



Reaching the Nations International Church Growth Almanac

Country reports on the LDS Church around the world from a landmark almanac. Includes detailed analysis of history, context, culture, needs, challenges and opportunities for church growth.



Spain

Population: 47.74 millions (#29 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 505,370 square km. Located in Southeastern Europe, Spain consists of the majority of the Iberian Peninsula and borders Portugal, France, Andorra, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Atlantic Ocean. The Pyrenees Mountains form the French border. Mountainous areas dominate several other areas, such as in the southeast and northwest. Temperate climate prevails in most areas with hot summers and cold winters. Major rivers include the Ebro, Tajo, and Guadalquivir. Spain administers two archipelagos, the Canary and Balearic Islands, and several disputed territories with Morocco (Ceuta, Melilla, Islas Chafarinas, Penon de Alhucemas, and Penon de Velez de la Gomera). Droughts and flooding are natural hazards. Environmental issues include pollution, water shortages, deforestation, and desertification. Spain is administratively divided into seventeen autonomous communities and two autonomous cities.

Peoples

Spaniard: 86.4%

Moroccan: 1.8%

Romanian: 1.3%

Other: 10.5%

Population: 50,015,792 (July 2020)

Annual Growth Rate: 0.67% (2020)

Fertility Rate: 1.51 children born per woman (2020)

Life Expectancy: 79.0 male, 85.2 female (2020)

Languages: Spanish (86%), Catalan (7%), Galician (5%), Basque (1%), other (1%). Castilian Spanish is the official language. Catalan, Galician, and Basque are recognized regionally and spoken in northern and extreme eastern areas. Languages spoken by over one million native speakers include Spanish (37 million), Catalan (3.7 million), and Galician (2.3 million).

Literacy: 98.4% (2018)

History

Prehistoric tribes inhabited the Iberian Peninsula for millennia prior to known ancient civilizations exerting their influence and control of the area. The Phoenicians, Celts, Carthaginians, and Greeks were among the first to settle and trade in Iberia. The Romans annexed the peninsula in prior to 100 BC and significantly influenced language, laws, and religion for the next several centuries. The Visigoths took control of much of Spain in the fifth century, and the Moors invaded in the early eighth century, conquering nearly the entire peninsula. Spain was not fully reunified and the Moorish peoples driven out until the beginning of the sixteenth century. Spain reached its golden age of power and influence in the sixteenth century as the Spanish Armada dominated the Atlantic, and wealth and resources were exploited throughout the Americas. The Spanish Armada was defeated by the English in 1588, contributing to the empire's declining influence for the next several centuries. Spain was occupied by France during the Napoleonic era and lost most of its overseas colonies by the mid-nineteenth century. The Spanish-American War was the final blow to Spain's steady decline in power as the United States annexed Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and several islands in the Pacific. During the first half of the twentieth century, Spain experienced significant economic and political turmoil, resulting in civil war and the rise of General Francisco Franco to power in 1939. Spain remained neutral during World War II and began to liberalize the economy in the 1950s. During the following two decades, Spain achieved rapid modernization and growth through economic liberalization. A parliamentary democracy was reinstituted following the death of General Franco in 1975.^[1] Spain joined NATO in 1982 and the European Community (European Union) in 1986. The government dealt with significant terrorist threats internally from the Basque Father and Liberty (ETA) and Muslim extremists with alleged ties to global terrorist networks, like Al Qaeda, during the 2000s. In the 2010s, political instability associated with the Catalonia independence movement posed challenges, albeit economic growth in Spain outpaced the average for the European Union during some of these years.

