



Shakira Farrar (Maryland), Alfreda Tsai (New York) and Rianne Sonke (California) listen to general conference while sitting on the Salt Lake Temple grounds.

Membership, Retention on the Rise

Annual statistics released at April general conference indicate the Church is rapidly approaching 13 million members worldwide. This steady growth pattern has continued with about a million new members now being added every three years or less.

These figures were announced just weeks after the National Council of Churches published its *2007 Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*, where it listed the Church as the fourth-largest religion in the United States. However, the Church itself makes no statistical comparisons with other churches and makes no claim to be the fastest-growing Christian denomination.

"The Church is unusual in

that it creates membership records and updates them constantly," said Church statistician Glen Buckner, who is also a member of the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies.

In 2006 there were more than 272,800 convert baptisms. The net increase for children of record during 2006 was more than 94,000.

Church membership growth numbers are often interpreted inaccurately, which can lead to misconceptions in the media, Brother Buckner said. Therefore, it is important to clearly understand what these numbers signify. They represent the number of Church members, but they do not represent activity rates. The Church does not remove an individual's name from its

membership rolls based on inactivity.

Like other faiths, the Church has varying degrees of growth among its members throughout the world. For example, the Church has relatively slow growth in Northern Europe, where many other churches are declining. It has steady and manageable growth in the United States, and is expanding rapidly in Africa, the Philippines, and South America.

For decades the Church has identified growth as its single greatest challenge. The Church has a lay ministry, and experience has shown that new members are more likely to slide into inactivity when they are not offered opportunities to serve or when they feel inadequate to accept a position.

President Gordon B. Hinckley has emphasized how essential it is that new members' involvement not end after baptism and confirmation. "The challenge now is greater than it has ever been because the number of converts is greater than we have ever before known. . . . I plead with you . . . I ask of you, each of you, to become a part of this great effort. Every convert is precious. Every convert is a son or daughter of God. Every convert is a great and serious responsibility. . . . In my view nothing is of greater importance" ("Converts and Young Men," *Ensign*, May 1997, 48).

In the Philippines, where many people are being

baptized, mission presidents and local Church leaders aim to ensure that potential converts fully understand the commitment they make at baptism. "We are more concerned with personal conversion than the number of baptisms and confirmations," said Elder D. Rex Gerratt, President of the Philippines Area. "The stronger our converts, the stronger our congregations. The stronger the Church is, the more it will be able to bless the people and strengthen the families of this country."

In the Philippines, while convert baptisms per missionary have increased in each of the last three years, activity rates of new converts are also on the rise.

The Church has also refined its missionary program to aid in the retention of converts. Potential missionaries are held to a higher standard to qualify for missionary service, and in 2004 the inspired missionary training publication, *Preach My Gospel*, was instituted to help missionaries focus on more comprehensive and personalized teaching of potential converts. The goal is stronger commitment from newly baptized members because of a deeper conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In addition to membership, the Church's increase in meetinghouses also indicates growth. There are currently 8,254 meetinghouses internationally, which shows a 10 percent growth rate over the past five years. That trend is also reflected in the United States, where

there are 6,361 meeting-houses—or a 9.6 percent growth rate for the same time period. Many of these meetinghouses accommodate

several congregations.

“Ultimately, the strength of the Church is really measured by the devotion and commitment of its members,”

said Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. “The Lord has never given us a mandate to be the biggest Church—in fact, He

has said our numbers will be comparatively few—but He has asked that we commit ourselves to living and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ.” ■

Church Diversity Breaks Stereotypes

In Harlem, an African-American bishop leads his congregation in prayer. In Miami, neighbors enter a bright yellow chapel and greet each other in Haitian. In Salt Lake City, a teacher instructs her New Testament class in Chinese.

This picture is a striking contrast to the stereotypical image many have of members of the Church in the United States as white, middle-class people from Utah. Yet it accurately portrays the changing face of Church membership, which is becoming increasingly diverse, mirroring a wide range of cultures and experiences.

