

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.



Sweden

Population: 9.72 millions (#91 out of countries)

By David Stewart and Matt Martinich

Geography

Area: 450,295 square km. Located in Scandinavia north of Denmark, Sweden borders Finland, Norway, and the Baltic Sea. Two major islands in the Baltic Sea are under Swedish administration: Gotland and Oland. Northern Sweden reaches past the Arctic Circle, where subarctic climatic conditions occur. Temperate climate occurs in most areas, characterized by cloudy, cold winters and mild summers. Plains constitute most of the terrain with the exception of some mountains in the west. Ice floes are a natural hazard. Environmental issues include acid rain and sea pollution. Sweden is divided into twenty-one administrative counties.

Peoples

Swedes: 81.5%

Syrian: 1.7%

Finns: 1.5%

Iraqi: 1.4%

Other: 13.9%

Swedes populate all areas of Sweden. Finns are concentrated in central areas. The Sami people number between 20,000 and 40,000 and primarily live in northern areas. Other ethnic groups consist primarily of immigrants from Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East.

Population: 10,040,995 (July 2018)

Annual Growth Rate: 0.80% (2018)

Fertility Rate: 1.87 children born per woman (2018)

Life Expectancy: 80.3 male, 84.3 female (2018)

Languages: Swedish (91.9%), Finnish (2.3%), Arabic (1.5%), Serbo-Croatian (1.2%), Spanish (1.1%), other (2%). Other languages principally consist of immigrant languages from the Middle East and Eastern Europe. There are few speakers of Romani and Sami dialects. Swedish is the official language and the only language with over one million speakers (9.15 million).

Literacy: 99% (2011)

History

The Swedes were known as merchant seafarers in the seventh and eighth centuries and were eventually grouped with other Nordic peoples as Vikings who raided and plundered regions as far as the Caspian Sea. Many religious sites important to Norse mythology and of significant religious importance such as Uppsala are located in Sweden. Christianity spread to Sweden around 1000 AD and supplanted Norse mythology and indigenous religions. Sweden became a Christian kingdom that included Finland by the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In 1397, all Nordic lands were unified as the Kalmar Union under Queen Margaret of Denmark, but the union dissolved in the sixteenth century as a result of ethnic rivalries. Gustav Vasa facilitated the establishment of a Swedish state in the sixteenth century and separated ties with the Catholic Church, thereby joining the Reformation. Sweden won wars between Poland, Denmark, and Russia in the seventeenth century, participated in the Thirty Years War, and emerged as a European power. By the mid-seventeenth century, Sweden controlled Finland, the St. Petersburg area of modern-day Russia, some areas of northern Germany, Estonia, and Latvia. The Napoleonic wars weakened Sweden's power and resulted in the loss of Finland to Russia in 1809. Sweden and Norway maintained a dual monarchy from the early nineteenth century until 1905 when Norway became independent. As many as one million Swedes immigrated to the United States between 1850 and 1890 due to changing social and economic conditions brought upon by the industrial revolution. Sweden maintained neutrality during both world wars and experienced strong economic growth and development during the twentieth century. Sweden joined the European Union in 1995. Today Sweden is known for its resilient economy and extensive social welfare system.[1]

Culture

The Christianization of Sweden in the Middle Ages marked a significant cultural turning point for the Swedish population, as traditional Norse and Viking mythology and religion were supplanted by Catholicism. The Reformation brought the Lutheran Church to Sweden, which remains the primary religious influence on culture today. During the twentieth century, liberalism and secularism took hold as religious activity rates declined, atheism spread, and positive social attitudes evolved towards homosexuality and cohabitation. Sweden has generated many talented authors, artists, musicians, actors, movie directors, and athletes during the past two centuries who have been regionally and internationally acclaimed. Traditional cuisine is comparable to other Scandinavian countries and relies heavily upon fish, meat, and potatoes.[2] Alcohol use rates are above average, and tobacco cigarette consumption rates rank slightly below world average.