Culture

Spain manifests its historical legacy through significant contribution from peoples and civilizations that have previously inhabited the peninsula, namely the Romans and Moors. Many of the cities in southern Spain reflect architecture and city design reminiscent of North Africa, whereas northern Spain shares many commonalities with Western Europe. The indigenous inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula have also made lasting cultural contributions. Spain heavily influenced the culture of Latin America until the independence of most colonies by the early nineteenth century. The Catholic Church has widely influenced culture and customs for centuries and in recent years has become less powerful on local society. Many literary works have worldwide fame, such as Don Quixote, which was first published in the early seventeenth century and is considered the first novel. Other Western European nations heavily influenced art and culture during the last two centuries, namely Italy, France and Germany. Cuisine varies by location, with Mediterranean foods and dishes in coastal areas and soups, breads, and salted dishes in the interior. Soccer is the most popular sport. Tobacco cigarette and alcohol consumption rates are high.

Economy

GDP per capita: \$38,400 (2017) [64.2% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.893 (2018)

Corruption Index: 62 (2019)

Spain experienced rapid economic growth from the 1990s to the onset of a major recession in the late 2000s. Unemployment rates more than doubled, reaching 19% in December 2009. The financial sector has experienced significant damage from the global financial crisis. Ongoing debt issues with concern by international investors about the possibility of governmental default

has weighed down the economy and threatened the stability of the euro currency. Recovery occurred after most other major world economies, whereas debt has remain an ongoing problem along with uncertainty about the government's ability to meet its financial obligations. Services generate 74.2% of the GDP and employ 71.7% of the work force, whereas industry generates 23.2% of the GDP and employs 24.0% of the work force. Major industries include textiles, food processing, metal manufacturing, chemicals, shipbuilding, tourism, and pharmaceuticals. Agriculture accounts for less than 5% of the work force and GDP. Grain, vegetables, olives, sugar beets, and citrus are primary crops. Other agricultural activities include processing animal byproducts, fish, and livestock. Primary trade partners include France, Germany, and Italy.

Corruption is perceived as more prevalent than in many European countries. The level of perceived corruption has not noticeably changed in the past decade. Due to its geographic location and long coastline, Spain is a major transshipment point for illicit drugs destined for Europe from Latin America, North Africa, and Southwest Asia. Money laundering from Colombian drug cartels and organized crime is an ongoing problem. Illegal immigration from North Africa has been an ongoing issue.

Faiths

Christian: 78.6%

Atheist: 11.3%

Agnostic: 7.6%

Other: 2.5%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Roman Catholics – 34,460,881

Orthodox – 1,500,000

Evangelicals – 461,998

Jehovah's Witnesses – 116,118 – 1,485

Latter-day Saints – 59,730 – 137

Seventh Day Adventists – 17,123 – 169

Religion

Most Spaniards are Roman Catholic, but 55% of those who identify as Catholic report that they almost never attend mass.[\[2\]](#) No other religious group constitutes more than 10% of the population. Protestants and Muslims are each estimated to number around 1.7-2.0 million, or 3%. Most of the Muslim population are immigrants who are not citizens and come primarily from Morocco. Eastern Orthodox Christians are found primarily among immigrants from Eastern Europe. The Jewish population is estimated at around 45,000.[\[3\]](#)

Religious Freedom

The constitution protects religious freedom, which is upheld by the government. There is no state religion, but the Catholic Church has the closest relationship with the government. Several religious groups have obtained special registration status with the government called notorio arraigo, including Orthodox Christians, Buddhists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Latter-day Saints, and this registration permits these groups to perform marriages. However, Latter-day Saints have continued to be unable to conclude agreements with the government to obtain the associated benefits with notorio arraigo status such as obtaining tax benefits. Instances of societal abuses of religious freedom have increased in recent years and most of these incidents have been targeted at Roman Catholics.[\[4\]](#)

