

International Saints Missiological Survey (ISMS) of over 6,500 Latter-day Saints, 2012- 2019: Key Findings and Analysis

MATTHEW MARTINICH, PSYD – THE CUMORAH FOUNDATION

Metrics of Church Growth

Annual Membership Totals (by country/state)

Annual Number of convert baptisms

Annual Increase in children of record

Annual Number of Missionaries Serving

Annual Number of Congregations (by country/state)

Annual Stakes and Districts (organizations) (by country/state)

Missions (by country/state)

Temples (by country/state)

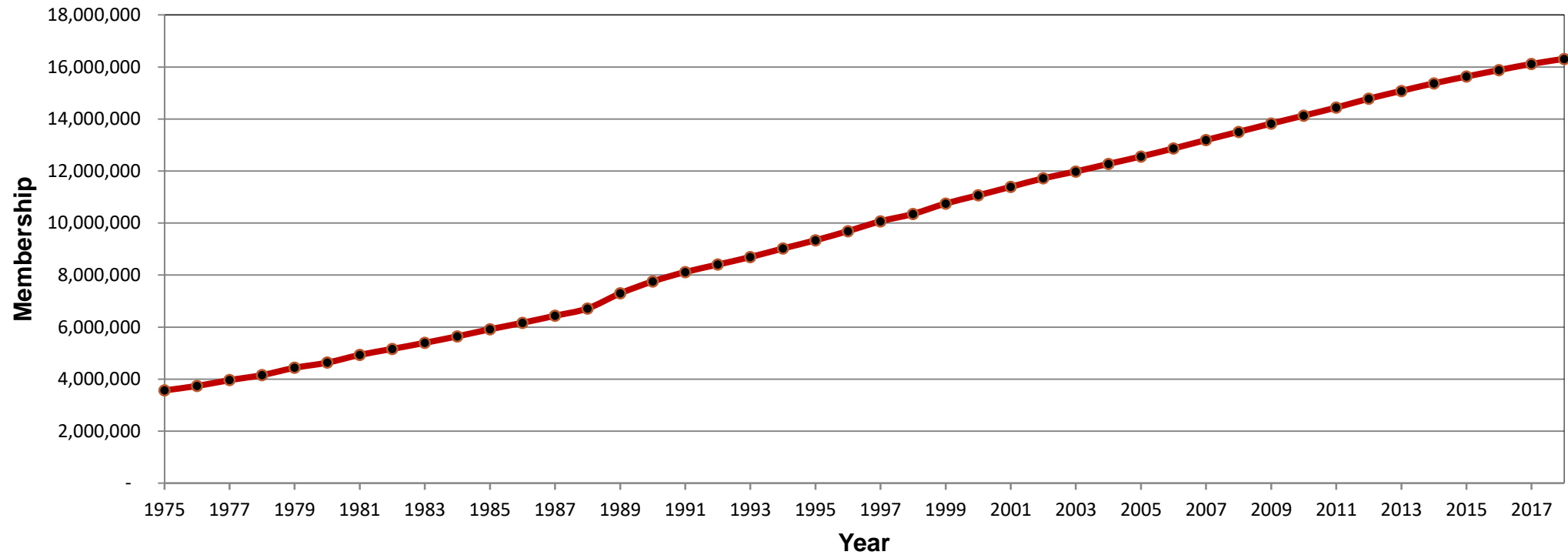
Church attendance

Percent of members who regularly attend church (member activity)

Percent of new converts who regularly attend church (convert retention)

