The Gathering of Scattered Israel: The Missional Enterprise of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

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Abstract
This article focuses on LDS missionary theology; changing missionary practices, training, and demographics of the missionary force in historical perspective; the relationship between the size of the missionary force and church growth; and the LDS Church’s geographic expansion as an international church.

Keywords
missiology, LDS Church, LDS Church history, church growth

In this article I address Latter-day Saint (LDS) missionary efforts over the history of the church. I consider changes in missionary practice, as well as the relation between (1) the training and demographics of the missionary force and (2) the growth in the missionary force and overall church growth.

Theology of Latter-day Saint mission
As missiologist Justice Anderson has asserted, “The starting point of all missiological study should be missionary theology.”¹ Latter-day Saint mission theology has been cosmic in scope from its inception, taking Jesus’s injunction “Go ye into all the world” quite literally.² Historians Reid L. Neilson and Fred W. Woods have commented,

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It is important to note that early Latter-day Saints, like other antebellum American Christians, believed that the resurrected Jesus Christ had commanded his disciples in the Old World to “teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19). Although nearly two millennia had passed since the earliest Christians attempted to meet this obligation, their counterparts in the New World still sought to share the Christian gospel with every nation, kindred, and tongue. The Mormons, despite their poverty [and] persecution . . . helped shoulder the ever-present burden of fulfilling the biblical Great Commission.3

This theology of mission has provided the forward thrust that has resulted in a volunteer, self-funded, short-term missionary (STMs) force which grew from 16 in 1830 to its zenith in 2014 of 89,000.4

Equally significant and growing alongside the theological notion of “every member a missionary”5 was and is the doctrine of “The Gathering.” Reid L. Neilson observed that “Latter-day Saints in America shared much of the same Christian worldview as their Protestant colleagues. Millenarianism, for example, influenced the thought and decision making of Mormon leaders and laity alike.”6 William Mulder, though, explained one significant theological difference: “‘The Gathering,’ not polygamy, was Mormonism’s oldest and most influential doctrine. . . . The gathering was Mormonism’s way of channeling what the nineteenth century called the religious affections. . . . Inspiration for the gathering sprang from a literal interpretation of Scripture, from a providential reading of history, and from the circumstances of a free-land society in early nineteenth century America. . . . While other millenarians set a time, the Mormons appointed a place.”7

Thus, throughout the nineteenth century the Latter-day Saint “Gathering of Israel” was animated by an apocalyptic millennial zeal to leave “Babylon” and gather to a Zion located in the Great Basin of what eventually became part of the United States of America.8 Patrick Mason points out how this unique theology was the impetus for a literal gathering early on: “Not only was gathering a defensive strategy, but fervent premillennialist early Mormons were convinced that their task was to prepare the kingdom of God and to call out the righteous from Babylon to gather to Zion in anticipation of the return of Jesus Christ to the earth. Church leaders encouraged new converts to the faith . . . around the world in the church’s various international missions, to move, as soon as possible, to the Saints’ gathering place in the intermountain West.”9

The self-perception that they were the only active agents gathering Israel from the four corners of the earth served, alongside the theological notion that “it becometh every man who hath been warned to warn his neighbor,”10 as the stimulus of the Church’s missionary enterprise from the beginning and has continued to figure predominantly in the discourse of Church president Russell M. Nelson.11

Despite the well-orchestrated and equally well-documented nineteenth-century migration across the American continent—alongside an even more impressive immigration from across the globe12—over time, the centralized gathering to the intermountain West transitioned to the current practice of gathering scattered Israel
to the local “stakes of Zion,” ecclesiastical jurisdictions that dot the globe.\textsuperscript{13} However, this shift in emphasis from a literal gathering to a centralized geographic location to a more figurative spiritual gathering to the local stakes wherever members currently reside has not minimized the theological imperative of “building Zion.”