Largest Cities

Urban: 77%

Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Sevilla, Zaragoza, Málaga, Murcia, Palma de Mallorca, Las Palmas, Bilbao, Alicante, Córdoba, Valladolid, Vigo, Gijón, L'Hospitalet, Vitoria-Gasteiz, A Coruña, Elche, Granada, Terrassa, Badalona, Oviedo, Cartagena, Sabadell, Jerez de la Frontera, Móstoles, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Pamplona, Almería, Alcalá de Henares, Fuenlabrada, Leganés, Donostia-San Sebastián, **Getafe**, Burgos, Albacete, Santander, Castellón de la Plana, Alcorcón, La Laguna, Logroño, Badajoz, Salamanca, Huelva, **Marbella**, Lleida, Tarragona, Dos Hermanas, Torrejón de Ardoz, Parla, Mataró, León, Algeciras, **Santa Coloma de Gramanet**, Alcobendas, Cádiz, Jaén, Orense, **Reus**, Telde, Girona, **Barakaldo**.

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

Fifty-eight of the sixty-three cities with over 100,000 inhabitants have Latter-day Saint congregations. Forty percent (40%) of the national population resides in the sixty-two largest cities.

Latter-day Saint History

The first known Spanish Latter-day Saint convert joined the Church in the 1870s in Spain, immigrated to Utah, and assisted in the translation of the Book of Mormon in Spanish. Additional Spanish converts did not join the Church until two American Latter-day Saint congregations were operating in Spain in 1966. In February 1968, the Madrid Branch became the first official congregation established with forty attending services. The creation of the branch became possible due to the passing of the Spain Religious Liberty Law in 1967. The Spanish government granted official recognition to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in October 1968.[\[5\]](#) Elder Marion G. Romney dedicated Spain for missionary work in May 1969.[\[6\]](#) Both seminary and institute were introduced by 1975. Missionaries were first assigned to the Canary Islands in 1979.[\[7\]](#) Spain joined the Europe Mediterranean Area in 1991.[\[8\]](#) In 1992, President Hinckley presented the Spanish king and queen a copy of the Book of Mormon.[\[9\]](#) In 1996, President Hinckley became the first Church president to visit Spain and attended the groundbreaking ceremony for the Madrid Spain Temple.[\[10\]](#) In 1998, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir performed in Spain on its European tour.[\[11\]](#) In early 1999, two missionaries from the Spain Las Palmas Mission drowned during a sightseeing activity.[\[12\]](#) Spain became part of the Europe West Area in 2000,[\[13\]](#) and in 2008 the Europe West Area and the Europe Central Area were consolidated into a single area (the Europe Area). In 2013, the Church organized its first stake in the Canary Islands. Latter-day Saint American Jared Tucker was numbered among the thirteen people killed in the August 2017 terrorist attack in Barcelona.[\[14\]](#) The Church closed its Madrid Missionary Training Center (MTC) in January 2019 as part of a worldwide effort to consolidate the number of small MTCs to conserve operating costs.[\[15\]](#)

Missions

In 1970, the Church created its first mission in Spain from the French Mission. Two additional missions headquartered in Barcelona and Seville (Sevilla) were organized in 1976. In 1987, a fourth mission was created in Bilbao. In 1988, the Spain Las Palmas Mission was created in the Canary Islands from the Spain Seville and Portugal Porto Missions.[\[16\]](#) The Spain Seville Mission was later renamed the Spain Malaga Mission in 1993. The Spain Las Palmas Mission was discontinued in 2006 and consolidated with the Spain Malaga Mission.[\[17\]](#) In 2010, the Spain Bilbao Mission was consolidated into the remaining three Spanish missions. In 2018, the Spain Malaga Mission was discontinued and merged with the Spain Madrid Mission. In 2020,

there were only two missions in Spain.

Membership Growth

Church Membership: 59,730 (2019)

In 1974, there were 620 Latter-day Saints^[18] increasing to 1,000 the following year.^[19] There were over 5,000 members in 1980 and over 10,000 members by 1983. By 1990, there were 17,000 Latter-day Saints in Spain.