Church Growth in Context

World Membership Growth: 1975-2018

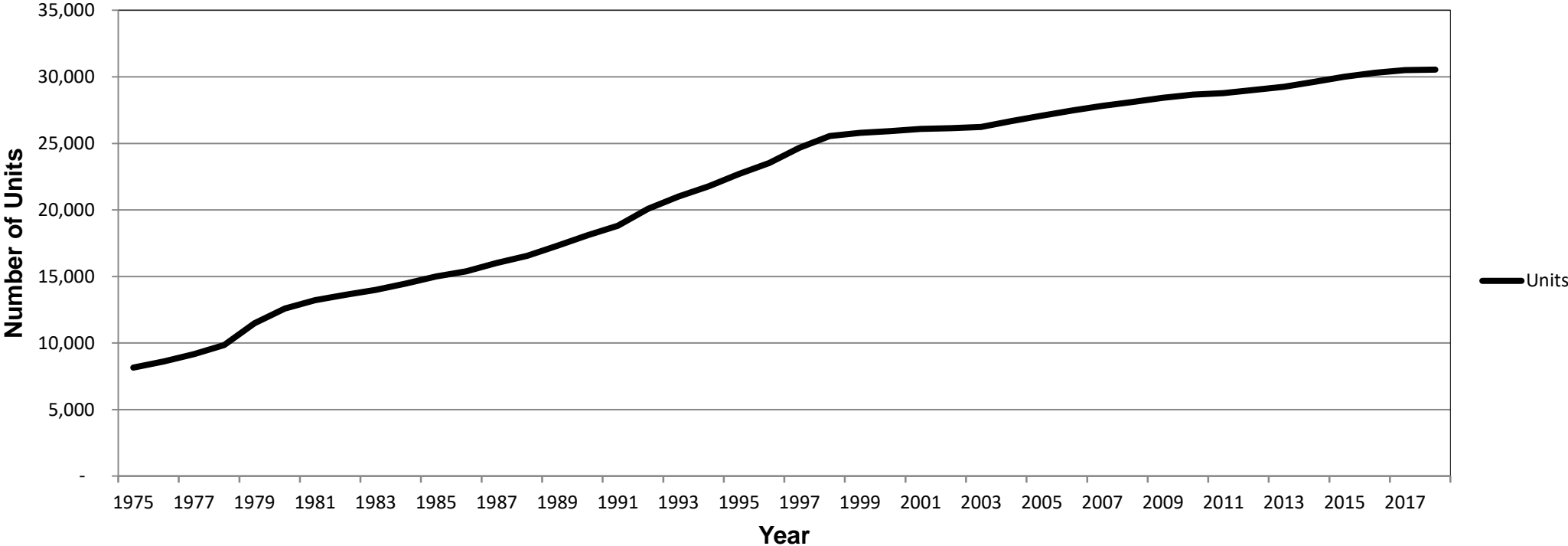


Church Growth in Context

1976	3,742,749	4.56%	1991	8,120,000	4.43%	2006	12,868,606	2.39%
1977	3,966,000	5.63%	1992	8,406,895	3.41%	2007	13,193,999	2.47%
1978	4,160,000	4.66%	1993	8,696,224	3.33%	2008	13,508,509	2.33%
1979	4,439,000	6.29%	1994	9,024,569	3.64%	2009	13,824,854	2.29%
1980	4,638,000	4.29%	1995	9,340,898	3.39%	2010	14,131,467	2.17%
1981	4,936,000	6.04%	1996	9,694,549	3.65%	2011	14,441,346	2.15%
1982	5,165,000	4.43%	1997	10,070,524	3.73%	2012	14,782,473	2.31%
1983	5,400,000	4.35%	1998	10,354,241	2.74%	2013	15,082,028	1.99%
1984	5,650,000	4.42%	1999	10,752,986	3.71%	2014	15,372,337	1.92%
1985	5,920,000	4.56%	2000	11,068,861	2.85%	2015	15,634,199	1.70%
1986	6,170,000	4.05%	2001	11,394,522	2.86%	2016	15,882,417	1.59%
1987	6,440,000	4.19%	2002	11,721,548	2.79%	2017	16,118,169	1.48%
1988	6,720,000	4.17%	2003	11,985,254	2.20%	2018	16,313,735	1.21%
1989	7,300,000	7.95%	2004	12,275,822	2.37%			
1990	7,760,000	5.93%	2005	12,560,869	2.27%			