Economy

GDP per capita: $51,200 (2017) [85.6% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.933 (2017)

Corruption Index: 85 (2018)

With one of the world's most advanced, stable economies, Sweden has prospered for decades as a result of a strong market-oriented government policies, neutrality and peace during both World Wars, a skilled labor force, and medium-sized population. Sweden has remained out of the euro zone due to concerns with its welfare system. Affordable housing and the integration of recent immigrants into the labor market pose challenges. Natural resources include iron ore, metallic minerals, precious minerals, lumber, and hydropower. Services employ 86% of the labor force and generate 65.4% of the GDP, whereas industry employs 12% of the labor force and generates 33% of the GDP. Iron and steel, precision equipment, wood, paper, food processing, and motor vehicles are major industries. Agriculture constitutes 2% or less of the GDP and labor force. Common agricultural products include barley, wheat, sugar beets, meat, and milk. Primary trade partners include Germany, Norway, and Denmark. Sweden has one of the lowest rates of perceived corruption worldwide and has ranked among the five least corruption countries for many years according to Transparency International.

Faiths

Christian: 68%

Muslim: 8%

Other/Unspecified/None: 24%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Church of Sweden – 6,100,000

Orthodox – 120,000

Catholic – 110,000

Jehovah's Witnesses – 22,330 – 306

Latter-day Saints – 9,701 – 40

Seventh Day Adventists – 2,871 – 37

Religion

Religion is highly correlated to ethnicity. The Church of Sweden (Lutheran) reports that 61% of Swedish citizens are members but has experienced declining membership in recent years. In 2009, nearly 73,400 members left the Church primarily to evade membership tax (usually less than 1% of income). The percentage of the population who are members of the Church of Sweden has declined by 10% in the past decade. Disaffiliated members may continue to attend services. Finns are predominantly Lutheran. Other Protestant denominations, Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the Missionary Church account for less than 7% of the population. Orthodox Christians are immigrants from East and Southeast Europe and the Middle East. Christian churches are overall poorly attended with the exception of major church festivals and religious ceremonies, such as weddings and funerals. Muslims constitute approximately 8% of the population and consist primarily of immigrants from Southeast Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. There are approximately 20,000-30,000 Jews.[3]

Religious Freedom

The constitution protects religious freedom, which is upheld by the government. Separation of church and state occurred in 2000. Recognized religious groups may receive government financial support, but registration with the government is not required. Government aid was disseminated among seventeen religious groups in the late 2010s. Religious education is required in public schools and studies all major religious traditions. Sweden has a special hate crime police unit and laws banning hateful speech relating to religious discrimination. There have been some reports of societal abuse of religious freedom targeting Muslims and Jews although the number of these incidents has decreased in recent years.[4]

Largest Cities

Urban: 87.4% (2018)

Stockholm, Göteborg, Malmö, Uppsala, Västerås, Örebro, Linköping, Helsingborg, Jönköping, Norrköping.

All ten of the most populous cities have a congregation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Thirty-four percent (34%) of the national population resides in the ten most populous cities.

Church History

Organized in 1850, the Scandinavian Mission administered Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. The first known Latter-day Saint Swedes joined the Church in Denmark in 1850. The first Swedish members to emigrate in Utah left Scandinavia in 1852. In 1853, the first Church branches in Sweden were organized in Skåne County. Police oppression of the Church occurred in the

mid-1850s and softened in 1855. The Scandinavian Mission baptized 623 converts in 1857. Twenty-five percent (25%) of the 9,854 Latter-day Saint converts baptized in the Scandinavian Mission during the 1850s immigrated to Utah, and half of the 12,887 converts baptized in the 1860s also emigrated. In 1905, the Church organized the Swedish Mission, which also administered Finland and Russia. The Church published a Swedish hymnbook in 1910 with 209 hymns. Intense persecution of the Church began in 1911 as the government encouraged counter-proselytism, the deportation of Church leaders, and strong action against local members engaged in proselytism. Missionaries did not proselyte again until 1915 when the government improved its position toward the Church. In 1916, there were less than twenty full-time missionaries in Sweden who distributed 169,000 tracts, visited 190,000 homes, held 10,000 missionary lessons, and baptized eighty-three converts. Swedish authorities refused visas for Latter-day Saint missionaries from 1920 until 1924. Twenty thousand, four hundred, and seventy-four copies of the Swedish translation of the Book of Mormon were sold in 1965.[5] President Thomas S. Monson dedicated Sweden for missionary work in 1977 after learning that the whole of Scandinavia was dedicated for missionary work in Denmark in 1850.[6] Seminary and institute began in the mid-1970s. Sweden issued a special postage stamp in celebration of the dedication of the Stockholm Sweden Temple in 1985.[7]