There were 1,800 members living in the Canary Islands and Madeira in 1988.^[20] Rapid membership growth occurred in the early years of missionary work on the islands, as the Spain Las Palmas Mission baptized 1,000 converts the first year of its operation and in 1990 baptized eighty converts a month.^[21] There were 1,243 members in the Jaen Spain District in 1995.^[22] Membership growth slowed starting in 1993, with annual membership growth rates between 2%–4% for much of the rest of the 1990s. In 1996, there were 28,000 members nationwide.^[23] By year-end 2000, membership stood at 31,695.

Modest membership growth continued into the 2000s as membership increased to 34,831 in 2002, 39,784 in 2005, 45,729 in 2009. Annual membership increases generally ranged from 1,200 and 1,800 and annual membership growth rates varied from 3.2% to 5.2%. Membership growth was stagnant in the Canary Islands for much of the 2000s as there was no increase in the 3,500 members from 2001 to 2005. In 2009, the Spain Bilbao Mission reported the most convert baptisms in one year in two decades (an 81% increase over the number of convert baptisms in 2008), and the Spain Barcelona Mission baptized 402 converts.

In the 2010s, the Church reported annual membership growth rates that ranged from 2-3%. Church membership reached 53,933 in 2015 and 59,730 in 2019. Membership growth over the past several decades has been largely influenced by significant numbers of South American converts joining the Church in Spain.^[24] The composition of membership varies by region, with some congregations having few native Spaniards.

In 2019, one in 832 was nominally a Latter-day Saint.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 94 Branches: 44 Groups: 4+ (June 2020)

In 1974, there were seventeen Latter-day Saint congregations.^[25] By May 1975, there were three districts and twenty-five branches.^[26] At this time, branches operated in Alcoy, Alicante, Badalona, Barcelona, Burgos, Cadiz, Castellon, Cordoba, Elche, Madrid, Malaga, Murcia, Sabadell, Sevilla, and Valencia.^[27]

The Church created the first stake in Madrid in March 1982, which was followed seven months later by the organization of the Barcelona Spain Stake. By 1990, there were members living on five of the seven inhabited Canary Islands organized in fourteen branches and two districts.^[28] A third stake headquartered in Sevilla (Seville) began operating in 1988, and a fourth stake was created in 1995 in Cadiz. By 1996, four stakes and sixteen districts functioned in Spain.^[29]

Most new stakes created in the 1990s and early 2000s were organized from two districts or a district and a part of a preexisting stake. The Church created additional stakes in Hospitalet (1997), Elche (1997), Madrid East (1999), Valencia (2003), and Granada (2004). As new stakes were organized, the number of districts declined dramatically from sixteen in 2000 to six in 2010. Cities or islands that once had districts headquartered in them that were consolidated during this period and do not presently have their own stakes or districts include Alcoy, Asturias, Badajoz, Fuerteventura, Lleida, Malaga, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Talavera, and Zaragoza. Many of these former districts had fewer than four branches, became part of a newly created stake, or became part of a preexisting stake. For the first time in many years, the Vitoria Spain Stake was created from a single district in 2009, becoming the first stake to function in northern Spain. In September 2010, there were ten stakes and six districts in Spain. In 2012, three new stakes were organized in Cartagena, Lléida, and Madrid Central. In 2018, the A Coruña Spain Stake was organized from two districts headquartered in the Galicia region. In 2019, there were fifteen stakes and two districts.