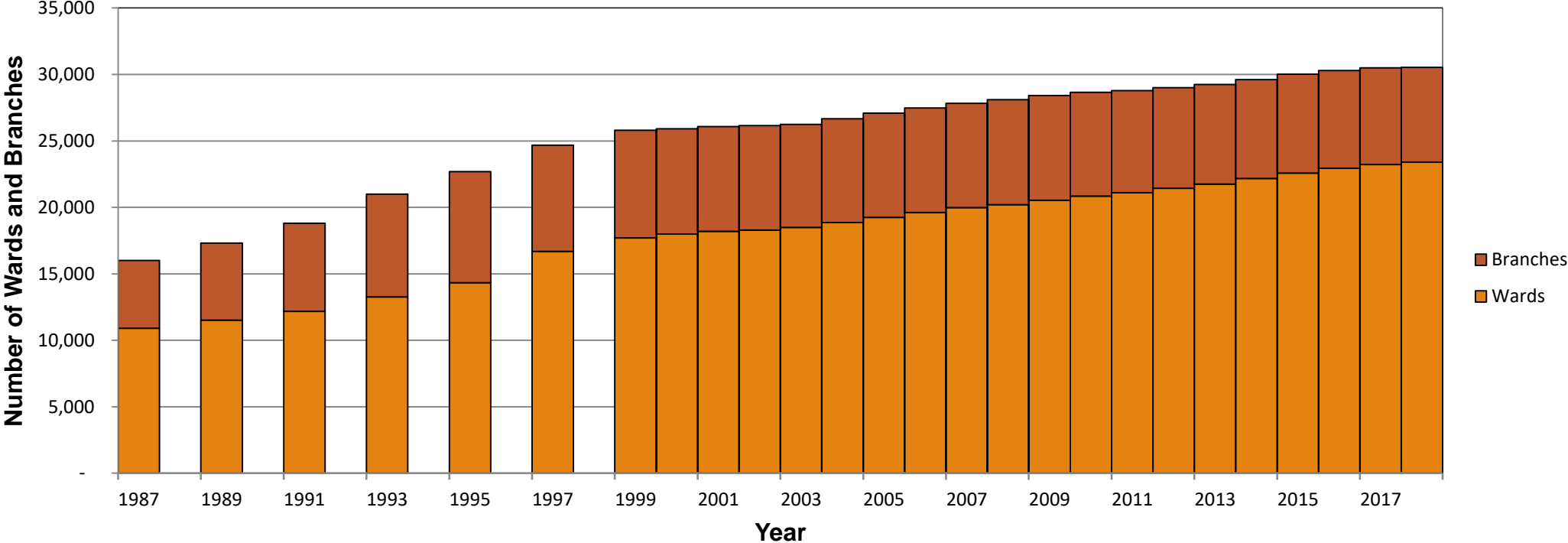
Church Growth in Context

World Congregational Growth: 1975-2018



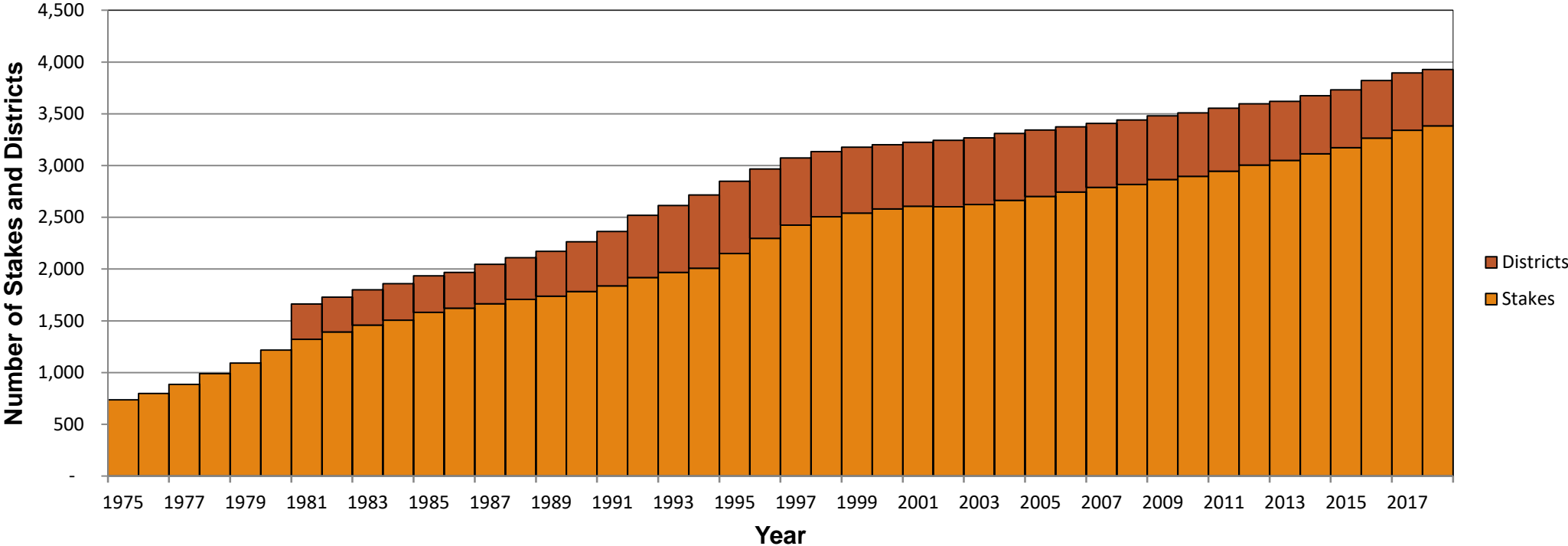
Church Growth in Context

World Ward and Branch Growth: 1987-2018



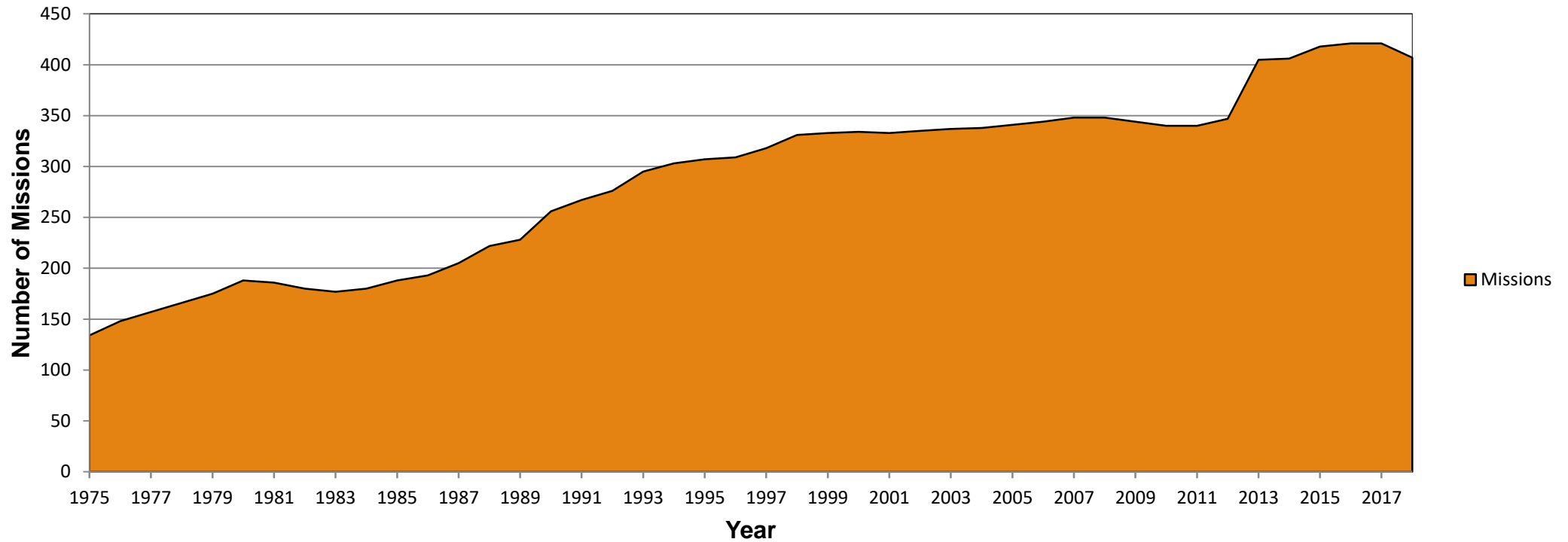
Church Growth in Context

World Stake and District Growth: 1975-2018



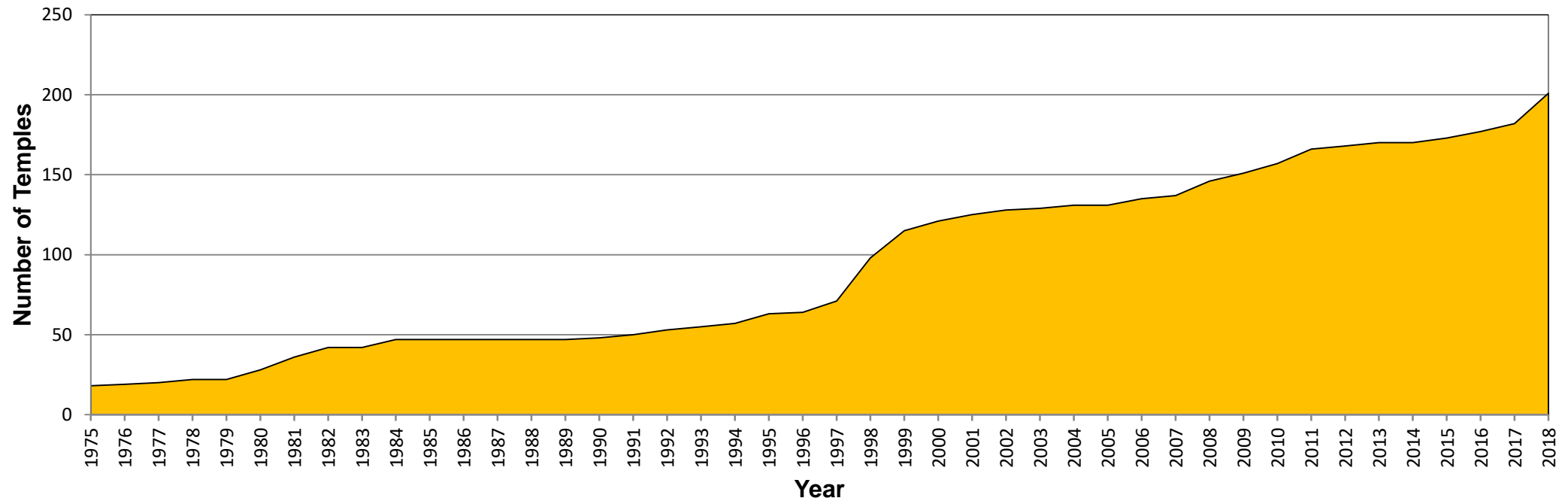
Church Growth in Context

World Mission Growth: 1975-2018



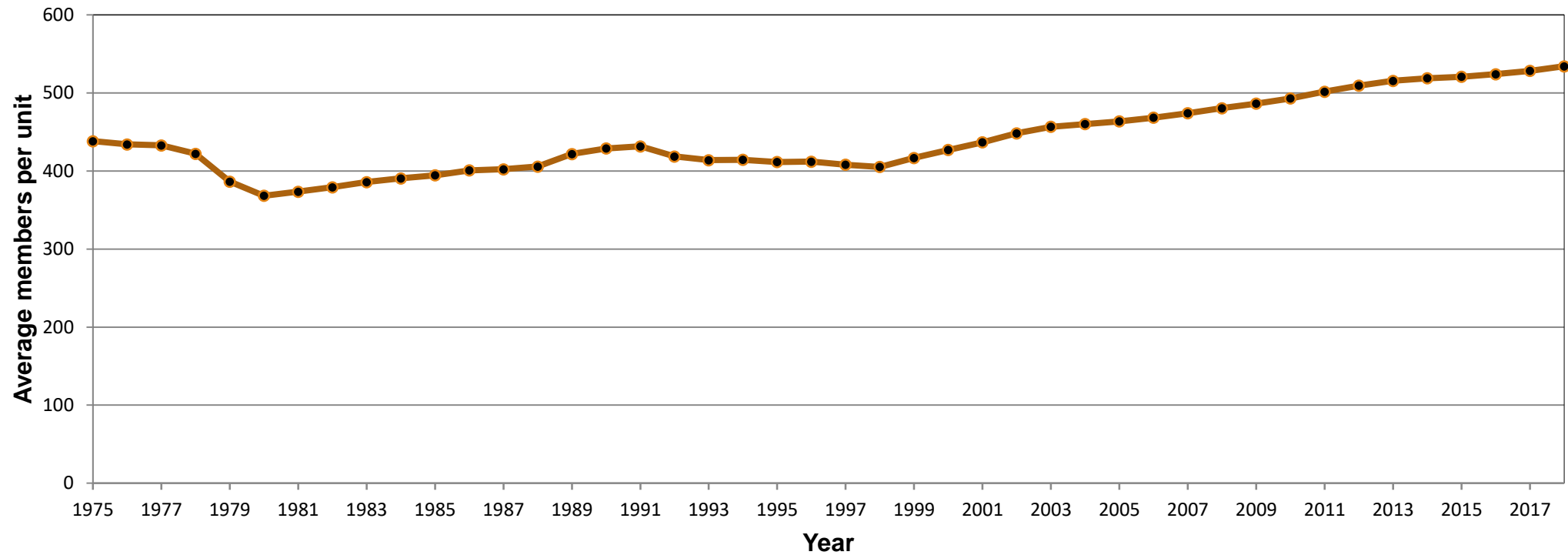
Church Growth in Context

**World Temple Growth
1975-2018**



Church Growth in Context

Membership to Units Ratio for the Worldwide Church: 1975-2018



ISMS

Data in study – 7 surveys – 6,816 responses between August 11th, 2012 and October 13th, 2019

Vast majority of participants completed survey through social media platforms, such as Facebook

Two Types of Surveys

- Returned Missionary (RM) – English, Spanish, French
- Member – English, Spanish, Portuguese, French

ISMS Survey Breakdown by Type and Language

RM English – 3,565

RM Spanish – 84

RM French – 9

Member English – 1,810

Member Spanish – 1,057

Member Portuguese – 155

Member French – 136

RM Survey - Questions

1. Assigned mission(s), Home Country, Languages Learned, Years Served
2. Indicate what areas you served in provided with the average number of members attending sacrament meeting on a weekly basis.
