rapid membership growth for the LDS Church during the 1980s and 1990s. Many previously receptive individuals have been shepherded into other highly active Christian denominations, becoming less interested and willing to meet with missionaries, join the Church, and remain active. Poverty, few opportunities for education, low literacy rates, and challenges developing economic self-sufficiency in rural areas remains obstacles to long-term church growth.

National Outreach
Five LDS missions provide excellent national outreach potential as all 22 national administrative departments have multiple congregations. However, three of the five missions are centered in Guatemala City, home to 20% of the national population. Outreach centers are also found in many small towns and rural areas with higher population densities, such as in western Guatemala. Quiché appears the most populous, least reached administrative province as only a handful of branches service over 650,000 people, nearly all of Maya descent. Most of the cities between 10,000 and 20,000 people without a mission outreach center are located in Quiché. Ethnic diversity, remote location, and few language resources have likely contributed to the limited Church presence in this department. Additional opportunities to expand national outreach exist in rural areas in mountainous areas with no nearby mission outreach centers, such as between Guatemala City and Coban.

Cities with a congregation account for approximately 40% of the national population. Those residing near a mission outreach center may increase the percentage of the population with close proximity to an LDS congregation and full-time missionaries to 60%, indicating that perhaps as many as 40% of Guatemalans remain unreached by mission efforts. However, most of the unreached population does not live far from established congregations. Forthcoming missionary work in these locations appears likely due to close proximity to mission outreach centers and expanding mission outreach potential following the organization of a fifth mission in 2010.

A website for the Central America Area is maintained by the Church in Spanish at http://countrywebsites.lds.org/gt/. The site provides information about the Church in Guatemala, church materials in Spanish, and a link to the meetinghouse locator.

Member Activity and Convert Retention
Rapid numerical membership growth coupled with low member involvement in missionary work has resulted in low convert retention and member activity as manifested by the steady decrease in congregations over nearly the past decade. Missionaries heavily implemented quick-baptism practices in the 1980s and 1990s, and stopped teaching those who did not commit to baptism within two weeks of beginning the missionary discussions. Lessons were often highly abbreviated with so-called "doorstep discussions" sometimes being taught in as little as fifteen minutes, exacerbating difficulties of understanding in a nation with low literacy rates and little tradition of reading among indigenous peoples. Converts tended to be baptized rapidly, often with little doctrinal understanding, and without having established regular habits of church attendance and scripture reading. Many of these converts stopped attending meetings after missionaries were transferred to different areas. Retained converts consisted primarily of those who could develop post-baptismal pattern of church attendance without adequate missionary teaching or member support. A large portion of converts are youth and children who join the Church without parental support.[28] Some of these converts have greatly contributed to the building up of the Church in Guatemala, but most appear to have fallen into inactivity as they never developed habits of meaningful church attendance and a solid understanding of the gospel. In the 2000s, missionaries appeared have made little progress in improving convert retention rates. The creation of the Guatemala Retalhuleu Mission in 2010 may have been partially influenced by a need for full-time missionaries to assist in reactivation and leadership training efforts nationwide.

Attempts to reactivate individuals with little remembrance of the Church has rarely succeeded as most attended church for only short periods - and sometimes not at all - after baptism. Additionally, inactive converts often have little doctrinal understanding and lack the heritage of being raised in active homes that contributes to higher reactivation rates in Utah, and so work with inactives has often been less fruitful than fresh proselyting efforts. . Missionaries report that many inactive members attend other churches or stopped actively attended the LDS Church due to proselytism of other denominations. Reactivation efforts have seen limited success in the past, although these successes were not sustained. In 1989, the Guatemala City Guatemala Mission implemented a program where full-time missionaries were paired with home teachers in their assigned congregations to

visit less active members. These efforts resulted in some areas experiencing an increase in church attendance of up to 40% and many member families returning to church activity. Reactivation efforts also resulted in an increase in convert baptisms during this period. Missionaries taught fifteenminute lessons and reported to their branch president or bishop about specific member needs.[29] Consistent involvement of local members in reactivation and member-missionary work is central to improving the quality and quantity of active membership.