In 1991, Sweden pertained to the Europe North Area.[8] Former Church President Thomas S. Monson, who has Swedish ancestry, visited Sweden in 1995 to create a stake. During his visit, President Monson met with the king and queen of Sweden.[9] In 2000, the Europe Central Area began administering Sweden.[10] In 2003, the Church participated in a government-held meeting supporting traditional family values.[11] That same year, Latter-day Saint Thea Halleberg won the Victor Ornberg prize for her contribution to collecting and publishing demographic information regarding Lapp and settler families in Sorsele.[12] In 2005, apostle Elder L. Tom Perry spoke live on Radio Jönköping concerning Church administration, the procedure for calling additional leaders, and relief efforts for the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. The broadcast reached some 300,000 listeners.[13] In 2006, the Göteborg Sweden Stake center was damaged by fire.[14] Apostle Elder M. Russell Ballard visited members in Sweden and held a devotional for young single adults that was broadcasted to the entire Europe Area. His message particularly focused on the importance of members remaining true to the Church and strengthening the Church in the region in order for the Church to be stable in the decades to come.[15] Apostle Elder Dale G. Renlund was called as an apostle in 2015. Although he was born in the Salt Lake City, Utah, Elder Renlund's first language was Swedish as his mother was from Sweden and his father was from a Swedish-speaking town in western Finland.[16]

Membership Growth

Church Membership: 9,701 (2017)

There were 106 Swedes in the Scandinavian Mission in 1853, increasing to 726 in 1857.[17] 19,417 Swedes joined the Church between 1850 and 1930; 8,545 of whom immigrated to Utah.[18] Church membership declined between 1930 and 1950. Membership totaled 1,854 in 1930, 1,614 in 1940, and 1,483 in 1950. However, membership increased in the following decades to 2,569 in 1960, 3,993 in 1965, and 4,722 in 1970. In 1975, there were approximately 5,500 Latter-day Saints in Sweden. Membership reached 6,000 in the late 1970s, 7,000 in the mid-1980s, and 8,000 in 1991. By year-end 2000, there were 8,595 members.

Membership grew slowly in the 2000s and 2010s, totaling 8,678 in 2002, 8,797 in 2006, 9,206 in 2010, 9,538 in 2014, and 9,701 in 2017. A decline in Church membership occurred in 2006. Annual membership growth rates ranged from –0.7% to 1.5% during the 2000s and 2010s, but typically ranged from 0-1%. Membership generally increases by fifty to one hundred members annually.

In 2017, one in 1,027 was a Latter-day Saint.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 24 Branches: 16 (April 2019)

In 1860, there were thirty-six branches and five districts in the Scandinavia Mission. Branches operated as far north as Luleå by the 1890s. Most of the Church's efforts to expand national outreach occurred in the nineteenth century. There were seven districts in the Swedish Mission by 1934.[19] The Church created the first stake in 1975 in Stockholm. Additional stakes were organized in Göteborg (1977), Stockholm South (1995), and Malmö (1996). A second period of national outreach expansion occurred in the 1970s and 1980s. In addition to the four stakes operating in early 2011, there was one district functioning in Umeå (1970) for branches in northern Sweden. Another district operated in Sundsvall, but the district closed in 2003 and retained branches were reassigned to the Umeå Sweden District.