3. What do you believe were the greatest reasons for members no longer attending church? Rank the following from 1 = highest to 10 = lowest (poor fellowshipping from members, inadequate prebaptismal preparation, weak testimony of the Church, doctrinal concerns, offended by a member or church leader, long distance to meetinghouse, language barriers, cultural conditions, lack of religious freedom, proselytism efforts from other religions)
4. What did member-missionary activity look like in your mission(s)? What was your experience working with members with missionary work?

RM Survey – Questions (Cont'd)

5. In general, how many converts did your mission baptize a year?

(less than 100, 101-200, 201-300, 301-400, 401-500, 501-750, 751-1,000, 1,001-2,000, more than 2,000)

6. What percent of converts would you estimate remained active one year after baptism in your mission?

7. Discuss how receptive the general population was to the LDS Church. What cultural factors facilitated or deterred growth?

8. Discuss what you believed to be the biggest barrier(s) for LDS Church growth in your mission(s).

9. When you served your mission, did your mission president(s) open any new cities to missionary work that previously had no missionaries assigned? Indicate which cities opened and what this process looked like.

10. Any other church growth developments or events on your mission that you would like to share?

Member Survey - Questions

1. Member Background Information (Congregation, Stake, Country, Activity Status)
2. How many attend sacrament meeting in your ward, branch, or group?
3. What percentage of members in your home ward, branch, or member group would you estimate to be active?
4. What do you believe are some of the primary factors for why less-active and inactive members do not regularly attend church in your congregation?
5. How many converts have joined the Church in your congregation within the past year?

Member Survey – Questions (cont'd)

6. What percentage of converts in your congregation would you estimate to remain active one year after baptism?
7. Please describe what member-missionary participation looks like in your congregation.
8. Has the Hastening of the Work of Salvation website and broadcast been implemented in your congregation? If yes, how has this affected missionary work in your congregation?
9. How many missionary companionships serve in your congregation?
10. Please describe the ethnic composition of your congregation including diversity issues such as marital status, religious background, language use, and socioeconomic status.
11. Any missionary or church growth developments in your area you wish to share?