For example, in the United States, more than 150 Latter-day Saint congregations speak a total of 20 different languages, including Polish, Navajo, Russian, Spanish, and German.

Much of the Church’s growth is attributed to the global volunteer missionary program, the largest of its kind in the world. More than 52,000 missionaries teach in 347 missions in more than 140 nations.

The Church is also growing more diverse internationally. More than half of all Church members now reside outside of the United States, a milestone that was reached

in February 1996.

Such growth among diverse cultures and nations has become the Church’s primary challenge. To help meet it, the Church translates scriptures, conference proceedings, satellite broadcasts, curriculum manuals, magazines, software, Web site information, and other materials into more than 100 languages. As a result, the Church’s translation system is one of the largest in the world.

With dramatic growth comes the challenge of unifying Latter-day Saints of many cultures. Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said that the growing diversity among the members is simply a condition, not a Church goal. The real goal is unity, not diversity. “We preach unity among the community of Saints and tolerance toward the personal differences that are inevitable in the beliefs and conduct of a diverse population,” he said.

As a result, efforts are made to teach Latter-day Saints around the world the doctrines of the Church and to train local leaders without imposing American culture.

“Sometimes our culture and the Western culture are very different,” said Seung Hwun Ko, a Church member from Seoul, Korea, “but when we talk about the gospel of Jesus Christ, we meet.” ■

New Missions Bring Total to 347

The continued growth of the Church and the desire of priesthood leaders to further strengthen members and leaders throughout the world have prompted the creation of new missions in Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean, and the realignment of four missions in Japan.

The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles have approved the creation of three missions—the Ukraine Dnepropetrovsk Mission, the Sierra Leone Freetown Mission, and the Puerto Rico San Juan East Mission. This brings the total number of missions around the world to 347.

Japan Realignments

In Japan, the boundaries of the Hiroshima, Nagoya, and Tokyo missions were realigned in early March 2007.

Portions of the Japan Tokyo North Mission and Japan Tokyo South Mission were consolidated and will be known as the Japan Tokyo Mission. The newly aligned Japan Tokyo Mission will be concentrated around the greater Tokyo metropolitan area and its 10 stakes.

The Japan Kobe Mission will include the Osaka-Kobe



Members meet in Ghana, Africa, reflective of the worldwide growth of the Church.

MAP BY THOMAS S. CHILD



Several missions in Japan were realigned to create the Japan Tokyo Mission in place of the Japan Tokyo North and South Missions.

area with its four stakes and another stake in nearby Kyoto. It is one of three areas in Japan that have multiple stakes in a metropolitan area.

Ukraine Dnepropetrovsk Mission

The Church in eastern Ukraine has grown so much that it is now beyond the capacity of one mission president to administer effectively. The creation of the Ukraine Dnepropetrovsk Mission from the Ukraine Donetsk

Mission will allow the mission president and missionaries to concentrate on strengthening existing branches and expanding into other large cities located within reasonable commuting distances of Dnepropetrovsk.

Sierra Leone Freetown Mission

In the Africa West Area, the Sierra Leone Freetown Mission was created from a division of the Ghana Accra



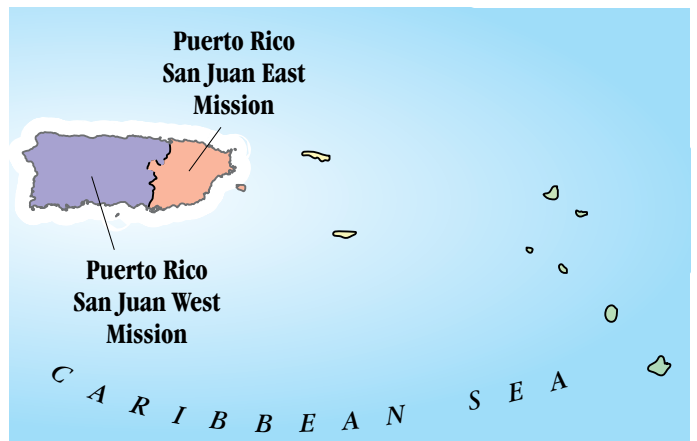
The Ukraine Dnepropetrovsk Mission becomes the third mission in Ukraine.



