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.

Samoa

Population: 0.2 millions (#190 out of countries)

By David Stewart and Matt Martinich

Geography

Area: 2,831 square km. Consisting of two main islands in the heart of Polynesia, Samoa is located half way between Hawaii and Australia in the South Pacific Ocean. Tropical climate occurs which is modified by dry (May to October) and rainy (November to April) seasons. Narrow coastal plains outline the two main islands of Savaii and Upolu whereas rugged mountains dominate the interior. Typhoons and volcanoes are natural hazards. Environmental issues include soil erosion, deforestation, invasive species, and overfishing. Samoa is divided into eleven administrative districts.

Population: 192,001 (2010)

Annual Growth Rate: 0.605% (2010)

Fertility Rate: 3.32 children born per woman (2010)

Life Expectancy: 69.28 male, 75.13 female (2010)

Peoples

Samoan: 92.6%

Euronesians (mixed European and Polynesian): 7%

Europeans: 0.4%

Languages: Samoan (100%). Samoan is the official language.

Literacy: 99.7% (2003)

History

Samoa is believed to be one of the first settled islands in Polynesia, being settled approximately 2,000 years ago. Settlers ventured to many other Polynesian islands from Samoa during the first millennium after Christ. Europeans first reached Samoa in the early eighteenth century, but regular contact did not occur until the 1830s when English missionaries and traders arrived. In the early twentieth century, administration of the Samoan islands was divided between the United States (American Samoa) and Germany. In 1914, New Zealand gained control over Western Samoa which continued until independence in 1962. In 1997, the name was officially changed in the constitution from Western Samoa to Samoa.[1] In 2009, an earthquake and tsunami damaged much of the country and resulted in 200 deaths.

Culture

Samoa continues to practice many aspects of its indigenous cultural, political, social, and linguistic customs and systems known as "fa'a Samoa." Christianity supplanted indigenous religious beliefs that supported an intricate mythological system and today Samoa is among the most religious countries in the world. Dances and ceremonies mark many social occasions. Cuisine consists of coconuts, seafood, taro, rice, fruit, and seaweed. Samoans traditionally receive gender-specific tattoos called pe'a for males and malu for females. American football and rugby teams frequently have Samoan team members and rugby is one of Samoa's most popular sports.[2] Cigarette and alcohol consumption rates are low.

Economy

GDP per capita: $5,300 (2009) [11.4% of US]

Human Development Index: 0.785

Corruption Index: 4.1

Dependent on development aid and family remittances from overseas, Samoa has a stable economy that also relies on agriculture and fishing for exports and employment. Lumber, fish, and hydropower are natural resources. Agriculture employs two-thirds of the work force and generates 12% of the GDP. Common agricultural products include coconuts, fruit, taro, yams, coffee, and cocoa. Services and industry employ the remaining one third of the work force and generate 75% and 13% of the GDP, respectively. Food processing, building materials, and auto parts are major industries. Primary trade partners include American Samoa, Australia, Fiji, and China.

Transparency International ranked Samoa as the least corrupt nation in Polynesia in 2010. There have been isolated reports of government corruption in the 2000s which included public servants stealing government funds.[3]

Faiths

Christian: 98%

other: 2%

Christians

Denominations Members Congregations

Latter-day Saints 69,244 133

Congregational 64,512

Catholic 37,248

Methodist 27,456

Assemblies of God 13,248

Seventh Day Adventists 8,534 40 (includes American Samoa and Tokelau)

Jehovah's Witnesses 391 9

Religion

All but 2% of Samoans follow a Christian denomination. Primary Christian denominations include Congregationalists, Catholics, Methodists, Latter-day Saints, Assembles of God, and Seventh Day Adventists. Between 2001 and 2006, figures from the Samoan censuses indicated continued steady decline of mainstream Christian denominations (Congregationalists, Catholics, and Methodists) and an increase in nontraditional and evangelical Christians. Non-Christians principally consist of Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and Baha'is.[4]

Religious Freedom

Persecution Index:

The constitution protects religious freedom which us upheld by the government. There are no restrictions on religious freedom and religious discrimination or persecution are not tolerated. There is no state religion, albeit the government has favored Christianity. Village chiefs frequently determine the religious denomination of relatives. Major Christian holidays are recognized as national holidays. There are no requirements for religious groups to register with the government. Missionaries may operate freely and churches may establish their own schools. Christian education in public schools is required. Villages traditionally had one Christian church and today many larger villages have multiple church denominations that coexist peacefully. Some nontraditional churches face resistance when attempting to establish additional congregations in unreached areas.[5]

Largest Cities

Urban: 23%

Apia, Vaitele, Faleasi'u, Vailele, Le'auva'a, Fale'ula, Vaiusu, Malie, Siusega, Laulii.