In 1987, there were 107 congregations, increasing to 144 in 1991. The number of congregations remained stagnant for the rest of the 1990s. The total number of congregations declined in the 2000s from 144 in 2000 to 133 in 2009 due to the consolidation of branches and few new congregations created. In 2000, there were forty wards and 104 branches and in 2005 there were fifty-six wards and eighty-six branches. The Canary Islands and extreme southern Spain experienced the greatest reduction in the number of congregations during this period. The island of Gran Canaria had eight branches in 2001 and in 2010 had only three branches. The island of Tenerife had six branches in 2001 and in 2010 had four. In southern Spain, several branches were discontinued in the Gibraltar area, including both branches in Ceuta and Melilla. In the 2010s, the number of congregations increased to 142 in 2015 (eighty-six wards, fifty-five branches), but then decreased to 137 in 2019 (ninety-three wards, forty-four branches). New congregations organized in the 2010s and in early 2020 included the Vic Branch (2011), Huércal-Overa Branch (2011), Vilagarcia de Arousa Branch (2011), Ibiza Branch (2012), Molina de Segura Ward (2012), Rota Military Branch (2012), Valencia 3rd Ward (2013), Malaga 4th Ward (2013), Badalona 2nd Ward (2014), Manresa Branch (2014), Marratxi Branch (2015), Pamplona 2nd Ward (2016), Tortosa Branch (2017), Madrid 7th Ward (2018), and the Barcelona 4th Ward (2020). Congregations closed in the 2010s included the Antequera Branch (2012), Puerto de la Cruz Branch (2013), Mijas Branch (English) (2016), Vilagarcia de Arousa Branch (2017), Cartagena 2nd Ward (2017), Seville 2nd Ward (2017), Malaga 4th Ward (2017), Avilés Branch (2018), Benavente Branch (2018), and the Puertollano Branch (2019).

Activity and Retention

Over 600 priesthood leaders nationwide met for a special regional conference in 1992. Over 4,200 attended the general session of the regional conference.^[30] Nearly 10,000 members attended the 10 dedicatory sessions for the Madrid Spain Temple in 1999.^[31] In 2004, almost 8,000 from Spain and Portugal attended a special meeting with President Hinckley in Madrid.^[32] Sixty members, primarily youth, from the Hospitalet Spain Stake participated in the first handcart pioneer trek in Spain in 2019.^[33] Enrollment was 1,661 in seminary or institute during the 2008–2009 school year. The average number of members per congregation has increased for several consecutive decades from 132 in 1989 to 221 in 1999, 344 in 2009, and 436 in 2019 due to low congregational growth rates and increases in the number of active members per congregation as many branches have advanced into wards. The number of active members per ward significantly varies from as few as sixty to as many as 200; however, most wards usually have between eighty and 150 active members. Branches usually have between twenty and sixty active members. Estimated member activity and convert retention rates widely vary from congregation to congregation. During the 2010s, slightly more than half of new converts appear to continue to regularly attend church services one year after baptism. Total active membership is estimated at approximately 11,500, or 19% of total membership.

Language Materials

Languages with Latter-day Saint Scripture: Spanish, Catalan, Arabic, English.

All Church scriptures are available in Spanish, including a Latter-day Saint edition of the Bible complete with full footnotes, Bible dictionary, and topical guide. All Church scriptures and many church materials are translated into Arabic. All Latter-day Saint scriptures and The Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith are available in Catalan. Most languages spoken by Eastern European immigrants have all Church scriptures translated with a wide selection of church materials available. Church materials translated into Basque include Gospel Fundamentals, The Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith, hymns and children's songs, and the sacrament prayers.

Meetinghouses

There are approximately 100 Latter-day Saint meetinghouses in Spain. Most congregations meet in church-built meetinghouses

or renovated buildings owned by the Church. Some small congregations meet in rented spaces.

Humanitarian and Development Work

The Church has completed thirty-one humanitarian and development projects in Spain since 1985—most of which have been community projects and refugee response efforts.^[34] Blood donation efforts by members in 1997 helped Spain become self-sufficient in its blood supplies.^[35] In 1998, Relief Society members in the Elche Spain Stake produced 450 handmade dolls for needy children.^[36]

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is registered with the government and faces no restrictions regarding missionary work or assembly. The government has not granted specific privileges entitled to other religious groups to the Church, such as tax benefits. Latter-day Saints have positive relations with the government and report few instances of persecution and intolerance.