RM SURVEY ENGLISH – MISSION SERVED

Adriatic North: 9	Central Eurasian: 2	French Polynesia: 5	Liberia: 1	Poland: 6	Tonga: 6
Adriatic South: 9	Chile: 131	Germany: 91	Madagascar: 5	Portugal: 21	Trinidad and Tobago: 19
Argentina: 123	Colombia: 30	Ghana: 24	Marshall Islands/Kiribati: 13	Puerto Rico: 10	Uganda: 4
Armenia/Georgia: 6	Costa Rica: 14	Guatemala: 62	Mexico: 195	Romania/Moldova: 9	Ukraine: 20
Australia: 58	Cote d'Ivoire: 2	Haiti: 1	Micronesia: 11	Russia: 44	Uruguay: 29
Austria: 5	Czech/Slovak: 11	Honduras: 27	Mongolia: 1	Samoa: 1	USA: 897
Baltic: 27	Denmark: 22	Hong Kong: 15	Mozambique: 5	Scotland: 21	Vanuatu: 5
Belgium/Netherlands: 26	Dominican Republic: 33	Hungary: 11	New Zealand: 26	Sierra Leone: 4	Venezuela: 14
Benin/Togo: 7	DR Congo: 1	India: 4	Nicaragua: 17	Singapore: 15	Zambia: 2
Bolivia: 28	Ecuador: 34	Indonesia: 10	Nigeria: 41	South Africa: 22	Zimbabwe: 4
Brazil: 200	El Salvador: 27	Italy: 64	Norway: 14	Spain: 76	Grand Total: 3,547
Bulgaria: 6	England: 84	Jamaica: 6	Panama: 13	Sweden: 21	
Cambodia: 11	Fiji: 11	Japan: 108	Paraguay: 28	Switzerland: 11	
Canada: 83	Finland: 10	Kenya: 3	Peru: 102	Taiwan: 38	
Cape Verde: 9	France: 62	Korea: 50	Philippines: 184	Thailand: 29	

RM SURVEY SPANISH – MISSION SERVED

México: 27

Venezuela: 9

Perú: 8

Honduras: 7

Argentina: 4

Brazil: 4

Guatemala: 4

El Salvador: 3

Nicaragua: 3

USA: 3

Chile: 2

Colombia: 2

Costa Rica: 2

Uruguay: 2

Bolivia: 1

Dominican Republic: 1

Paraguay: 1

RM SURVEY FRENCH – MISSION SERVED

Cote d'Ivoire: 5

DR Congo: 1

Rep. of Congo: 1

Nigeria: 1

MEMBER SURVEY ENGLISH – COUNTRY OF RESPONDENT

United States: 755	Sweden: 10	Namibia: 4	Singapore: 2	Iceland: 1
Philippines: 260	India: 9	Scotland: 4	Tonga: 2	Indonesia: 1
Nigeria: 216	Switzerland: 9	Botswana: 3	UAE: 2	Ireland: 1
Ghana: 95	Chile: 8	Georgia: 3	Venezuela: 2	Japan: 1
South Africa: 51	Finland: 7	Grenada: 3	Argentina: 1	Laos: 1
Canada: 39	Norway: 7	Guam: 3	Belarus: 1	Marshall Islands: 1
Australia: 31	Brazil: 6	Samoa: 3	Benin: 1	Northern Ireland: 1
Germany: 31	Mexico: 6	Thailand: 3	Burundi: 1	Portugal: 1
New Zealand: 24	Uganda: 6	Cambodia: 2	Colombia: 1	Puerto Rico: 1
Liberia: 23	Belgium: 5	France: 2	Denmark: 1	Russia: 1
Zimbabwe: 22	Guyana: 5	Hong Kong: 2	Dominican Republic: 1	Rwanda: 1
Sierra Leone: 21	Netherlands: 5	Kenya: 2	Ecuador: 1	Sri Lanka: 1
England: 19	Peru: 5	Pakistan: 2	Estonia: 1	Trinidad/Tobago: 1
Jamaica: 11	El Salvador: 4	Papua NG: 2	Fiji: 1	

MEMBER SURVEY SPANISH– COUNTRY OF RESPONDENT

México: 161

Argentina: 132

Perú : 100

Honduras: 97

Guatemala : 96

El Salvador : 79

Nicaragua: 63

Costa Rica: 51

Paraguay: 45

Bolivia: 44

Ecuador: 36

Venezuela: 36

Chile: 31

Panamá: 30

Colombia: 24

Spain: 10

Puerto Rico: 10

Dominican Rep.: 7

USA: 1

Uruguay: 1

MEMBER SURVEY PORTUGUESE – COUNTRY OF RESPONDENT

Brazil: 135

Cabo Verde: 19

Angola: 1

MEMBER SURVEY FRENCH – COUNTRY OF RESPONDENT

Cote d'Ivoire: 54

DR Congo: 51

Haiti: 6

French Polynesia: 5

Togo: 4

Rep. of Congo: 3

Benin: 2

Cameroon: 2

Burundi: 1

Gabon: 1

CONVERT RETENTION AND MEMBER ACTIVITY

RM SURVEY ENGLISH – CONVERT RETENTION ONE YEAR AFTER BAPTISM BY COUNTRY

TOP TEN COUNTRIES WITH MOST RESPONSES

1. United States (n = 897): 50%
2. Brazil (n = 200): 42%
3. Mexico (n = 195): 44%
4. Philippines (n = 184): 52%
5. Chile (n = 131): 44%
6. Argentina (n = 123): 41%
7. Japan (n = 108): 47%
8. Peru (n = 102): 54%
9. Germany (n = 91): 54%
10. England (n = 84): 44%