All ten of the largest cities and villages have an LDS congregation. 35% of the national population resides in the ten most populous urban areas.

LDS History

Two Hawaiian LDS missionaries attempted to establish the Church in 1862 but were unsuccessful.[6] The first mission president arrived in June 1888 to establish the Samoan Mission.[7] The first LDS conference in Samoa was held in late 1888 in Apia and was attended by 56, including 35 baptized members. Some Protestant leaders perpetuated misinformation about the Church shortly thereafter which challenged proselytism conditions for LDS missionaries. Savaii opened for LDS missionary work in 1890. The translation of the Book of Mormon into Samoan commenced in 1900 and the mission divided to create the Tongan Mission in 1916. Samoan church membership increased to the point when in the 1920s the Church purchased several plantations that helped to finance church schools. North American missionaries were withdrawn between 1940 and 1946 as a result of World War II. During this period, local Samoan missionaries staffed the mission. Labor missionaries began serving in the 1950s and built meetinghouses and Church President David O. McKay visited in 1955.[8] Seminary and institute began in the mid-1970s. Cyclones in the late 1980s and early 1990s devastated the islands, damaging church property and killing one Latter-day Saint.[9] In 1995, Latter-day Saint Tufuga Samuelu Atoa from Pesega received the Western Samoa Order of Merit for his civil contributions to Samoa.[10] In 1997, Samoan Head of State Malietoa Tanumafili II conferred the title of chief on Polynesian Cultural Center President Lester Moore, the first time that the title of chief was bestowed on a non-Samoan.[11] Samoa pertained to the Australia/New Zealand Area until 1998 when Samoa was included in the newly created Pacific Islands Area.[12] A fire destroyed the Apia Samoa Temple in 2003 shortly before renovations were to be completed, marking the first time in LDS history that an operating temple had burned.[13] That same year, a North American full-time missionary perished in a flooding accident.[14] 22 Latter-day Saints perished in the 2009 tsunami.[15] In 2010, Samoa pertained to the Pacific Area.

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: 69,224 (2009)

There were 124 Latter-day Saints by 1890 and approximately 1,100 by 1898.[16] From the mid-1960s to mid-1970s, LDS missionaries generally baptized 1,000 new converts a year.[17] By 1974, 15% of the population was LDS and there were 19,000 Latter-day Saints on Samoa and American Samoa.[18] The most rapid, sustained membership growth occurred in the 1980s and early 1990s. There were 40,000 members by 1988[19] and membership reached 60,000 in Samoa and American Samoa collectively by the early 1990s. By year-end 2000, there were 59,143 Latter-day Saints in Samoa.

Membership grew slowly during the 2000s, numbering 61,094 in 2002, 63,640 in 2004, 65,644 in 2006, and 67,120 in 2008.

Annual membership growth rates during this period ranged from a low of 0.9% in 2007 to a high of 3.2% in 2009 but averaged around 1.5% for most years. The percentage of self-identified Latter-day Saints in Samoa increased between the 2001 and 2006 censuses from 12.7% to 13.2%,[20] or just over one third of official LDS membership at the time. In 2009, 36% of the national population was nominally LDS.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 118 Branches: 15

The most rapid growth in the number of LDS congregations occurred in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. There were 112 LDS congregations operating on both Samoa and American Samoa in 1987, increasing to 140 by 1995 and 160 by 1997. By year-end 2000, there were 129 LDS congregations in Samoa, including 108 wards. The number of congregations increased to 131 in 2002, 132 in 2004, and 133 in 2006. The number of wards has steadily increased, numbering 110 in 2002, 112 in 2004, 115 in 2006, and 116 in 2007 whereas the number of branches has declined from 21 in 2000 to 15 in 2010. At year-end 2010, there were 90 congregations on Upolu and 43 on Savaii.