The Sierra Leone Freetown Mission was created from a division of the Ghana Accra Mission.

Mission. The countries of Togo and Benin will also be transferred from the Ghana

Ghana Cape Coast, and Sierra Leone Freetown, with 10,000 in the Freetown mission.



The Puerto Rico San Juan East Mission has been created from a division of the Puerto Rico San Juan and West Indies Missions.

Cape Coast Mission to the Ghana Accra Mission.

The new mission will include neighboring countries to reduce travel and administrative demands. Priesthood leaders will have more opportunity to care for new members and to conduct Church affairs in this area.

Approximately 38,000 members live in the three missions of Ghana Accra,

Puerto Rico San Juan East Mission

In the Caribbean, the Puerto Rico San Juan East Mission has been created from a division of the Puerto Rico San Juan and West Indies Missions.

The Puerto Rico San Juan Mission will be renamed the Puerto Rico San Juan West Mission. The mission headquarters will be centered in

San Juan, and the mission will cover the western half of Puerto Rico. It will also include the islands of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao.

The new Puerto Rico San Juan East Mission will also be centered in San Juan and will contain the two stakes and one district in eastern Puerto Rico as well as the English-speaking Virgin Islands, British Virgin Islands, Anguilla, St. Kitts and Nevis, Antigua and Barbuda, Montserrat, Dominica, and Barbados.

The West Indies Mission will remain headquartered in Trinidad and will be renamed the Trinidad and Tobago

Mission. It will oversee English-speaking Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Grenada, St. Lucia and St. Vincent, and the Grenadines; French-speaking areas Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana, and St. Martin; and Dutch-speaking areas Suriname and the northern islands of the Netherlands Antilles, including St. Maarten, St. Eustatius, and Saba.

The new mission will reduce travel demands and allow the mission president more contact with missionaries and local priesthood leaders. ■

Adapted from Church News, February 10, 2007.

New Museum Exhibit Documents Tabernacle

By Stephanie Long, Church Magazines

A new exhibit documenting the history of the Salt Lake Tabernacle on Temple Square will run through January 11, 2009, at the Museum of Church History and Art in Salt Lake City.

Coinciding with the rededication of the newly renovated Tabernacle, the display, *The Salt Lake Tabernacle: Gathering the Saints under One Roof*, looks at the construction and history of the Tabernacle and tells its story through artifacts, pictures, documents, drawings, architectural models, and artwork.

"The story of the construction of the Salt Lake Tabernacle is so unique that we pulled out every stop possible to do it justice," said

museum curator Richard Oman. "We haven't installed an exhibit with this many complex exhibit techniques and messages since our Salt Lake Temple centennial exhibit in 1993."

Those involved with the planning of the exhibit meticulously gathered artifacts from the Tabernacle during the recent renovation to use in the exhibit, including one of the original floor joists believed to have been used as a support beam for several boweries before being reused in the Tabernacle in the 1860s; original adobe bricks and wall plaster; and various original objects such as square-headed nails, benches, and organ pipes.

But the exhibit doesn't



Opening the exhibit, Elder Marlin K. Jensen, Church historian, shows reporters a replica of the trusses in the Salt Lake Tabernacle.

stop at merely providing visitors with visual displays.

Visitors can experience and imagine firsthand what it was like to be President Brigham Young speaking to the Saints by standing at a full-size reproduction of an original Tabernacle pulpit.