Cultural Issues

The declining influence of the Catholic Church on society and religion in Spain has provided positive and negative effects for Latter-day Saints. The Catholic Church has provided many Spaniards with a foundation of belief that Latter-day Saints can build upon. However, lower attendance levels in religious affairs and nominal membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints appear partially affected by Spanish society's attitude and practices surrounding one's relationship with religion. Secularism has quickly occupied the void left by the declining influence of Catholicism. Returned missionaries report that many, if not most, youth and young adults are nonreligious and often identify as atheist or agnostic. Latter-day Saints are also often misunderstood or misidentified with other religious groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses. High cigarette and alcohol use create a challenging environment for missionaries to navigate, as many suffer from addictions to these substances. Failure to completely abstain from harmful substances and practices not condoned by the Church may result in lower convert retention and member activity. Widespread infidelity with cultural practices of maintaining mistresses also presents challenges, and has led to the excommunication or inactivity of many members, including some priesthood holders.

National Outreach

Approximately 45% of the national population resides in cities with mission outreach centers, including nearly all cities with over 100,000 inhabitants. With the exception of Ceuta and Melilla, all administrative divisions in Spain have multiple mission outreach centers. A sizeable percentage of the unreached population resides in urban areas. Of the more than 330 cities with between 20,000 and 100,000 inhabitants, which constitute 33% of the national population, only around sixty have mission outreach centers. Essentially all small cities, towns, and villages are unreached by the Church. The least populated cities with a Church presence have approximately 30,000 people such as Inca.

Many of the unreached medium-sized Spanish cities can have mission outreach centers established with careful planning and proper vision. Missionaries serving in the Spain Barcelona Mission reported visiting remote cities with members and investigators and helping prepare for the establishment of congregations in these locations, such as Vic in the late 2000s which eventually had a branch organized in the early 2010s. Efforts by full-time missionaries and local leaders can help reduce the number of unreached medium-sized cities through holding cottage meetings, forming groups or dependent branches, and

through service activities like Helping Hands.

Prospects for Internet-based mission outreach appear favorable. In 1997, Spain ranked among the fifteen nations with the most visitors to the Church's website.^[37] The Church operates a country website for Spain at <https://es.laiglesiadejesucristo.org/>. The site contains online videos on the Church, explains Church doctrines, practices, and history, and provides local church news and contact information for missionaries. Use of the site in proselytism initiatives by both members and missionaries may facilitate greater outreach throughout Spain, especially among those not prepared for lessons from the full-time missionaries but have some interest.

Past historical events have provided media exposure for the Church, namely the dedication of the temple in Madrid. The Madrid Spain Temple open house was covered by every major media outlet.^[38] Public relations and media outreach will be important for future proselytism.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Mission policies promoting the rushed baptism of investigators who have not developed habits of regular church attendance habits is one source of low member activity rates in Spain today. However, missionaries frequently report that many less actives state they stop attending church because they were offended by another member of the Church. Missionaries report that a large number of the inactive members in the Canary Islands reported that they stopped attending church because they were offended, although deeper issues of testimony or behaviors contrary to church teachings often underlie such claims. Concerns with a lack of conversion among newly baptized members were one of the major themes reported by Spanish members in the mid-2010s. Overall, inactive members appear to have little recollection of church doctrines and practices, as many were baptized with limited understanding and without firm gospel habits. This lack of a solid foundation of testimony and understanding among many inactives has limited the success of reactivation efforts. The transient nature of many converts who are not native Spaniards further complicates efforts to address activity issues. Improvements in member activity have occurred in several areas of Spain over the past two decades, as evidenced by the creation of several new stakes, which require a specified number of active members and tithing-paying priesthood holders to function. Emphasizing institute, seminary, and youth outreach programs appears to be a meaningful means of reducing past poor convert retention and improving member activity rates.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Assimilating Latin Americans and Spaniards into the same congregations presents the most widespread ethnic integration issue. Disparities in the demographics of Latter-day Saint congregations and the general population have come as a result of greater receptivity of Latin Americans and the strength of the Church in Latin American countries, as some members have immigrated to Spain from Latin America. Missionaries reported in 2010 that the Almeria Ward was approximately a third Ecuadoran, a third Argentine, and a third Spaniard. Few challenges integrating these groups into the same congregations have been reported due to common language and many cultural similarities between Spain and Latin America. Some congregations with an overrepresented Latin American presence may experience challenges baptizing and keeping active a Spaniard minority. Integrating Africans and non-Spanish speakers into congregations may be the greatest ethnic integration issue. Missionaries have attempted to proselyte Romanians but report resistance and low receptivity to their message. Conflict between native Spanish ethnic groups such as Basques and Catalans appears minimal due to the concentration of these ethnic groups in the respective areas of the country.