One of the ever-present challenges faced by this virtual army of Latter-day Saint STMs who are seeking to “gather [the] elect from the four quarters of the earth”\textsuperscript{14} is the fact that they are frequently viewed by other Christians as sheep-stealers, preying on disaffected members of other congregations instead of those not yet converted to Jesus Christ. As such, the activities of Latter-day Saint missionaries are often not considered by their Christian counterparts to be missionary work at all, because they are focused not on converting souls to Christ but rather on converting them away from mainstream Christian churches.\textsuperscript{15} For example, Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp and Reid L. Neilson explained how this practice was implemented during the nineteenth century: “While American Protestants evangelized almost exclusively in non-Christian, non-Western nations, the Latter-day Saints focused their resources on the Christian, Western, Atlantic world. . . . Specifically, they assigned 6,444 (53 percent) . . . to evangelize throughout the United States and Canada and designated 4,798 (40 percent) . . . to missionize in Europe, especially in Great Britain and Scandinavia.”\textsuperscript{16}

In defense of these Mormon missionary activities, Church leaders pointed out that since LDS missionaries were preaching additional truths—restored by the Prophet Joseph Smith after the long apostasy—they believed their message added to the already existing Christian message, and with that came a scriptural injunction to take that message to the whole world, regardless of their current church affiliation.\textsuperscript{17}

\section*{Latter-day Saint mission in historical perspective: Nineteenth-century beginnings}

From its earliest beginnings, nineteenth-century missional preaching was based on self-selection, as with other Christian faiths.\textsuperscript{18} William E. Hughes observed, “Every convert considered himself a missionary and sought to share the restored gospel with family, friends, neighbors and acquaintances. No official call needed to be extended, nor area of labor designated—each member sensed the need to spread the gospel. . . . At a conference in New York in 1831, Joseph said, ‘And let your preaching be the warning voice, every man to his neighbor,’ and again this was echoed in December 1832, when it was revealed that ‘. . . it becometh every man who hath been warned to warn his neighbor.’”\textsuperscript{19}

Men ordained to the priesthood were not the only ones who felt compelled to share the gospel informally with their family and friends. It is evident from their journals that many new members perceived that sharing the gospel was part of their divinely appointed duty.\textsuperscript{20}

As Hughes explained, “During the 1850s, the Mormon missionary system became more routinized and institutionalized. . . . LDS leaders replaced the freelance
missionary system with the more organized appointed missionary system.” Hughes
details how these “mission calls” were initially issued:

Very little time elapsed from the moment the missionary heard his name read over the pulpit
in conference to the time he departed. . . . It was no easy task for wives to allow their
husbands to leave. . . . When one considers the great sacrifices required and the conditions
under which these early missionaries served, it is remarkable that most responded in the
affirmative. For example, the Missionary Record indicates that from 1860 to 1869, 702 men
were called and only 10 did not honor the call. These numbers are an indication of the strong
obligation men felt when they were called to spread the gospel through missionary efforts.21

Hughes’s findings are summarized in table 1.

**Table 1.** Mission calls and missionaries

| Decade | Method of delivering calls | Average age | Length of service | Marital status
|--------|---------------------------|-------------|------------------|-----------------
| 1850s  | Surprise announcement at General Conference | 35          | 30 months        | mostly married  
| 1860s  | Surprise announcement at General Conference | 37          | 30 months        | mostly married  
| 1870s  | Surprise announcement at General Conference | 40          | 14 months        | mostly married  
| 1880s  | Unsolicited letter—call issued by Apostles, assisted by members of a missionary committee | 35          | 24 months        | mostly married  
| 1890s  | Consulted by their local ecclesiastical leaders before formal assignments were extended | 30          | 24 months        | a growing number of single, younger men and women |

*Source:* Hughes, “A Profile,” 176–81.

*a* A statistical sampling of missionaries called from 1849 to 1900 reveals that 78 percent were married and 22 percent were single at the time of their call. The majority of those who were single were called later in the century. See Hughes, “A Profile,” 157.