The first LDS stake was created in Samoa in Apia in 1962. In the 1970s, the Church organized seven additional stakes in Apia West (1970), Savaii (1971), Upolu West (1971), Savaii West (1973), Upolu South (1975), Upolu East (1977), and Upolu Aleisa (1979). By 1974, Samoa became the first country to be completely covered by stakes.[21] One new stake was created in the 1980s in Savaii South (1982) and by 1990 there were nine stakes.

Seven new stakes were created in the 1990s located in Upolu North (1992), Pesega (1995), Savaii Sagone (1995), Apia Navu (1995), Fagamalo (1995), Upolu Saleilua (1995), and Upolu Faleasi'u (1996). No new stakes were organized in the 2000s. Between the late 1970s and early 1990s, several districts were established, such as in Fagamalo and Lona Fagaloa. These districts have since become stakes or were consolidated with neighboring stakes.

Activity and Retention

Several large conferences, meetings, and open houses have been well attended by local members. 1,500 attended the centennial celebration of the establishment of the Church in Samoa on Savaii in 1988.[22] In 1997, 4,000 attended a special meeting with President Hinckley on Savaii and 10,000 attended another meeting held on Upolu.[23] 45,004 attended the 2005 Apia Samoa Temple open house and 16,037 Latter-day Saints participated in the dedicatory sessions from Samoa and American Samoa.[24]

On average, an LDS missionary baptized ten new converts a year in the 1960s and 1970s.[25] The average number of members per congregation increased between 2000 and 2009 from 455 to 517. 3,344 were enrolled in seminary or institute during the 2008-2009 school year. Self-identified Latter-day Saints on the 2006 census constituted approximately 37% of church-reported membership. Most wards appear to have approximately 100 to 150 active members whereas most branches have over 50 active members. Active Samoan membership is estimated to stand at approximately 25,000, or 35-40% of total church membership.

Language Materials

Languages with LDS Scripture: Samoan

All LDS scriptures and most church materials are translated into Samoan.

Meetinghouses

There were 69 LDS meetinghouses in Samoa in late 1991.[26] At the end of 2010, there were at least 94 LDS meetinghouses. Church chapels have been damaged several times by hurricanes and flooding.

Humanitarian and Development Work

The Church has operated at least three schools in Samoa for several decades.[27] A professor from Brigham Young University and several returned LDS missionaries helped advocate the preservation of a 30,000-acre tract of rainforest from logging in 1989.[28] The Church sent 90,000 pounds of food and emergency relief to hurricane victims in Samoa and American Samoa following Hurricane Ofa and local members and full-time missionaries participated in cleanup efforts.[29] The Church delivered additional aid following destruction left by Hurricane Val.[30] In 2002, full-time missionaries cleaned a cemetery in Apia.[31] In 2003, the Church donated 515 wheelchairs to the disabled.[32] The Church donated $15,000 following destruction left by Cyclone Olaf in 2005.[33] Other humanitarian and development projects have included furnishing schools with educational

materials, completing clean water projects, and rheumatic fever prevention.[34]

Opportunities, Challenges and Prospects

Religious Freedom

Latter-day Saints have benefited from a high degree of religious freedom and no societal abuses of religious freedom. Foreign full-time missionaries report little difficulty obtaining visas. The Church maintains positive relations with the government and local members worship, assemble, and proselyte freely.

Cultural Issues

Samoans maintain an intimate connection with Christianity and most regularly attend church. These factors have favored LDS mission outreach initiatives over the past century. Strong family connections have fostered the development and growth of the Church through member referrals and member-missionary activity. Opposition does occur in some villages toward nontraditional Christian groups, but the LDS Church does not appear to have been specifically targeted nor do counter-LDS efforts appear to have significantly affected LDS growth. The degree of cooperation and friendship exhibited at present between Latter-day Saints and other Christian groups is demonstrated from an account following the destruction of the original Apia Samoa Temple by fire in 2003 when religious and community leaders offered support and comfort and the Methodist Church sent a check to pay for some of the finances to rebuild the temple.[35] Latter-day Saints are generally viewed much more favorably in Samoa than in many other nations by the major Christian traditions.

