

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.



Solomon Islands

Population: 0.61 millions (#170 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 28,896 square km. Consisting of almost 1,000 islands in far western Oceania, the Solomon Islands sit to the northeast of Australia between Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea. Most islands are mountainous with the remainder consisting of coral atolls. Tropical climate prevails year round subject to a monsoon season. Natural hazards include typhoons, earthquakes, volcanoes, and tsunamis. Deforestation, soil erosion, and deteriorating coral reef health are environmental issues. The Solomon Islands are administratively divided into nine provides and one capital territory.

Population: 609,794 (July 2010)

Annual Growth Rate: 2.315% (2010)

Fertility Rate: 3.39 children born per woman (2010)

Life Expectancy: 71.37 male, 76.63 female (2010)

Peoples

Melanesian: 94.5%

Polynesian: 3%

Micronesian: 1.2%

Other: 1.1%

Unspecified: 0.2%

Languages: Pijin is widely spoken as a language of inter-ethnic communication and shares many linguistic similarities with Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea and Bislama in Vanuatu. English is the official language although not widely spoken. 71 native

languages are spoken, most of which have fewer than 15,000 speakers.

Literacy: N/A

History

The first inhabitants settled the islands around 1000 BC. European powers began to exploit the human population for labor in the region. In the late 19th century, the British made the islands a protectorate and gained jurisdiction for islands previously under German control during World War I. Missionaries successfully converted most of the population to Christianity during the 19th and 20th centuries. During World War II, the Solomon Islands became a crucial battleground in the Pacific between the United States and Japan. Several long, bloody battles were fought such as the Battle of Guadalcanal. During the 1990s, intense ethnic conflict and government destabilization occurred resulting in a 2003 Australian-led effort to reestablish order with troops and police from various Pacific nations under the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands. Order and civility has been reestablished in most areas, but ethnic tensions remain high - particularly on Guadalcanal - and the economy continues to be poorly developed.

Culture

Language and culture generally vary village to village resulting in a rich mosaic of Melanesian, Polynesian, and Micronesian traditions. Most of the population follows tribal laws and customs. Due to the many isolated islands with poorly developed infrastructure and little modernization, radio is one of the most influential forms of media. Foods common to Oceania such as taro root, yam, fruit, and seafood are most commonly consumed. Soccer is the most popular sport. Alcohol consumption rates are low.

Economy

GDP per capita: $2,600 (2009) [5.6% of US]

Human Development Index: 0.552

Corruption Index: 2.8

The economy collapsed as a result of internal strife in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Some economic growth has occurred, but rich natural resources continue to be poorly utilized and most goods must be imported. The population generally subsides upon fishing, forestry, and agriculture. Agriculture employs 75% of the workforce and produces 42% of the GDP whereas services employ 20% of the workforce and account for 47% of the GDP. Primary agricultural products include cocoa, coconuts, potatoes, vegetables, and fruit. Industry is limited to fishing, mining, and logging. China, Singapore, and Australia are primary trade partners. Taiwan has taken interest in increasing food crop yields and improving agricultural practices.

Corruption is perceived as widespread. Officials who break the law are rarely prosecuted. Lawlessness in the early 2000s has subsided, but the government relies upon other nations to help maintain order.

Faiths

Christian: 97.1%

Other: 2.4%

Unspecified: 0.3%

None: 0.2%

Christians

Denominations Members Congregations

Anglicans 213,428

Catholic 115,861

South Seas Evangelical 103665

Methodist 67,077

Seventh-Day Adventists 39,666 184

Jehovah's Witnesses 1,830 43

Latter-Day Saints 299 4

Religion

Christian missionaries have converted most Solomon Islanders. The largest denominations include Anglicans (35%), Catholics (19%), South Seas Evangelicals (17%), Methodists (11%), and Seventh Day Adventists (10%). Most non-Christians follow indigenous beliefs and are concentrated among the Kwaio community on the island of Malaita.[1]

Religious Freedom

Persecution Index:

The constitution protects religious freedom which is upheld by government practices and law. Religious groups must register with the government and there have been no reports of registration being denied. There have generally been no reports of societal abuses of religious freedom. Missionaries may openly proselyte. Some villages have imposed law that can restrict some aspects of religious freedom such as day of worship.[2]

Largest Cities

Urban: 18%

Honiara, **Gizo**, **Auki**, **Tulaghi**, **Kirakira.**

Cities and towns listed in bold have no LDS congregation

One of the five largest cities or villages has a congregation. 11% of the national population lives in the five largest cities. Only Honiara and Gizo have over 5,000 inhabitants.