TOP TEN COUNTRIES/MISSIONS WITH HIGHEST RETENTION

1. Central Eurasian (n = 2): 80%
2. DR Congo (n = 1): 80%
3. Cote d'Ivoire (n = 2): 74%
4. Kenya (n = 3): 70%
5. Liberia (n = 1): 70%
6. Samoa (n = 1): 70%
7. Zimbabwe (n = 4): 69%
8. French Polynesia (n = 5): 66%
9. Hong Kong (n = 15): 63%
10. Romania/Moldova (n = 9): 63%

RM SURVEY ENGLISH – CONVERT RETENTION ONE YEAR AFTER BAPTISM BY COUNTRY

TOP TEN COUNTRIES WITH LOWEST CONVERT RETENTION RATE

1. **Venezuela (n = 14): 25% - Most recent survey from 2004**
2. **Austria (n = 5): 25% - Most recent survey from 1992**
3. Poland (n = 6): 29%
4. Armenia/Georgia (n = 6): 30%
5. Uruguay (n = 29): 33%
6. Puerto Rico (n = 10): 34%
7. Costa Rica (n = 14): 36%
8. Cabo Verde (n = 9): 36%
9. Thailand (n = 29): 38%
10. Paraguay (n = 28): 38%

RM SURVEY SPANISH – CONVERT RETENTION ONE YEAR AFTER BAPTISM BY COUNTRY

1. Costa Rica (n = 2): 73%
2. Colombia (n = 1): 70%
3. Dominican Rep. (n = 1): 70%
4. Guatemala (n = 4): 65%
5. Perú (n = 8): 64%
6. Venezuela (n = 9): 59%
7. Brazil (n = 4): 58%
8. Chile (n = 2): 58%
9. Honduras (n = 7): 52%
10. México (n = 27): 50%
11. Nicaragua (n = 3): 50%
12. USA (n = 3): 50%
13. Paraguay (n = 1): 40%
14. El Salvador (n = 3): 38%
15. Uruguay (n = 2): 20%

RM SURVEY FRENCH – CONVERT RETENTION ONE YEAR AFTER BAPTISM BY COUNTRY

Cote d'Ivoire (n = 5): 62%

DR Congo (n = 1): 25%

Nigeria (n = 1): 60%

Rep. of Congo (n = 1) = 50%

TOTAL (n = 8) = 56%

MEMBER SURVEY ENGLISH – MEMBER ACTIVITY RATE BY COUNTRY

TOP TEN COUNTRIES WITH MOST RESPONSES

1. United States (n = 755): 46.9%
2. Philippines (n = 260): 46%
3. Nigeria (n = 216): 60%
4. Ghana (n = 95): 65%
5. South Africa (n = 51): 52%
6. Canada (n = 39): 47%
7. Australia (n = 31): 48%
8. Germany (n = 31): 54%
9. New Zealand (n = 24): 45%
10. Liberia (n = 23): 56%

TOP TEN COUNTRIES WITH HIGHEST RETENTION

1. Trinidad and Tobago (n =1): 78%
2. Burundi (n = 1): 75%
3. Namibia (n = 4): 74%
4. Sri Lanka (n = 1): 70%
5. Samoa (n = 3): 66%
6. Ghana (n = 95): 65%
7. Kenya (n = 2): 63%
8. Singapore (n = 2): 63%
9. Botswana (n = 3): 60%
10. Japan (n = 1): 60%
11. Laos (n =1): 60%
12. Nigeria (n = 216) = 60%
13. Zimbabwe (n = 22) = 60%

TOTAL (n = 1,617) = 48.7%

MEMBER SURVEY SPANISH – MEMBER ACTIVITY RATE BY COUNTRY

1. Bolivia (n = 44): 57%
2. Honduras (n = 75): 56%
3. Costa Rica (n = 40): 55%
4. Dominican Republic (n = 7): 51%
5. Guatemala (n = 78): 51%
6. México (n = 145): 44%
7. Perú (n = 70): 49%
8. El Salvador (n = 63): 46%
9. Nicaragua (n = 50): 48%
10. Panamá (n = 23): 46%
11. Puerto Rico (n = 10): 46%
12. Colombia (n = 17): 45%
13. Spain (n = 10): 45%
14. Ecuador (n = 24): 44%
15. Venezuela (n = 36): 41%
16. USA (n = 1): 40%
17. Argentina (n = 132): 38%
18. Paraguay (n = 39): 37%
19. Chile (n = 31): 29%
20. Uruguay (n = 1): 14%