Double Affiliation

Strong interest in Christianity but moderate levels of allegiance to a given denomination has created additional cultural challenges for Latter-day Saints and other Christians regarding the double affiliation of their members. Most nominal Latter-day Saints that no longer attend LDS Church services appear actively involved in or identify with other Christian traditions. Doubly affiliated Latter-day Saints that actively engage in another Christian denomination are challenging to reactivate due to their current social and religious connections outside the Church. LDS missionaries, leaders, and members also need to emphasize unique doctrinal teachings and theological positions and to ensure that prospective converts have established firm gospel habits and are well integrated into local congregations before baptism to help curb against the loss of some Latter-day Saints to other Christian denominations and safeguard against convert attrition.

National Outreach

Samoa receives excellent LDS mission outreach as all eleven administrative districts have multiple mission outreach centers. Nearly the entire population resides within five kilometers of an LDS meetinghouse. The percentage of the population residing in a town or village with an LDS congregations is likely greater than 90%. The average LDS congregation includes 1,347 people within its boundaries. There are 43 LDS congregations on Savaii, generating an average of one ward or branch per 903 inhabitants whereas there are 90 LDS congregations on Upolu, or one congregation per 1,529 people.

The high receptivity of Latter-day Saint mission outreach in Samoa creates favorable conditions for a prospective LDS congregation in every large and medium-sized village. In late 2010 23 villages that appeared to have between 500 and 1,500 inhabitants had no LDS congregations, nine of which were on Savaii (Auala, Falealupo, Gataivai, Lata, Mauga, Sala'iloa, Tafuatai, Tuasivi, Vaipouli) and 14 of which were on Upolu (Afega, Maninoa, Matatufu, Mulivai, Sa'anapu, Saanapu-uta, Salamumu, Salepaga, Samai, Satalo, Savaia, Si'ufaga, Tafitoala, Utulaelae). Most of these lesser reached urban locations likely have several active, less active, and inactive Latter-day Saint families and are located several kilometers away from the nearest LDS meetinghouse. Reasons for no LDS congregations in these 23 villages may include opposition from the dominant religious groups of the village, inadequate active priesthood leadership in the area, few Latter-day Saints, and low member activity. Methods which may be utilized to establish congregations in lesser-reached villages include holding cottage meetings, creating dependent branches or groups, and assigning full-time and member-missionaries to proselyte in these locations.

LDS mission outreach directed towards Samoans occurs internationally as there were 65 Samoan-language LDS congregations outside of Samoa and American Samoa in late 2010 operating in the United States (38), New Zealand (18), and Australia (9) providing outreach to the approximately 120,000 Samoan-speakers abroad. Remarkably, the level of outreach employed by the LDS Church at present for Samoans abroad appears to be almost identical to that on the main island of Upolu as there is an average of one LDS congregation per 1,846 Samoans abroad. This finding also likely indicates that the percentage of Latter-day Saint Samoans is relatively constant throughout Samoan communities regardless of location.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Samoa has demonstrated moderate member activity rates compared to other nations, but this appears tp largely reflect the result of the cultural importance that Samoans place on regular church attendance and participation as well as the lack of a dominant Christian faith before the arrival of Europeans. LDS converts not retained are likely to return to their previous church or to begin attending another denomination. Lackluster convert retention rates appear to have become more problematic in the 2000s compared to earlier decades as this was the first decade since prior to the creation of the first stake in 1962 that no new LDS stakes were organized. Slower membership growth has contributed to the slowdown in congregational growth, but congregational growth has not kept pace with membership growth during this period, suggesting that many new members were not retained and that the number of retained new converts is only slightly higher than the number of deaths or disaffiliates among older Latter-day Saints. Ten new wards were organized in the 2000s, many of which were from branches, and the percentage of self-identified Latter-day Saints increased between the 2001 and 2006 censuses, indicating some increase in active membership during this period. Church-reported membership increased by 9.3% between 2001 and 2006 whereas census figures for Latter-day Saints increased by 5.4%.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

The highly homogenous Samoan population has faced few ethnic integration challenges. Religious plurality has reduced many challenges of assimilating Samoan Latter-day Saints. A combination of these conditions have favored LDS Church growth over the past several decades.

Language Issues

The Church began translating materials into Samoan at an early stage of missionary work and today has a wide array of materials and all LDS scriptures translated. Widespread use of Samoan has simplified mission outreach approaches.