LDS History

Elder James E. Faust dedicated the island for missionary work eight years before any formal missionary worked started in 1987. The Solomon Islands were assigned to the Papua New Guinea Port Moresby Mission in 1992.[3] In 1995, the mission assigned the first missionary couple to the country and held the first sacrament meeting in Honiara on February 5th.[4] Young elder missionaries were introduced in the late 1990s and were evacuated in 2000 due to violence and political instability.[5] Missionaries were reassigned in the 2000s. The first LDS presence off of Guadalcanal was established in Malaita in 2011.

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: 299 (2009)

Most members appear to have joined the Church prior to 2001 or after 2006. By year-end 2000, there were 180 members. Little membership growth occurred for most of the 2000s as there were 186 members in 2002 and 196 in 2006. During the late 2000s, membership growth accelerated particularly in 2007 and 2009. There were 246 members in 2008. Membership increased by 50% between 2006 and 2009.

Congregational Growth

Branches: 4

The Church created the Honiara Branch in the late 1990s. In 2010, the Honiara Branch divided to create two new congregations in the Honiara area, the Burns Creek and White River Branches. In 2011, a fourth branch was organized on Malaita Island in Fauabu and all four branch were included in the newly organized Honiara Solomon Islands District.

Activity and Retention

Low member activity levels were apparent in only one branch functioning until 2010. In recent years member activity rates appear to have significantly improved. Sacrament meeting attendance in the Fauabu Branch averaged around 50 in late 2011. In November 2011, 261 individuals attended the Sunday morning district conference session when the Honiara Solomon Islands District was formally organized. Active membership is likely around 200, or 50% of total church membership.

Language Materials

Languages with LDS Scripture: English, Bislama

Church materials translated in Bislama include some unit, temple, Priesthood, Relief Society, Sunday School, Young Women, audio/visual, Primary, missionary, hymns, children's songs, and family history resources.

Meetinghouses

Church meetings are likely held in a renovated building or a rented space.

Health and Safety

Past ethnic violence and lawlessness on Guadalcanal may pose future safety threats to members and missionaries if these conflicts are reignited.

Humanitarian and Development Work

Senior missionary couples have served periodically since the mid-1990s. In 2010, senior missionaries appeared to participate in humanitarian and development work. A humanitarian missionary couple for the Pacific Area visited in 2010 to assess needs in a hospital in Honiara.

Opportunities, Challenges and Prospects

Religious Freedom

No government restrictions limit the Church's activities. Missionaries may travel to the country and proselyte freely. However, ethnic violence has interrupted missionary work in the past. Isolation and continued political uncertainty have likely continued to affect little mission outreach. In 2011, government officials informed senior missionaries that the Church was free to expand outreach throughout the country.

Cultural Issues

A strong Christian tradition in many areas may make many less receptive to the Church due to familial and societal connections to particular denominations. Members have reported some prejudice and isolation from the community for joining the Church. One family in Honiara used to rely on a communal water source located by some other neighborhood churches. However, after joining the LDS Church, the nearby churches barred them from using the water source, requiring the family to travel a longer distance for fresh water. The lack of economic development brings many hardships to the population and provides humanitarian opportunities for the Church.

National Outreach

A relatively small population distributed over many islands, poor nationwide infrastructure, few urbanites, and membership limited to Honiara will continue to challenge expanding national outreach. Mission outreach remains restricted to Honiara, home to nine percent of the national population, and the small village of Fauabu on Malaita. Due to the recent arrival of the Church and its transient missionary presence, many are likely unaware of the Church's presence and beliefs in Honiara. Increasing mission outreach in Honiara will be crucial toward establishing outreach centers elsewhere in the islands as many different ethnicities who reside in Honiara that maintain contact with their home villages. The creation of two new branches in 2010 and the first branch outside of Guadalcanal in late 2011 provide valuable opportunities to expansion of mission outreach. Holding cottage meetings and conducting periodic visits to villages outside Honiara on Guadalcanal appears most feasible and effective for increasing outreach in the near future as over 100,000 live on Guadalcanal (17% of the national population). Western Province has the largest population without a church presence.