TOTAL (n = 845) = 46%

MEMBER SURVEY PORTUGUESE – MEMBER ACTIVITY RATE BY COUNTRY

Cabo Verde (n = 18) = 45%

Overall (n = 136) = 43%

Brazil (n = 118) = 42%

TOTAL (n = 136): 43%

MEMBER SURVEY FRENCH – MEMBER ACTIVITY RATE BY COUNTRY

1. Togo (n = 4) = 79%
2. Gabon (1) = 75%
3. **DR Congo (n = 42) = 70%**
4. Rep. of Congo (n = 3) = 62%
5. Benin (n = 2) 58%
6. Haiti (n = 5) = 57%
7. **Cote d'Ivoire (n = 42) = 55%**
8. French Polynesia (n = 5) = 50%
9. Cameroon (2) = 42%

TOTAL (n = 112) = 63%

Inactivity Reasons – RM Survey English

REASON	TOTAL	USA ONLY	OUTSIDE USA ONLY
weak testimony of the Church	3.38	3.50	3.90
poor fellowshipping from members	3.39	3.60	3.88
offended by a member or church leader	3.70	3.93	4.24
inadequate prebaptismal preparation	3.86	4.28	4.36
doctrinal concerns	4.58	4.68	5.31
long distance to meetinghouse	4.99	5.99	5.47
cultural conditions	5.31	6.26	5.86
language barriers	6.27	7.13	7.01
proselytism efforts from other religions	6.54	7.42	7.32
lack of religious freedom	7.17	8.22	8.00

Inactivity Reasons – RM Survey Spanish

REASON	TOTAL
inadequate prebaptismal preparation	4.63
poor fellowshiping from members	4.66
weak testimony of the Church	5.20
doctrinal concerns	5.22
offended by a member or church leader	5.30
long distance to meetinghouse	5.36
cultural conditions	5.40
proselytism efforts from other religions	5.73
language barriers	5.78
lack of religious freedom	6.13

Inactivity Reasons – RM Survey French

REASON	TOTAL
doctrinal concerns	3.33
poor fellowshiping from members	3.67
weak testimony of the Church	4.13
long distance to meetinghouse	4.29
offended by a member or church leader	4.57
language barriers	5.57
inadequate prebaptismal preparation	5.80
cultural conditions	6.50
proselytism efforts from other religions	7.43
lack of religious freedom	9.14

Inactivity Reasons – Member Surveys

Most common answers had to do with testimony development, socialization challenges, and the influence of local culture

RM Surveys – Receptivity to the Church

Regard of the Church as an American church

Confusing Latter-day Saints with other religious groups, particularly Jehovah's Witnesses

Misinformation spread by other religious groups or governments

Indifference

Unpopularity of organized religion

Religion being a private matter

Church policies

Substance use

Economic development (poverty vs. materialism)

Conflicting societal views regarding sex and marriage

Positive regard for the Church and its members

Strong ethno-religious ties to traditional religions/family tradition to specific faith

Generational differences

Ethnic differences in receptivity

Competition among religious groups for converts

Friendly and interested (But no commitment, Interested in socializing with missionaries, but not learning about the Church)

SOME INTERSTING FINDINGS

Convert retention rates one year after baptism are approximately 50% both inside and outside of the United States. Convert retention rates are generally improving, but number of convert baptism has been declining

Number of active members significantly increasing per congregation in the Philippines and in certain Latin American countries, such as Peru and Bolivia

The impact of a mission president (and area presidencies), for good or for worse

Member activity rates significantly vary by congregation and country, also the number of converts baptized per congregation

RM Survey data for English and Spanish noted very similar reasons for member inactivity (weak testimony of the Church, poor fellowshipping from members, offended by a member or church leader, inadequate prebaptismal preparation)

Long-term retention of converts several years after baptism remains a significant problem

Resource allocation imbalances – most missionary resources are allocated to areas where most Church membership reside (centers of strength)

Of the 755 respondents from the Unites States, 20 reported that their ward or branch had 20 or more convert baptisms a year

LIMITATIONS

Estimates

Bias of the responder – encapsulation – i.e. “laziness”

Missing responses to some items

Some areas are very difficult to survey – Papua New Guinea and Russia

Dynamic Growth

Misunderstanding questions

Spanish survey – was heavily criticized on social media in some locations such as Dominican Republic – received few responses

Member activity rates were higher than what they appear to be in actuality – address unknown file

FUTURE STUDY

Retention of youth – children of record vs. convert baptisms

Measure attitudes about missionary work/growth

Reasons for problems with retention of converts 1-5 years after baptism

Centers of strength policy – report on this policy from members and not returned missionaries

Impact of moving on church growth – Utah transplants

Inferential statistical analysis

Greater study of changes in activity and retention over time

Member activity rate reported by returned missionaries