Thirty-nine congregations operated in 1990, including twelve wards. The number of congregations increased during the 1990s to forty-eight in 1993 and to a high of fifty-two in 1995 (14 wards, 38 branches). Starting in the late 1990s, congregation consolidations decreased the number of units to fifty-one in 2000, forty-eight in 2001, forty-five in 2003, forty-four in 2005, forty-two in 2007, forty-one in 2008, and forty in 2010. The number of wards dropped by one from twenty-five in 2000 to twenty-four in 2001. Ten branches were consolidated in the 2000s. Units discontinued after 2001 include the Avesta, Hässleholm, Kalmar, Märsta, Nynäshamn, Östersund, Sollefteå, Stenungsund Branches, and the Enskede (YSA), Limnhamn, and Tyresö Wards. Two new congregations were created in the 2000s, the Hägersten and Västerhaninge 2nd Wards. No wards or branches were created or discontinued in the 2010s as of early 2019.

Activity and Retention

Sweden possesses modest rates of LDS member activity. Large meetings and conferences have been moderately attended by active Latter-day Saints. Four thousand members from throughout Scandinavia attended an area conference held in Stockholm in 1974.[20] One thousand three hundred Swedish Latter-day Saints attended a special meeting with President Monson in 1995 following the creation of the Stockholm Sweden South Stake.[21] A local newspaper reported that there were 5,000 registered Latter-day Saints in 2005.[22] Three hundred thirty-one were enrolled in seminary and institute during the 2008–2009 school year.

The average number of members per congregation increased from 169 in 2000 to 222 in 2009 and 243 in 2017. Member activity varies widely by congregation. The Linköping Branch in the Stockholm Sweden South Stake had twenty-four active members and approximately 170 less active or inactive members in late 2010. Approximately thirty members were active in the Jakobsberg Ward, located in northwestern Stockholm, in early 2010.

In the early 2010s, returned missionaries reported the following church attendance by congregation: Utby (150), Malmö (120), Jönköping (100), Stockholm (100), Södertälje (95).Örebro (85), Gubbängen (80), Södertälje (80), Trollhättan (75), Norrköping (70), Helsingborg (60), and Skövde (25). In the mid-2010s, returned missionaries reported the following church attendance by congregation: Hägersten (200), Handen (200), Gubbängen (120), Västra Frölunda (120), Stockholm (100), Trollhättan (100), Vendelsö (100), Örebro (95), Lund (85), Malmö (80), Kungsbacka (50-80), Helsingborg (50-60), Kristianstad (40), Luleå (40), Sundsvall (40), Uppsala (40), Gävle (35), Västerås (30), Eskilstuna (20-25), Halmstad (20-25), Skövde (10), Växjö (10), and Skellefteå (5). In early 2016, local member reports noted the following church attendance by congregation: Västerhaninge (175), Vastra Frolunda (175), and Stockholm (70). In early 2019, local member reports noted the following church attendance by congregation: Utby (125), Vendelsö (125), Tröllhättan (90), Lund (70), Helsingborg (50), Karlskrona (50), and Karlstad (30). Most wards appear to have 50-150 active members, whereas most branches have 20-50 active members. Returned missionaries who served in the mid to late 2010s reported that the Sweden Stockholm Mission baptized 100-200 converts a year, and that 40-50% of converts remained active one year after baptism. Many, if not most, new converts are immigrants. Nationwide active membership is estimated at 2,900, or 30% of total membership.

Finding

In recent years, Swedish leaders have struggled to tailor missionary approaches to Swedes. In 2003, the Jonkoping Ward responded to poor receptivity to the Church and misinformation about Latter-day Saints by emphasizing to local members the need to invite others to learn about or attend the Church and sacrifice their time and effort into member-missionary work activity. Methods used by the ward to find receptive individuals and proselyte included holding open houses, firesides, concerts, and service projects; advertising in local newspapers; sending media press releases; and distributing flyers.[23] In 2010, full-time missionaries taught English and Swedish language classes in the Stockholm area for service and to find investigators.

Language Materials

Languages with Latter-day Saint Scripture: Swedish, Finnish, Serbian, Greek, Danish, Farsi, Spanish, Turkish, Arabic, Polish.