Distance from mission headquarters in Papua New Guinea is another limiting factor for expanding national outreach due to travel time and expenses. Papua New Guinea has 10 times as many people as the Solomon Islands - many of which are unreached by the Church - and many member districts which need assistance from missionaries. This has likely contributed toward few available resources allocated to the Solomon Islands. An increase in missionaries and resources assigned to the mission may lead to some expansion in missionary work in the Solomon Islands. LDS Radio programs broadcast throughout the islands providing information and an introduction to the Church may present a potential means of informing and creating interest in unreached locations.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Low levels of member activity appear linked to few local Church leaders, limited pre-baptismal training and habituation of prospective converts, and limited training and assistance from mission leadership based in Papua New Guinea. Seminary and institute have yet to be introduced which may be a sign of a lack of youth and church programs to meet their needs. Remoteness in many areas of the world has created a more resilient membership base capable of meeting the needs of increasing numbers of new converts, which may be currently occurring in Honiara. Increase in active membership in recent years appears a major contributor to the establishment of additional congregations in Honiara.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Areas of the Solomon Islands reached by Latter-day Saints have experienced some of the most acute interethnic conflict, primarily between the indigenous inhabitants of Guadalcanal and peoples who have moved to the island from other areas, particularly Malaita. These issues are less present in many other areas of the islands, which may lead to greater Church growth in these locations once missionary work commences.

Language Issues

No Church materials have been translated into Pidgin English or any indigenous languages. Due to linguistic similarities with Bislama, some materials translated in Bislama may assist in teaching the gospel and helping members and investigators understand Church doctrine. Low literacy rates in some areas make distributing Church literature a less effective approach to mission outreach and also create future challenges in developing local leadership and member self reliance.

Missionary Service

Very few if any local members have served full-time missions. North Americans were among the first young elder missionaries to serve a decade ago, but now missionaries assigned are Polynesian or Melanesian. In 2010, the Church assigned one Samoan senior missionary couple to the islands. In 2011, a North American senior couple was assigned to the Solomon Islands.

Leadership

In early 2011, all three branches had native branch presidents. The Solomon Islands nonetheless face a shortage of Priesthood holders capable of holding leadership positions. In 2010, the Honiara Branch president had served for seven years in this position and was called as branch president only three months after joining the Church. Few Priesthood holders and leaders may lead to delays in establishing additional congregations and expanding mission outreach. As a result of limited numbers of local priesthood leaders, the Church called a senior missionary as the first district president in late 2011.

Temple

The Solomon Islands belong to the Sydney Australia Temple district. Few if any members have attended the temple due to

their limited numbers and travel expenses. A temple in Papua New Guinea may be forthcoming once additional stakes are organized in that country, which would lessen travel time and expenses for Solomon Islander members.

Comparative Growth

No other sovereign nation in Oceania has as limited of a Church presence as the Solomon Islands. One in 2,000 is a member of the LDS Church; the country with the next lowest percentage of members in the region is Papua New Guinea with one member per 350 people. Most islands in Oceania are at least one percent LDS, with some nations having Church membership exceed 20% of the population. Little church growth has occurred partially due to the Church not establishing an official presence until the mid-1990s whereas most of Oceania had the Church first established in the nineteenth century or between 1950 and 1980. Member activity rates appear lower than in most of Oceania.

Many Christian denominations have experienced steady growth over several decades. Several of these denominations have had a long term presence and maintain congregations throughout the islands. Many of these churches historically converted the population to Christianity. These groups report high levels of self sufficiency and have few foreign workers.

Future Prospects

The Solomon Islands may be on the brink of consistent Church membership growth and expanded outreach on Guadalcanal. However, political and social instability has prevented greater mission outreach in the past and may continue to delay growth. Greater mission resources are needed to assist in the development of local leadership, which remains extremely limited in numbers. Once this occurs, a positive outlook for strong church growth appears likely as the Church has experienced favorable receptivity throughout the region. Accelerated membership growth in the late 2000s and leadership development in the early 2010s may indicate increased progress coordinating local members and full-time missionaries in missionary efforts. Additional congregations may continue to be created on Guadalcanal and Malaita in the coming years as the four operating LDS congregations develop greater self-sufficiency. Sending more native youth on missions appears to be of key importance to promote long-term growth and to develop self-sustaining congregations.

[1] "Solomon Islands," International Religious Freedom Report 2009, 26 October 2009. http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127288.htm

[2] "Solomon Islands," International Religious Freedom Report 2009, 26 October 2009. http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127288.htm

[3] "7 new missions created; total now 275," LDS Church News, 29 February 1992. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/22528/7-new-missions-created-total-now-275.html

[4] "From around the world," LDS Church News, 15 April 1995. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/25990/From-around-the-world.html

[5] "Missionaries evacuated from Solomon Islands," LDS Church News, 17 June 2000. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/37992/Missionaries-evacuated-from-Solomon-Islands.html