Like the early New Testament disciples, the LDS missionaries were initially com-
manded to go without purse or scrip.22 Church leaders instructed them to leave any
cash they had with their wives and children to support them in their absence. Once
they reached the East or West Coast, horses, mules, and wagons were sold to finance
their journey oversees.23 As a result, nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint missionaries
were almost universally poor, often wearing tattered clothing and worn-out shoes,
conditions that, in the end, endeared them to other labor-class Europeans and North
Americans who had been disenfranchised by their middle- and upper-class clergy.24 As
with the early disciples, the command to travel without purse or scrip was later
relaxed,25 and as the century ended, most missionaries were not traveling strictly in this manner but rather were supplementing their travels with other forms of finances.26

Historical research reveals that the source material for their sermons was overwhelmingly the Bible. They preached about the Book of Mormon, not from it. Its authenticity was at issue, not its teachings, and the Elders depended upon the Bible to “prove” that authenticity. Although the Doctrine and Covenants was available as early as 1845, and by 1869 had gone through six printings, it was used even less than the Book of Mormon in missionary sermons.27

What kinds of training did these lay missionaries receive during the nineteenth century? Mormon missiologist R. Lanier Britsch asserted, “Occasionally, criticisms have been leveled at the LDS for sending missionaries into the field who are untrained in theology or who lack the generally expected academic degrees. In answer to this, Latter-day Saints usually say, ‘Unschooled, perhaps, but certainly not untrained.’”28 Latter-day Saint historian Richard O. Cowan observed: “In 1832, a revelation directed Joseph Smith to organize the School of the Prophets . . . [which] began meeting at Kirtland in 1833 under the direction of Joseph Smith. A similar activity commenced that same year in Jackson County, Missouri, under the leadership of Parley P. Pratt and was known as the School of the Elders. The prime purpose of both schools was to prepare missionaries for their service. The Seventies’ Hall, which opened at Nauvoo in 1844, served the same basic purpose.”29

In terms of proselytizing methodology, Hughes noted:

Between 1849-1900, there were nearly as many proselyting methods as there were missionaries. Not only did each missionary adapt customary methods to fit his own personality, but proselyting methods were also adapted and modified according to the attitudes of the people, and the customs and the laws of the land in which they were used. In addition, each mission was presided over by a mission president who directed proselyting activities as he saw fit. There were no Church-wide teaching programs or proselyting systems guiding the labors of organized missions. Missionaries, given their particular circumstances, used the proselyting methods which brought them the most success.30

How successful were these rag-tag nineteenth-century Mormon missionaries? Britsch observed,

The average number of missionaries called from 1830-1844 was 127 per year. The Church grew from a small number of members on April 6, 1830, to 26,146 members at the end of 1844. . . . Most of the 26,146 members were converts, not children born into church membership. . . . Surprisingly, the total number of Church members more than doubled to 52,165 during this period. . . . Just think about it: The Martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum [Smith] took place in June 1844, [and] the majority of [Latter-day] Saints were driven out of Nauvoo in February 1846. The Saints suffered their way to Winter Quarters [Nebraska] and endured countless hardships. In 1847, they began settlement in Great Salt Lake Valley and proceeded to regroup. Despite these significant challenges, missionary work went forward.31
The LDS initial missionary success in Great Britain exploded exponentially throughout the nineteenth century, and what was deemed by many as an “American Religion” quickly became predominantly British, as shown in table 2.

**Table 2. The impact of British membership and immigration, 1840–90**

| Year | Number of Latter-day Saints in Great Britain | Number of Latter-day Saints who immigrated to the US | Membership worldwide | Membership minus British Saints\(^a\) |
|------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1840 | 3,626                                       | 291                                                 | 16,865                | 12,948                              |
| 1850 | 30,747                                      | 9,437                                               | 51,839                | 11,655\(^b\)                        |
| 1860 | 13,853                                      | 30,079                                              | 61,082                | 17,150                              |
| 1870 | 8,804                                       | 53,749                                              | 90,130                | 27,577                              |
| 1880 | 5,112                                       | 71,267                                              | 133,628               | 57,249                              |
| 1890 | 2,770                                       | 89,695                                              | 188,263               | 95,798\(^c\)                        |

*Source: Stark, *The Basis of Mormon Success*, 211–12.*

\(^a\)British Saints = Latter-day Saints in Britain, plus emigration from Britain to the US.

\(^b\)US Census for 1830 reported 11,354 white persons living in Utah.

\(^c\)Non-British Saints outnumbered British Saints for the first time since 1845.