All Latter-day Saint scriptures and a wide selection of church materials are translated into Swedish, Finnish, Greek, Danish, Spanish, Arabic, Polish, and Serbian. Only the Book of Mormon is available in Farsi and Turkish. The Church has translated several unit, temple, priesthood, Relief Society, Sunday School, young women, primary, missionary, church proclamations, and family history materials in Farsi, Serbian, and Turkish. Somali language materials are limited to The Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith and Gospel Principles.

Meetinghouses

The first Church meetinghouse completed in the twentieth century was in Gubbangen in 1961.[24] There were approximately thirty-eight meetinghouses in early 2019, nearly all of which were built by the Church.

Humanitarian and Development Work

In 1940, Swedish Latter-day Saints sent food and clothing to members in German-occupied Scandinavian countries.[25] Economic prosperity and high standards of living have resulted in little need for Church-sponsored humanitarian and development work. There have been seven humanitarian or development projects conducted by LDS Charities in Sweden since 1985, and six of these projects were refugee response initiatives.[26]

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

For the past several decades, the Church has benefited from full religious freedom in Sweden to proselyte, assemble, and worship. Foreign missionaries readily obtain visas and report no major challenges with government or civic authorities.

Cultural Issues

Secularism, liberal social views clashing with scriptural morality, and nominal Christianity each have created major obstacles for Latter-day Saints to address regarding the finding, teaching, and retention of new converts. These social issues have contributed to mediocre member activity levels, as those without strong testimonies and those who are not socially well-integrated to congregations often become inactive. Those who engaged in extramarital relationships or cohabitation must marry or end these relations prior to baptism. The Church has responded to the challenging of this environment by emphasizing the role local members play in missionary work by finding, teaching, and fellowshipping investigators, new converts, and less active members. Many immigrant groups have been more receptive than Swedes to mission outreach, but present differing challenges, such as strong ethno-religious ties and difficulty assimilating into some Swede-majority congregations. High taxes and cost of living have been economic challenges for members to live Church teachings. Transportation expenses can dissuade some members from attending meetings regularly.[27] Alcohol and cigarette consumption rates are lower than most Western European countries, favoring proselytism.

National Outreach

Approximately 45% of the national population resides in cities with a Church presence. Nineteen of Sweden's twenty-one administrative counties have a congregation. Ten counties have only one Church congregation. The two unreached counties—Jämtlands and Kalmar—received mission outreach at the beginning of the 2000s, and today, their inhabitants account for 4% of the Swedish population. Of the fifty-two cities with populations between 20,000 and 100,000 inhabitants, twenty-two have their own Church congregations and constitute 13% of the national population, whereas thirty do not have a Latter-day Saint congregation and comprise 9% of the national population. Three percent (3%) of the Swedish population lives in cities that once had Church congregations. With approximately 20,000 inhabitants, Kungsbacka is the least populated city to have a Church congregation.

The Church has yet to reverse the trend of congregation consolidations that commenced in the late 1990s in order to improve national outreach potential. Active and inactive members likely reside in most of the unreached cities with over 20,000 inhabitants and provide favorable opportunities to establish new mission outreach centers in these locations. Holding cottage meetings and organizing dependent branches or groups in these areas provides flexibility in performing mission outreach in lesser-reached and unreached areas by the Church. Creating non-Swedish-speaking congregations may facilitate greater outreach among immigrant groups in the largest cities. Additional mission outreach centers are also needed for native Swedes in the most populous cities, as many reside far from meetinghouses. Sweden's third largest city of Malmö had only one congregation in early 2019.

Sweden had the sixth most visitors to the Church's website in 1997[28] and was among the first eight countries to have a country-specific Church website.[29] The Church continues to maintain a website for Sweden in Swedish at http://www.jesukristikyrka.se/. There is also a Swedish version of Mormon.org that provides information for those interested in learning more about the Church at https://www.mormon.org/swe. The Internet sites provide information on Latter-day Saint beliefs, meetinghouse locations, links to other church websites, local news, and missionary visits. High rates of Internet usage among the Swedish population and referring interested individuals to the site by local members and missionaries may increase national outreach over time.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Member activity and convert retention rates have been mediocre, and the average number of members per congregation remains low, indicating that the number of active members in most congregations is small. Full-time missionaries regularly teach and find inactive members but report little success in sustainable reactivation. Many less active members are chronically less active and never develop regular church attendance habits. Immigrant converts struggle the most to remain active due to language barriers and motivation by some converts to join the Church for secondary gain. Small numbers of active members continue to threaten the closing of additional congregations. Cultural attitudes towards religion and reliance on full-time missionaries in smaller congregations appear the primary contributors to low member activity rates in some areas. Young single adult outreach centered on institute and church attendance appears to be the most favorable means of addressing current inactivity issues.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