Visitors can also take a firsthand look at a replica of the roof of the Tabernacle. A portion of the original roof trusses of the Tabernacle has been reproduced in the museum. Original latticework timbers measuring 10 feet (3 m) deep by 16 feet (4.9 m)

wide and 16 feet (4.9 m) high were removed from the Tabernacle to be used in the construction of the replica.

"The full-size roof section is the 'wow' part of this exhibit," Brother Oman said. "Everyone who has watched us construct it has been astonished that we would even attempt to recreate a part of the roof in the gallery."

For more information on *The Salt Lake Tabernacle: Gathering the Saints under One Roof*, visit www.lds.org/churchhistory/museum. ■

Martin Harris Wallet Donated to Church

An original wallet used by Martin Harris (1783–1875) was donated to the Church by Mr. Harris's great-great-grandson, Russell Martin Harris, at the Museum of Church History and Art in Salt Lake City. Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles accepted the wallet on behalf of the Church and spoke briefly about Martin Harris and of the wallet's historical significance.

"One of Martin Harris's greatest contributions to the Church, for which he

should be honored for all time, was his financing the publication of the Book of Mormon," said Elder Oaks. "He mortgaged his home and farm for \$3,000 to secure payment on the printer's contract."

Martin Harris was a key figure in early Church history. He served as one of Joseph Smith's early scribes and was one of the Three Witnesses to the divine origin of the Book of Mormon. In 1829 he used his farm as collateral to finance the printing of the



Russell Martin Harris, his daughter-in-law Ula Harris, and his grandson Shane Lance Harris present Martin Harris's wallet to Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

first 5,000 copies of the Book of Mormon and sold 151 acres of his farm in 1831 for \$3,000 to pay for its publication. Oral tradition in the Harris family holds that the wallet was used by Martin Harris to carry the \$3,000 to

the printer, Egbert B. Grandin, for payment.

According to Richard Oman, curator at the Museum of Church History and Art, "This wallet makes visually tangible the testimony of Martin Harris." ■

Church Responds to Disasters

Church Opens Meetinghouses to Argentine Flood Evacuees

Hundreds sought shelter in Church meetinghouses following flooding and heavy rains in Argentina at the end of March.

For several days rain drenched parts of Argentina, causing widespread flooding that killed at least 7 people. Nearly 37,000 people were forced to evacuate their homes, prompting the Church to offer its meetinghouses as shelters in the affected areas.

Hardest hit were the Santa Fe and Entre Rios Provinces in Argentina's northeast. It is unknown how many homes and businesses were flooded, but there were no reports from Church members of deaths or destroyed homes.

Eight meetinghouses across the region have

housed approximately 600 people. The Church has also provided food, mattresses, medication, and clothing to the flood victims.

Church Aids Those Affected by Tornadoes

On Wednesday, March 28, more than 60 tornadoes swept through an area covering South Dakota to Colorado to Texas, USA, killing at least four people in three states and prompting the response of the Church to help those affected.

Extensive damage occurred in Holly, Colorado, when a tornado 600 feet (183 m) wide touched down for over a mile (1.6 km), damaging more than 60 homes. The Holly Branch meetinghouse sustained serious damage, and the branch president's home was heavily damaged. Thousands of

people in the affected areas were left without gas and power.

All missionaries and Church members were reported safe. Local Church welfare leaders worked to meet the needs of Church members and the community.

Church Assists Caribbean Flood and Landslide Victims

The Church assisted residents of Hispaniola, the Caribbean island shared by the countries of Haiti and the Dominican Republic after at least 11 people died and more than 1,000 homes were damaged or destroyed by flooding and landslides on March 27.

The disasters, caused by more than three days of intense rain, isolated 20 towns and led to the evacuation of more than 4,000 people. The Church authorized

the Caribbean Area Presidency to use funds to purchase essential emergency relief items for those affected by the disaster.

Members, Missionaries Safe Following Japan Quake

Early on Sunday, March 25, an earthquake measuring 6.9 on the Richter scale shook the Hokuriku region of Japan. The quake, centered just offshore, killed one person, destroyed several roads and 50 homes, and severely damaged more than 200 homes, schools, and other buildings.