Ethnic Issues and Integration
Guatemala experiences considerable friction between Mestizos and indigenous peoples. However, geography generally separates these groups and reduces conflict in everyday living. Areas along the peripheries of larger cities are likely most prone to these issues affecting missionary work and member activity, as both Mestizos and indigenous peoples may interact and attend the same congregations. The large size of membership and support of five LDS missions provides opportunities to create language-specific congregations which may also help to curb conflict between these two groups. Overall, there have not been many reported instances of ethnic conflict in the Church.

Language Issues
The Church has translated selected materials in the most commonly spoken indigenous languages. However, many less commonly spoken indigenous languages continue to have no outreach materials. Languages with over 40,000 speakers without church material translations include Poqomam (150,000), Achi' dialects (90,000), Jakalteko (89,000), Tz'utujil (84,000), Q'anjob'al (78,000), Ixil (69,000), Akateko (48,500), and Chuj dialects (40,000). Some of these languages are spoken in regions without LDS mission outreach centers. Initial efforts to establish the Church in regions with languages without Church material translations will have to rely upon the population's use and familiarity of a second language with Church materials available.

In 2000, the Church produced audio scriptures in Q'eqchi', Kaqchikel, and Mam.[30] Audio scriptures are particularly useful in areas of low literacy, although it is not clear how many local members have access to audioscriptures or the devices with which to play them. Indigenous languages continue have only a handful of written materials translated and no other audio resources available. Efforts to improve literacy and increase the number of materials available in these languages may help generate greater breakthroughs with the indigenous population. Q'eqchi' is the only indigenous language with all LDS scriptures available due to the well-established Q'eqchi'-speaking LDS community as there were 4,500 Q'eqchi'-speaking members in 1990.[31] In 2004, Q'eqchi'-speaking members met in 35 chapels and three districts.[32] Many full-time missionaries assigned to indigenous-speaking areas achieve at least some proficiency in local languages despite their complexity and lack of written literature. Audiovisual materials such as General Conference talks translated into several native languages offers a more immediate and practical approach to language issues.

Many indigenous peoples are illiterate and cannot speak Spanish fluently. Relatively few who are not fluent in Spanish are literate in their native language. This renders at least partially moot the need to translate a full church curriculum into indigenous languages with few speakers. The number of native speakers of small indigenous languages is also declining due to increasing Spanish-language education and gradual cultural assimilation. Those who do not speak Spanish experience severely restricted economic opportunities, and so it is likely that the need for translations into other languages will continue to decrease.

Missionary Service
Area leadership indicated that the Central America Area became potentially self-sustaining in its full-time missionary force in late 2009. Large numbers of North American missionaries continue to serve in Guatemala. The Guatemala Missionary Training Center was expanded in 1992.[33] In 1994, a new missionary training center was completed able to house 102 missionaries.[34] Missionaries often report of holding callings in their assigned congregations, particularly in smaller cities and in rural areas.

Leadership
Local leadership is found in the greatest numbers in Guatemala City, which has the fifth most stakes in a metropolitan area outside the United States. In 1998, President Hinckley spoke in a meeting to over 1,000 leaders from 12 stakes in Guatemala City.[35] In 1989, Carlos Amado became the first Guatemalan General Authority.[36] In 1992, Pedro E. Abularach from Quetzaltenango was called as a regional representative.[37] In 1993, Julio E. Alvarado from Guatemala City[38] and Luis A. Amado[39] were called as regional representatives. The following year, Mario A. Lopez, Eriberto Israel Perez Citalan, and Mario Salazar Moran were called as regional representatives.[40] In 2000, Jose E. Boza was called as an Area Authority Seventy.[41] In 2005, I. Poloski Cardon was called as an Area Authority.[42] In 2007, Elder Enrique R. Falabella was called to the First Quorum of the Seventy and Carlos L. Astorga was called as an Area Authority Seventy.[43] Many Church Education System (CES) employees have served in stake presidencies and other local leadership positions, but the majority of leadership positions are filled by non-Church employees.