There have been few ethnic integration issues reported by full-time missionaries. Some local members report tension among

Swede members regarding cultural attitudes about immigrant groups. Language barriers appear to be the greater challenge for immigrant investigators and converts to attend congregations.

Language Issues

Nearly the entire population has Church materials available in their native language. Languages without current translations of Church materials do not appear likely to have materials translated in the near future. Non-Swedish-speaking congregations may be organized in the coming years to meet the needs of immigrant groups, such as Serbs, Turks, Africans, and Iranians, although ongoing assimilation of such groups into Swedish society may decrease the need for language-specific outreach.

Missionary Service

The full-time missionary force remains staffed primary by foreign missionaries. There were 165 missionaries serving in Sweden in 1950.[30] In 1995, there were sixty-eight full-time missionaries assigned to Sweden.[31] Local members regularly serve members, but the percentage of youth and young adults that serve missions is low. Swedish Latter-day Saint missionaries have served throughout Europe, North America, and in some countries in Asia. Greater emphasis on missionary preparation may increase the number of members who serve missions and reduce reliance on international missionary manpower to staff the Sweden Stockholm Mission.

Leadership

Sweden has well-trained Church leadership that supports four stakes, one district, and a temple despite fewer than 10,000 members. With only a couple of exceptions, all congregations appear to have local leaders. The number of active priesthood holders remains limited and has likely contributed to the consolidation of congregations in recent years. Swedish members have served as mission presidents, regional representatives, area authorities, and general authorities. In 1993, Arne L. Hedberg from Orebro was called as the Sweden Stockholm Mission president,[32] and R. Ingvar Olsson from Göteborg was called as a regional representative.[33] In 1994, Bo G. Wennerlund from Stockholm was called as the Stockholm Sweden Temple president.[34] In 2000, Hans H. Mattsson from Haninge was called as an Area Authority Seventy,[35] and Arne Lennart Hedberg from Orebro was called as the Stockholm Sweden Temple president.[36] In 2006, Bengt Oskar Hoglund from Vasterhaninge was called as the Stockholm Sweden Temple president.[37] In 2007, Hans Gunnar Gustav Ljungh from Trollhattan was called as the Copenhagen Denmark Temple president.[38] In 2010, R. Ingvar Olsson from Haninge was called as an Area Seventy,[39] and Per G. Malm from Jonkoping was called to the Second Quorum of the Seventy.[40] In 2015, Sven Ingemar Nyman from Södertälje was called as president of the Stockholm Sweden Temple.[41] In 2016, Rolf Ingvar Olsson from Stockholm was called as the president of the Copenhagen Denmark Temple.[42] In 2018, Lars Gösta Malm from Svövde was called as president of the Stockholm Sweden Temple.[43]

Church leadership also appears self-sufficient and not reliant on Church employees to staff local needs. There were no Church employees among members of stake presidencies when the Malmo Sweden Stake was reorganized in 2012.[44] In 2013, none of the members of the reorganized Stockholm Sweden Stake were Church employees.[45] In 2015, none of the members of the reorganized Goteborg Sweden Stake presidency were Church employees.[46]

Temple

Announced in 1981 and completed in 1985, the Stockholm Sweden Temple administers to members living in central and northern Sweden, whereas the Denmark Copenhagen Temple (announced in 1999 and dedicated in 2004) serves members in southern Sweden. Sweden pertained to the Bern Switzerland Temple district prior to the completion of the temple in Sweden. The Stockholm Sweden Temple district performed between 42,000 and 50,000 endowments a year in the mid-1990s. A guest house operates next to the temple with 120 beds to accommodate members traveling long distances.[47] Russia and the Baltic states were part of the temple district until the completion of the Helsinki Finland Temple in 2006, and today Latvian members continue to attend the Stockholm Sweden Temple. In 2019, the Stockholm Sweden Temple appeared underutilized as only 3-5 endowment sessions were scheduled per day. Furthermore, other types of temple ordinances are performed for only 1-2 per day based upon the schedule posted on the Church's website.[48]