Rodney Stark made the following observation regarding some of the reasons behind the missionaries’ success in Great Britain during this time:

Why did the Latter-day Saints do so well in Britain? The 1840s were very stressful times there. The enclosure movement had driven millions from rural areas to lead lives of desperate poverty and misery in the polluted industrial cities. The majority of Britain’s seventeen million people were extremely poor; they lived in squalid, crowded tenements or were homeless on the streets. Given these conditions and the extraordinary class contrasts ... it is no surprise that there was increasingly bitter class antagonism. A substantial amount of this antagonism was directed towards the conventional churches; nearly all of them, including the “fundamentalist” sects, not only opposed the working class in terms of politics, but charged pew rentals that were well beyond the means of most citizens. ... It is important to recognize that British immigrants did far more than swell the church rolls, for few of them were cynical opportunists. Once in America, surrounded by a Latter-day Saint society, the British Saints were models of devotion whose descendants still make up a significant portion of Utah Latter-day Saints. In 1990 the U.S. Census asked Americans their ancestry. In Utah, 44 percent said they were ‘English,’ as compared with 30 percent in Maine, 29 percent in Idaho, 26 percent in Vermont, and 24 percent in New Hampshire (these were the top five).33

In addition to sending missionaries predominantly throughout the United States and to Europe in order to fulfill the Great Commission’s “to all nations,” Church leaders also dispatched missionaries “to almost all points of the compass,” as recounted by Britsch:

Can you imagine men such as Richard Ballantyne, founder of the Church’s Sunday School program, sitting next to his wife, Hulda, in the Bowery hearing his name read out that he was
called to serve a mission in Hindustan? He was not alone . . . eight other men were called to Hindustan (India), and four were called to Siam (Thailand). Four elders were called to Hong Kong, China. . . . Unlike their Protestant counterparts, who for several centuries, from the Reformation until the late 1700s, believed the Great Commission to “teach all nations”

Table 3. Latter-day Saints Membership, 1830–1900

| Date                | Number of Latter-day Saints | Percent Increase |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|
| April 6, 1830       | 6                           | —                |
| December 31, 1830   | 280                         | 4,667            |
| 1840                | 16,865                      | 6,023            |
| 1850                | 51,839                      | 307              |
| 1860                | 61,082                      | 18               |
| 1870                | 90,130                      | 48               |
| 1880                | 133,628                     | 48               |
| 1890                | 188,263                     | 41               |
| 1895                | 231,116                     | 23               |
| 1900                | 283,765                     | 23               |

Source: Stark, “The Basis of Mormon Success,” 209.

applied only to the original Apostles, Joseph Smith and Brigham Young knew it was the entire Church’s current obligation to teach every people.34

Latter-day Saints remained self-proclaimed deviants from accepted religious and cultural norms. And so, despite the unpopularity of a faith that openly practiced plural marriage and made concerted attempts to establish theocratic social orders throughout the United States, tens of thousands joined the Church in the United States and abroad, either migrating or immigrating to help build “Zion.” (See table 3.)

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries: Constancy amid change

Mormon historian Jonathan Stapley noted, “Starting at the turn of the twentieth century, mission presidents began to publish manuals of instruction for their missionaries.” And beginning in 1925, “a Mission Home in Salt Lake City provided a central location where all missionaries could gather and receive instruction. Generally, a missionary would stay for several days, be set apart as a missionary by a General Authority. . . . Missionaries went directly to foreign language areas with no language preparation. . . . In 1937 [the newly created Radio, Publicity, and Mission Literature Committee of the Church] . . . released the first edition of The Missionary’s Handbook. This book marked the beginning of a centralized focus on a worldwide missionary effort.”35
In her study of the history of Latter-day Saint missionary language training, Cynthia Hallen observed that “at first missionaries were proud that they could go directly to the field and learn language(s) without going to school as the Protestants did,” relying more directly on the gift of tongues. “It wasn’t long, however,” she notes, “before Church leaders, missionaries, and educators sensed a need for serious language preparation in order to make more effective use of the time in the mission field.” She notes: “The Salt Lake Missionary Home introduced classes in English and foreign languages in 1926 . . . but [General Authorities of the Church first] gave serious consideration to a language training program as early as 1947.” After deliberating for more than a decade, “on December 4, 1961, the Missionary Language Institute was officially opened” on the campus of Brigham Young University as part of the university, as described by Britsch.