Language Issues

As the second most spoken language by Latter-day Saints worldwide, Spanish has an ample supply of church materials and scriptures. The Church has a limited number of materials in other indigenous languages, such as Catalan and Basque, and is unlikely to translate additional materials in either of these languages or languages currently without church materials due to the widespread use of Spanish throughout the country and the low demand for church material translations in these languages.

Missionary Service

Spain remains reliant on other nations to staff its full-time missionary force. By 1975, there were 130 full-time missionaries serving in Spain. A MTC operated in Spain between the 1990s until January 2019, but the MTC has generally trained few missionaries. In the mid-2000s, there were 800 missionaries serving in Spain, but by late 2010 there were fewer than 300 due to reductions in the assigned missionary complement with the contraction of the size of the world missionary force. The Madrid MTC had just fifteen missionaries in September 2010. The recent closure of the Madrid MTC not only appeared attributed to a focus to conserve operating costs, but also a lack of growth in the number of members in Spain and neighboring missions who serve full-time missions. Missionary preparation classes offered through stakes, districts, or institutes may help increase the number of Spaniards serving full-time missions. Greater emphasis is also needed on preparing converts for baptism and helping to establish firm gospel habits so that they can become active members who go on to serve in the church, participate in member-missionary work, and serve full-time missions when possible.

Leadership

All congregations appear to be led by local members, whether Latin American immigrants or native Spaniards. Church Education System (CES) employees have frequently served in leadership positions, and most stake presidencies had at least one CES employee prior to 2020, which may indicate an inadequate supply of local male leadership. For example, two of the three members of the Madrid Spain East Stake Presidency were Church employees in 1999.^[39] However, by the 2010s approximately half of stake presidencies in Spain had one Church employee, whereas the other half of stake presidencies did not have any Church employees. This suggests improvements with the maturity and size of leadership within the general Church membership.

Several Spanish members have served as national or international church leaders. However, the Church almost always assigns foreigners to serve as presidents for Spanish missions or the Madrid Spain Temple. Boanerges Rubalcava from Cornellà was called as a regional representative in 1990.^[40] In 1994, Faustino Lopez R. from Madrid was called to preside over the Spain Malaga Mission.^[41] Francisco Jose Vinas from Villalba was called as a regional representative in 1995^[42] and later that year as an area authority.^[43] Elder Francisco Vinas was called to the Second Quorum of the Seventy in 1996^[44] and to the First Quorum of the Seventy in 1998.^[45] In 1997, Francisco I. Gimenez from Barcelona was called as a mission president^[46] over the Colombia Bogota South Mission.^[47] In 2003, Francisco Gimenez was called as an Area Authority Seventy.^[48] In 2008, Faustino Lopez from Madrid was called as an Area Authority Seventy.^[49] In 2012, Manuel Parreño Ruiz from Elche was called as the Argentina Bahia Blanca Mission President.^[50] In 2014, Carlos Jesús Somoza Díaz from Madrid was called as the new Madrid Spain Temple President.^[51] Remaining districts appear unable to become stakes, not primarily from a lack of active priesthood holders, but from inadequate active general membership.