Comparative Growth

Sweden was the only Scandinavian country to not experience stagnant membership growth during the 2000s. However, member activity and convert retention rates appeared the lowest in the region, as other nations with half as many Latter-day Saints as Sweden (Denmark, Norway, and Finland) had the same number of members or more enrolled in seminary and institute as Sweden in the late 2000s. Priesthood leadership appears as developed as Denmark and Finland due to the operation of multiple stakes with fewer than 10,000 members. Sweden was the only Scandinavian country to experience a significant decline in the number of congregations operating during the 2000s, as the number of congregations declined by only one in Norway and Finland and by two in Denmark during this period. Sweden ranked among the ten countries that experienced the greatest percentage decline in the number of congregations during the 2000s (–20%). In the 2010s, membership growth rates have been comparable to Norway and Finland. Furthermore, congregational growth trends in Sweden in the 2010s have also mirrored other Nordic countries as there has been no significant change in the number of wards or branches.

Missionary-minded Christian groups report membership decline or stagnant to slow growth. Seventh-Day Adventists entered Sweden in 1901 and have experienced stagnant membership growth for many years. Adventist membership declined from 3,046 in 1998 to 2,812 in 2009, and the number of churches declined by seven from forty-six to thirty-nine. Adventists generally baptize fifty or fewer converts annually.[49] In 2016, Adventists reported nearly 2,900 members, thirty-three churches (large or well-established congregations), and four companies (small or recently established congregations). Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostals have been the most successful Christian groups in recent years although both of these groups currently experience stagnant growth. Jehovah's Witnesses reported 22,418 active members meeting in 325 congregations in 2009. Witnesses baptized over 300 converts in 2009. However, Witnesses reported no growth in the 2010s as there were 321 baptisms and 22,330 active members meeting in 306 congregations in 2018.

Future Prospects

President Monson stated in 1995: "As I offered the prayer of rededication of Sweden, I emphasized that the future of the Church in Sweden will be maximized when the membership of the Church and the missionaries work hand in hand in meeting and teaching the gospel to others."[50] In the late twentieth century, President Hinckley stated the following regarding the future growth of the Church in Sweden: "Sweden has for many years been like this glass of water—not much action. In the middle 1800s when the first missionaries came to Sweden, thousands of people joined the Church. It was a great and mighty harvest…there will be a new harvest, a second harvest in Sweden, that will bring thousands of Swedes into the Church."[51] However, prospects for such a "second harvest" for the Church in Sweden do not appear likely for the foreseeable future given recent growth trends and current conditions. The outlook for future Church growth in Sweden is poor over the medium-term due to the continuing trend of congregation consolidations or stagnant congregational growth, moderately low member activity rates, few members serving full-time missions, and failure of missions to formulate missionary approaches tailored to the needs and circumstances of the highly secular modern Swedish society. Greater growth will ultimately hinge on the faithfulness of local members in their member-missionary efforts. Emigration remains a challenge for the Church to maintain self-sustainability. President Hinckley stated the following in May 2004 in Denmark: "Thousands upon thousands of Latter-day Saints from Denmark and Sweden left these lands to go to their Zion in the mountains of the West. Great is their posterity. . . . Now we don't emigrate any more. Stay here to build Zion in Denmark, Sweden, and Iceland. Let us be strong. Let us be men and women of great faith. Let us hold on to the truth. Let us do what is right."[52] Time will tell if the Church is able to maintain its current geographical field of operation with an aging Latter-day Saint membership, member inactivity problems, and convert attrition.

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[4] “Sweden.” International Religious Freedom Report for 2017. Accessed 9 April 2019. https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dlid=280964#wrapper

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