The Language Training Missions (LTM) [was] founded in 1963. . . . New missionaries live at this school for six to eight weeks. During this time, they study the language of the mission to which they have been assigned, usually in the context of lesson discussions. In addition, these missionaries study the history and culture of the area. Originally there were LTMs at Ricks College in Idaho, the BYU-Hawaii Campus, and at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. [Eventually, the three were] combined at a new facility near BYU. This multimillion-dollar complex produces speakers of [many foreign] languages, and the number is constantly expanding. No one expects these missionaries to be competent in linguistic or cultural matters; nevertheless, they are much better prepared to teach than LDS missionaries have been in years past.

Whether learning a foreign language or not, all “missionaries start their missions with several weeks of training at a Missionary Training Center.” Robert Lively observed, “Most struggle in some way. Issues include homesickness, missing a significant other, being with a companion at all times, and exhaustion. A few return home early because they choose to or because they are told to. The [majority] complete their training and move on . . . to the mission field.” Lively notes that the instructors at the MTCs around the world—unlike their Catholic and Protestant counterparts, who are typically university professors with PhDs—are “largely [young, recently] returned missionaries,” ranging in age from twenty to twenty-five, many of them students at nearby universities.

Latter-day Saint historian Claudia Bushman summarized this feature of mission training: “This plan moved customized teaching from ‘structure-based’ to ‘principle-based.’” *Preach My Gospel*, a missionary manual released in 2005, stressed goal setting and planning, adding emphasis on “using time wisely, finding people to teach, improving teaching skills, [and] helping people make and keep commitments.”

After receiving these various kinds of training at one of the MTCs, missionaries are sent “to their assigned geographical region, called a mission. Each mission is presided over by a mission president, who typically has two assistants. . . . Missions are typically subdivided into large regions called zones and further into subregions called districts, with missionary leaders in charge of the work in these areas. Missionaries are to always be with their ‘companions,’ one of whom is typically a ‘senior’ to the other.” Lively noted, “The missionary’s first companion in the field is known as his
‘trainer,’ and it is that person’s responsibility to help the new missionary assimilate into the mission culture and to fulfill mission expectations. Being new to the mission, ‘greenies’ hold the lowest status in the mission.”43 Single, male missionaries typically serve twenty-four months; single female missionaries serve eighteen months.

## Changing demographics within the missionary force

The Church maintained a rigid mission orthodoxy and orthopraxy throughout the twentieth century. In October 2012, however, a significant change occurred regarding the age of female missionaries. At that time, Church president Thomas S. Monson announced that the minimum age for female missionaries was being lowered from twenty-one to nineteen.44 This change resulted in a dramatic increase of female members into the missionary work force, as graphically portrayed in the second diagram on the Church’s online website Newsroom.45

In addition to lowering the minimum age for females, President Monson announced the lowering of the minimum age for males from nineteen to eighteen. As can be seen in figure 1, while the number of female missionaries increased, the number of male missionaries did as well—at a somewhat commensurate rate—resulting in the retention of a predominantly single, male missionary force.

![Figure 1. LDS missionaries: female, male, and total, for each of four years. (Data obtained from Stark, “The Basis of Mormon Success,” 209; Church Almanac by Deseret News, 1974–2013, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department [Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News]; and “Statistical Report” for 2014–2020, Newsroom, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed September 27, 2021, https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/statistics.)](image)
In addition, Lively observed that single, young adult males and females “aren’t the only Latter-day Saints who volunteer for missionary service. Many retired Church members . . . [numbering in the] thousands serve in a variety of missionary roles around the world. They include senior couples and senior sisters . . . . They too are dedicated to supporting the Church and furthering its message, or, as it is said, ‘helping to move the work along.’”

The missionary force and church growth

Significantly, an increase in total missionaries has not translated into a commensurate increase in overall Church membership. As indicated in figure 2, from 1839 to 1840, Church membership grew by 2.46 percent. The percentage annual growth was somewhat higher for the years 1880, 1920, and 1960, somewhat lower for 2000, and considerably lower for 2020.