Temple

The Madrid Spain Temple was announced in 1993, and the groundbreaking occurred in 1996. Prior to the completion of the temple, the closest temples were in Switzerland and Germany. The Church began looking for a temple site in Spain as early as 1992.^[52] The Madrid Spain Temple was dedicated in 1999 and is part of a church complex also containing temple patron housing, a distribution center, the former MTC, and a stake center.^[53] Endowment sessions have historically been held hourly Tuesday through Saturday. In addition to being located in the city with the most Latter-day Saints in Spain, the Madrid Spain Temple is centrally located geographically, which allows for good access for members residing in most areas. Prospects of additional temples in Spain appear unlikely for the medium-term future, although the Church's second temple in Spain will likely be announced in Barcelona given that there are three stakes within Barcelona and surrounding cities. However, a small temple in the Canary Islands may also be forthcoming given recent trends with the announcement of small temples in remote islands of the world with at least one stake such as Guam and Okinawa, Japan.

Comparative Growth

Spain has the largest Latter-day Saint population in continental Europe despite an official Church presence of just over fifty years. Most Western European nations have had a church presence since the mid-nineteenth century and today have few members, partially as a result of heavy emigration of Latter-day Saints until the twentieth century and lower receptivity to Latter-day Saint missionaries. The only European nations with a higher percentage of Latter-day Saints than Spain are the United Kingdom and Portugal. Spain currently exhibits one of the most rapid annual membership growth rates in Western

Europe, which has been sustained for several decades. Continued steady membership growth notwithstanding, reduction in the full-time missionary force is also impressive due to the size of current church membership, as more rapid membership growth rates tend to occur in countries with small memberships. The Madrid Spain Temple appears to be one of the best utilized in Europe, as manifest by endowment sessions scheduled hourly. However, membership and congregational growth remain outpaced by most Latin American countries, where only a few cities with over 20,000 inhabitants have no mission outreach center as opposed to the hundreds of small and medium-sized cities that are unreached in Spain.

Other missionary-oriented Christian groups have reported essentially stagnant membership and congregational growth within the past decade. The number of congregations and members for Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses has been relatively unchanged since the early 2010s. Latter-day Saints and Seventh-Day Adventists maintain approximately the same number of congregations. However, Jehovah's Witnesses are among the most successful groups and maintain as many congregations in Spain as Latter-day Saints operate in all of Europe.

Future Prospects

The Church has significantly reduced its outreach in Spain since the mid-2000s as indicated by the closure of three of the prior five missions, the consolidation of approximately two dozen branches (many of which were the only branches that operated in a city), the closure of the Spain MTC, and the reduction of the full-time missionary force to less than half its prior level. With fewer full-time missionaries, low member activity rates, small Latter-day Saint family sizes, and increasing secularism and disinterest in organized religion among the Spanish population, the Church faces significant challenges in expanding national outreach for the long-term. Greater breakthroughs with the native Spaniard population and improved member activity rates are needed to sustain long-term growth. Nevertheless, the Church in Spain continues to report steady annual membership growth rates (i.e. 2-3%) and moderate convert retention levels (slightly more than 50% for one year after baptism). Notwithstanding this finding, the Church in Spain operated fewer official congregations in early 2020 (138) than it did nearly thirty years ago in 1991 (144) even though Church membership has increased by approximately 160%. Local Church leaders must undertake an active role in the promotion of effective member-missionary strategies and laying the groundwork to organize new congregations in lesser-reached or unreached areas within their stakes and congregations to help reverse the longstanding trend of stagnant congregational growth and better reach the Spanish population before societal conditions may further worsen and result in even more diminished receptivity to the Latter-day Saint gospel message.

[1] "Background Note: Spain," Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, 18 August 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2878.htm>

[2] "Spain," International Religious Freedom Report 2009, 26 October 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127338.htm>

[3] "2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: Spain." U.S. Department of State. Accessed 6 June 2020. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/spain/>

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