Leadership in rural areas and districts remains limited and often lacks numbers or strength to function properly. The Q'eqchi'-speaking region has suffered from a lack of trained leaders as many are illiterate and have had little formal education. Returned missionaries who served in areas with a more established Church presence help to strengthen local leadership.[44]

Temple
The first organized temple trip to the Mesa Arizona Temple occurred in 1965 for members in Guatemala and El Salvador. 92 traveled by bus to the temple. The temple trip subsequently became a yearly tradition.[45] The Church announced the Guatemala City Guatemala Temple in 1981 and dedicated it in 1984. The temple served members throughout Central America until the dedication of the San Jose Costa Rica Temple in 2000. In 2006, a second temple for Guatemala was announced in Quetzaltenango, making Guatemala the first Spanish-speaking nation besides Mexico with more than one temple. Members in western Guatemala traveled over four hours one way to the temple in Guatemala City and were unable to attend frequently due to work schedules.[46] In 2010, endowment sessions at the Gautemala City Temple were held hourly throughout most the morning and evening and at times held every 30 minutes if needed. In 2010, the Quetzaltenango Guatemala Temple was under construction.

It is difficult to ascertain the portion of temple work conducted by Guatemalan members as the temple district in 2010 included Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Belize. Stakes in Guatemala City appear to support a large portion of the workers and

patrons on weekdays. With a second temple in Quetzaltenango, no additional temples appear likely to be built in Guatemala in the foreseeable future. Some remote districts have difficulty financing and staffing temple excursions. The new temple in Quetzaltenango will help alleviate some of these burdens, but problems with few active members and leaders continue to hinder temple work in many districts. Members who travel long distances to attend the Guatemala City Temple may stay in temple patron housing which can accommodate 112.[47] However, travel costs to the temple remain too high for many indigenous members, including most in the Q'eqchi' region.[48]

Comparative Growth
Guatemala appears to have average to high member activity rates for Latin America, although these rates are low in an absolute sense. Less than five percent of members participate in seminary and institute annually in Guatemala, similar to other Central American nations. With the exception of Nicaragua, other Central American nations also experienced stagnant or declining numbers of congregations during the 2000s and a substantial drop in membership growth rates. Although Guatemala has the most nominal and active members in Central America and is the nation with the eighth largest number of LDS members worldwide, Guatemala experiences the most limited mission outreach in Central America because millions reside in remote rural areas.

Most Christian groups reported more rapid growth than the LDS Church during the past decade. The Seventh-day Adventists grew by 60,000 members between 2003 and 2009 with most remaining active whereas LDS membership increased by 28,000 during the same time period with few converts remaining active. The much higher convert retention and activity rates achieved by Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses demonstrate that low retention and member activity rates are not inevitable, nor do they result from cultural difficulties, but rather reflect policies and practices of the LDS missionary program which have traditionally focused on large numbers of quick baptisms with little attention to gospel habits, regular prebaptismal church attendance, and long-term convert retention. The consequences of such short-term LDS mission policies are now leading to declines even in nominal membership growth as substantial missionary resources have been diverted from proselytism to deal with increasingly serious challenges of rampant inactivity and difficulties staffing congregations with many nominal members but few active ones.

Future Prospects
Guatemala will continue to be of key importance to the Church in Latin America due to its historical legacy, large Church membership, inactivity issues, and rapidly growing population. The creation of a fifth mission in 2010 will may facilitate greater attention to member-missionary efforts and may lead to greater outreach among lesser reached indigenous groups, particularly in the highland areas.

Guatemala has yet to break its trend of declining congregations. The creation of the first new stake in a decade years occurred in late 2009 from the Nahualá Guatelmala District and a portion of the Quetzaltenango Guatemala El Bosque Stake. Missionaries report that many districts are diligently working towards becoming stakes, especially in the highland areas. Some districts have combined, such as the Ceiba Amelia Guatemala District and the Santa Lucia Cotzumalguapa Guatemala District in 2009, likely in preparation to create future stakes. Most districts will need to organize additional congregations as few districts had enough branches to become stakes in 2010. Very few stakes have enough congregations to divide to create additional stakes, another sign of poor retention and low growth rates over the past decade.

Church leaders appear optimistic about future growth, although that enthusiasm has tempered with the consolidation of many congregations and reluctance to open new ones. In 1992, Elder Ted E. Brewerton served as the Central America Area president and predicted that there would be many millions of LDS members throughout Central America.[49] Predictions of future membership expansion into the millions are rendered moot by the fact that only a fraction of nominal members are active, and that the membership growth of the last decade has been inadequate to even sustain existing congregations. Very low convert retention and member activity rates suggest that a change in the primary focus of missions from achieving arbitrary baptismal quotas to a focus on growing the number of active, participating members expanding the number of self-sustaining, indigenously staffed congregations, will be necessary for sustainable future growth.

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