Missionary Service

Samoa is among the few nations with fewer than 100,000 members that is self-sufficient in staffing local full-time missionary needs and export large numbers of missionaries abroad. Church-operated schools and seminary and institute attendance have contributed to long-term sustainability of local full-time missionary numbers. The first Samoan Latter-day Saint served a full-time mission in the late 1880s. By 1898, 122 full-time missionaries from North America had served in Samoa.[36] In 1974, Samoan Latter-day Saints constituted 75% of the missionary force assigned to Samoa.[37] The Church operated a missionary training center in Samoa as early as 1988[38] but the center appears to have closed by the late 1990s or early 2000s. Samoan full-time missionaries now receive training in the New Zealand Missionary Training Center and frequently serve in Oceania, North America, the Caribbean, and Africa. In 2010, most full-time missionaries in Samoa were assigned to two or three congregations. North Americans frequently serve in Samoa despite self-sufficiency of Samoan missionary manpower.

Leadership

Local church leadership began to mature and become more self-sufficient in the 1950s when local district presidencies were organized and full-time missionary involvement in congregational administration decreased. The first Samoan mission president of the Samoa Apia Mission was called in 1974.[39] Many Samoan Latter-day Saints living abroad have served in regional leadership positions, such as Lini Lyon To'o from New Zealand who was called as the Samoa Apia Mission President in 1993.[40] LDS Church employees have frequently served in leadership positions and at times, church employees have constituted two or three members of a stake presidency. In 1992, George Selu Fruean from Apia was called as a regional representative.[41] In 2000, Daniel Afamasaga Betham from Aleisa was called as the president of the Apia Samoa Temple.[42] Samoa has generated fewer regional or international LDS leaders than many other Polynesian countries with sizeable LDS membership, but this does not appear due to a shortage of qualified individuals. Inadequate numbers of active priesthood holders has likely been a factor in the lack of LDS congregations in some villages.

Temple

Samoan Latter-day Saints attended the Hamilton New Zealand Temple prior to the construction of the Apia Samoa Temple. Initially planned for construction in American Samoa, the Apia Samoa Temple was announced in 1977 and dedicated in 1983.[43] Samoan members primarily attended the Suva Fiji Temple following the destruction of the Apia Samoa Temple in 2003[44] and prior to its rededication in 2005. Flood waters almost reached the rebuilt temple in 2006.[45] The Apia Samoa Temple services members living in Samoa and American Samoa. In 2010, the temple was moderately utilized as six endowment sessions occurred from morning to evening Tuesday through Friday and three sessions occurred on Saturdays. Additional sessions scheduled by individuals stakes or congregations likely occur regularly. Prospects for an additional small temple on Savaii appear favorable over the medium term due to geographic separation from Apia. A potential temple on Savaii would service five stakes.

Comparative Growth

Samoa possess the second highest percentage of nominal LDS membership of any country after Tonga and boasts the second

largest LDS membership in Polynesia after New Zealand. Membership growth rates in Samoa during the 2000s ranked slightly higher than other Polynesia nations as most nations in the region experienced annual membership growth rates around one percent. Samoa is the only nation in Polynesia that is entirely covered by stakes. Member activity rates and the percentage of members enrolled in seminary and institute is comparable to most nations in Oceania. Congregational growth trends in the 2000s in Samoa were similar to most nations in Polynesia.

Latter-day Saints number among the most successful of nontraditional Christian groups operating in Samoa today. Seventh Day Adventists and Evangelicals have achieved more rapid growth that Latter-day Saints in recent years. Seventh Day Adventists report steady membership and congregational growth as membership and congregations nearly doubled in the 2000s. Jehovah's Witnesses experience slow growth and have fewer than 400 active members meeting in nine congregations. Christian groups that have achieved the greatest success have established education and development institutions, frequently open new congregations in unreached areas, and develop local leadership.

Future Prospects

The LDS Church in Samoa has achieved a high degree of self-reliance that has facilitated missionary outreach internationally through surplus missionary manpower and reliance on local members to staff the Samoa Apia Mission. Little progress for the Church in Samoa has occurred over the decade of the 2000s however as few new congregations were organized, retention has been mediocre, and membership growth rates have declined from earlier levels. A church-planting approach in lesser-reached villages to address these obstacles many help reverse the recent trend of stagnant growth. Double affiliation continues to be a major issue that challenges reactivation and retention efforts. As a result of branches becoming wards, several stakes appear close to dividing in the near future in the Apia area and in eastern Savaii.

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