Of note, while total Church growth as a percentage has been declining steadily since 1997, during this same time period the total number of missionaries experienced its most dramatic increase, averaging 60,463. In contrast, during the preceding 160-year period, from 1835 to 1995, the average number of missionaries was a staggeringly low 6,667—almost one-tenth the average of the last twenty-two years. This growth in missionaries was more than ten times the average annual growth in Church membership.

In other words, in comparing the earlier period of the Church (1835–1995) with the later period (1996–2018), there was an annual average of nearly ten times fewer missionaries (6,667 vs. 60,463) but an annual average growth rate in membership approximately ten times higher (26 percent vs. 2.41 percent). Not only does there appear to be no relationship between the total number of missionaries and percentage growth.
increase or decrease in Church membership, there also appears to be no correlation between total convert baptism and total missionaries from 1996 to 2014.

At first glance, these findings might indicate failure. However, if seen in the broader context of World Christianity, the missionary program and subsequent growth of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is, in comparison, robust, as shown in table 4.

**Geographic expansion**

As the Church’s missionary force experienced periods of both growth and decline throughout the twentieth century, it continued to expand geographically, as historian Jan Shipps observed.

Mormons were the ones who appeared to be making the most headway at home. . . . In the twentieth century LDS growth no longer depended on the British mission, but it was impeded by world events. . . . LDS growth slowed to only 13 percent between 1915 and 1920. Following the war, growth returned to prewar levels, only to be sharply reduced during the Great Depression. Then came World War II, and once again foreign travel was impossible. LDS men who might have gone on missions were in the armed forces instead. Then, with wars and the depression behind them, the Latter-day Saints entered a period of very rapid growth—never below 22 percent for any five-year period since 1950. In 1995 LDS membership was nearly ten million. As a result of this rapid growth, Mormonism is no longer an American or British-American movement. As of 1996 more than 50 percent of all Saints lived outside the United States.47

The role President Spencer W. Kimball played in this growth cannot be overstated. In addition to mobilizing the young adult men of the Church with his preachment “Every young man should serve a mission,”48 the Church won legal recognition in Poland in 1977 and erected a temple in East Germany in 1985. A recalcitrant Russia warily granted post-Communist legality in 1998.49

Like other Christian denominations, mission success transitioned from the Global North and West throughout the nineteenth century to the Global South in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Even as late as 1981, most of the Church’s 4,920,449

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**Table 4. Latter-day Saint missions in context**

| Religious affiliation   | Total missionary growth rate percentage, 1970–2018 | Total affiliation growth rate percentage, 1970–2018 |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Total Christians       | 1.82                                                | 2.06                                                |
| Latter-day Saints      | 4.30                                                | 4.56                                                |

Source: Statistical data for World Christianity obtained from Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden: Brill, accessed September 2021), www.worldchristiandatabase.org. Statistical data for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints obtained from *Church Almanac*, 1974–2013, and Newsroom, “Statistical Reports,” https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/statistics.
members lived in the United States and Canada. However, just thirty years later, in 2011, most of the Church’s 14,441,346 members lived outside the United States and Canada. And like other Christian churches engaged in missionary work, the growth has occurred primarily in Africa and in Central and South America—the Global South.\(^5\) When compared with trends within the larger context of World Christianity, the results are dissimilar, with only a slight majority of the members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Global South in 2011, as opposed to two-thirds of Christians worldwide by 2018. In fact, LDS missionaries did not even begin proselytizing in any organized way in South America until the 1920s, four and a half centuries after the Roman Catholic Church began its efforts there, and not until the latter part of the 1970s in Africa (with the exception of white South Africa), nearly two millennia after the first Christian missional efforts there.\(^5\) By and large, the shift toward the Global South did not even begin until part way through the twentieth century.