Shortly after the quakes, two six-inch (15-cm) tsunamis hit the coast but caused no damage.

All members and missionaries in the region were safe and accounted for following the quakes, though multiple aftershocks plagued the area.



Members of the Church in Jakarta prepared two meals a day for approximately 500 people displaced by floods.

Members' Homes Damaged in New Mexico Tornadoes

A series of tornadoes touched down overnight in the state of New Mexico, USA, on Friday, March 23. Local Church members responded quickly to distribute food, water, and hygiene kits to those in the affected area. Volunteers from local LDS congregations assisted in the cleanup.

The tornadoes destroyed 24 homes and businesses in Clovis and Logan, New Mexico, where they did the most damage. More than 100 homes, businesses, and schools in the area reported damage.

Despite minor damage to some members' homes, all members and missionaries were safe. No casualties were reported in the affected areas.

Members Feed Community after Jakarta Floods

After a devastating flood hit parts of Jakarta, Indonesia, in early February, members of the Church living in the area set up a food kitchen to prepare meals for

more than 500 people displaced by the floods.

With funding from LDS Charities, the members were

Comment

A Story Like My Own

I was touched by the article "Tell Me It Isn't True" (February 2007). Brother Anthony Atkins's experience in coming to the truth of the restored gospel reminded me of my own as a teenager. I was raised in a Protestant sect and was taught in school to know and love the Bible. But that knowledge led me, even as a young child, to have some questions, such as, "If God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, then where are the prophets?"

The analogy of the pond and the hang gliders given to Brother Atkins by the Spirit mirrors the feelings that I experienced while considering baptism. It seemed as if I had already reached the highest way of living I could reach in the church I attended, and I was barely 16 years of age.

able to provide two meals a day and deliver them to those who had to relocate because of the floods.

Members of the Church gathered all the food and supplies, then set up a makeshift kitchen under a tent. This service was reminiscent of the 2002 floods in Jakarta, when Church members also set up temporary kitchens to prepare food for displaced community members.

Missionaries serving in the Jakarta area also assisted with the cooking and delivering of the food. It is estimated that rising waters drove almost 50,000 people from their homes. ■

That church offered me the best the world had to offer in serving others and living the principles I had learned. The restored gospel offered me the universe to learn and explore.

So often we get caught up in the day-to-day demands of living in the world and in a busy church that we sometimes forget the feelings and inspiration that led us to the path we are on. I am grateful for the reminder this article gave me.

Karen Murray, Washington

Healing Power of Music

I noticed in the March 2007 issue of the *Ensign* the numerous references to the healing power of music—in particular, the hymns of the Church. I want to thank you for including that message. Music is indeed sometimes

the only thing that can heal a wounded soul.

Larry Beck, Oregon

A Personal Benchmark

Thank you for your article "Having Faith in God's Timeline" (March 2007). The author expressed thoughts I often experienced as a single member of the Church with eloquence and exactness. Her statement, "I consistently check in on whether what I'm doing is right—if my goals in life match the larger goal of discipleship to the Savior," is an exceptional benchmark for me. I will use it as such.

I appreciate the personal relevancy I find in each issue. Thank you for this publication. Rachel Lemblé, Canada

Practical Application

I can't help but write and tell you how enlightening the article "Confirming the Call" by A. Wayne Baker (April 2007) was to me. The three principles the author shared have so many practical applications, and the personal experiences were easy to relate to. Thank you.

Jeanine Tew, Utah

Correction

A news story in the April *Ensign* reported that *The Testaments of One Fold and One Shepherd* ran exclusively in Salt Lake City for five years. While the Joseph Smith Memorial Building is the only location where the feature was shown on 65 mm film, *The Testaments* has also been screened at visitors' centers and missionary training centers on video. ■