Since its inception, LDS mission, as a global enterprise, has struggled to overcome stereotypes relative to polygamy and racial prejudice, international political barriers, and secularized post-Christian social trends. Despite these and other tensions, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints continues to call and send out missionaries, young and old, at more than twice the rate of their Christian counterparts, experiencing a commensurate Church growth rate that is also more than double that of all other Christian faith groups combined (see table 4). While future challenges undoubtedly lie ahead, the vision and scope of the Latter-day Saint mission enterprise have developed into what has become the largest, lay, short-term missionary force embracing the Great Commission in modern times.\(^5\)

**Notes**

1. Justice Anderson, “An Overview of Missiology,” in *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions*, ed. John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 13–15.
2. Significantly, this command has been quoted in the interim (1843 to the present) by no fewer than 148 general authorities of the Church in its General Conferences. See https://www.lds-general-conference.org/.
3. Reid L. Neilson and Fred E. Woods, preface to *Go Ye into All the World: The Growth and Development of Mormon Missionary Work*, ed. Reid L. Neilson and Fred E. Woods (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2013), x.
4. See https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/elder-nielson-provides-mormon-missionary-update-after-surge.
5. To understand the impact of Church president David O. McKay’s coining of this phrase and subsequent reiterations by church leaders since, see Marianne Holman, “‘Every Member a Missionary’ for Fifty Years,” *Ensign*, April 2009, 77.
6. Reid L. Neilson, “Mormon Mission Work,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Mormonism*, ed. Terryl Givens and Philip L. Barlow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 183.
7. William Mulder, “Mormonism’s ‘Gathering’: An American Doctrine with a Difference,” *Church History* 23, no. 3 (1954): 248–64.
8. This sentiment was perhaps best captured in Doctrine and Covenants section 133, verses
4–12, which was received as a revelation to Joseph Smith Jr. in November 1831. It reads:
“Wherefore, prepare ye, prepare ye, O my people; sanctify yourselves; gather ye together,
O ye people of my church, upon the land of Zion, all you that have not been commanded
to tarry. Go ye out from Babylon. . . . Yea, verily I say unto you again, the time has come
when the voice of the Lord is unto you: Go ye out of Babylon; gather ye out from among
the nations, from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Send forth the elders
of my church unto the nations which are afar off; unto the islands of the sea; send forth unto
foreign lands; call upon all nations, first upon the Gentiles, and then upon the Jews. And
behold, and lo, this shall be their cry, and the voice of the Lord unto all people: Go ye forth
unto the land of Zion. . . . Yea, let the cry go forth among all people: Awake and arise and
go forth to meet the Bridegroom; behold and lo, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet
him. Prepare yourselves for the great day of the Lord. Watch, therefore, for ye know neither
the day nor the hour. Let them, therefore, who are among the Gentiles flee unto Zion.”

9. Patrick Mason, The Mormon Menace: Violence and Anti-Mormonism in the Postbellum
South (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 27.
10. See Doctrine and Covenants, section 88, verse 81.
11. Since his installment as president and prophet of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day
Saints on January 14, 2018, Russell M. Nelson has directed members of the church world-
wide to engage fully in the “gathering of Israel,” twice in 2018 (June 3 and October 3)
and three times in 2019 (February 11, April 7, and October 6). However, this is not a new
directive. Church leaders have issued the same injunction in church-wide (i.e., worldwide)
general conferences eighty-six times since the early 1850s.
12. For excellent resources on both Mormon migration and immigration, see the “Immigrants
Ancestor’s Project,” Center for Family History and Genealogy, Brigham Young University,
http://immigrants.byu.edu/; “Saints by Sea: Latter-day Saint Immigration to America,”
Brigham Young University, https://saintsbysea.lib.byu.edu/; and “Overland Travel Pioneer
Database,” Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, https://history.churchofjesuschrist
.org/overlandtravel/.
13. For an example of the contemporary position, see Dallin H. Oaks, “Preparation for the
Second Coming,” Ensign, April 2004, 8, 174th annual General Conference report, where
he said, “The current commandment is not to gather to one place but to gather in stakes in
our own homelands.”
14. This directive occurred early on in the revelations of Joseph Smith, first in Doctrine and
Covenants, section 33, verse 6, which was received in October of 1830, just six months
after the organization of the Church, and later during September of 1831, while translating
Matthew chapter 24 (verse 27).
15. Stephen Neill and Owen Chadwick, A History of Christian Missions (New York: Penguin
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