

Analysis of New Missions to be Organized in July 2026

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Overview

On October 24th, 2025, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints announced it will create 55 new missions in 2026, bringing the worldwide total to 506. Church leaders described the change as both a response to sustained missionary growth and a means of keeping missions small enough for leaders to mentor and support missionaries more effectively. The number of young, service, and senior missionaries has risen from just over 65,000 at the end of 2022 to nearly 72,000 at the end of 2023, and is now above 84,000, according to the Church's statement.¹

This analysis reviews the geographic distribution of the 2026 missions, highlights trends relative to prior years when large numbers of new missions were organized, and assesses implications for church growth. It also addresses the strategic signal behind the placements: a more assertive, population-centered expansion and a looser implementation of the "centers of strength" model, including re-engagement of large metropolitan areas.

Trends in Mission Growth

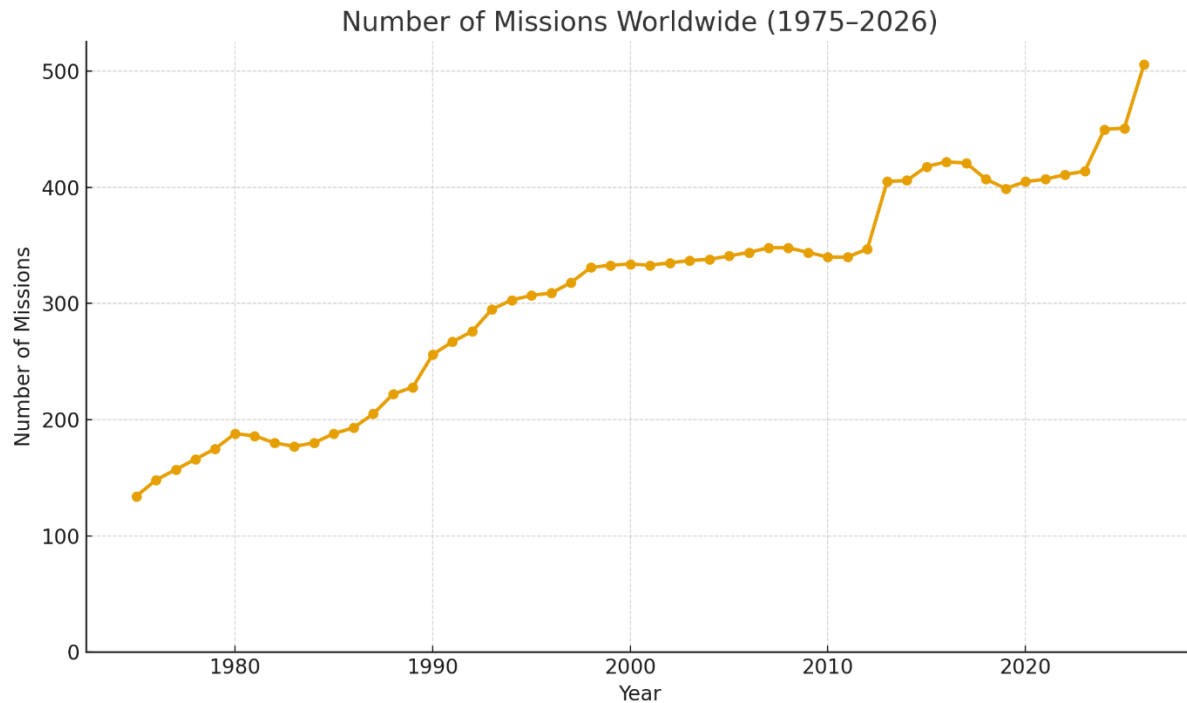
The Church has generally reported steady increases in the number of missions worldwide over the past half century (see Figure 1). A mission is an administrative unit led by a mission president and his wife who oversee full-time missionary efforts within designated geographical boundaries. Similar to temple announcements, the establishment of new missions has occurred in distinct waves, with major surges during the late 1980s and early 1990s, in 2013, and again in the mid-2020s. A review of mission totals by year highlights these expansion waves. The years with the greatest single-year increases in the total number of missions were:

- 2013 (+58)
- 2026 (+55)
- 2024 (+36)
- 1990 (+28)
- 1993 (+19)
- 1988 (+17)
- 1976 (+14)
- 1980 (+13)
- 1998 (+13)
- 1987 (+12)

There have been only three years when there has been a net decrease of more than four missions: 2018 (-14), 2019 (-8), and 1982 (-6).

¹ <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/55-new-missions>

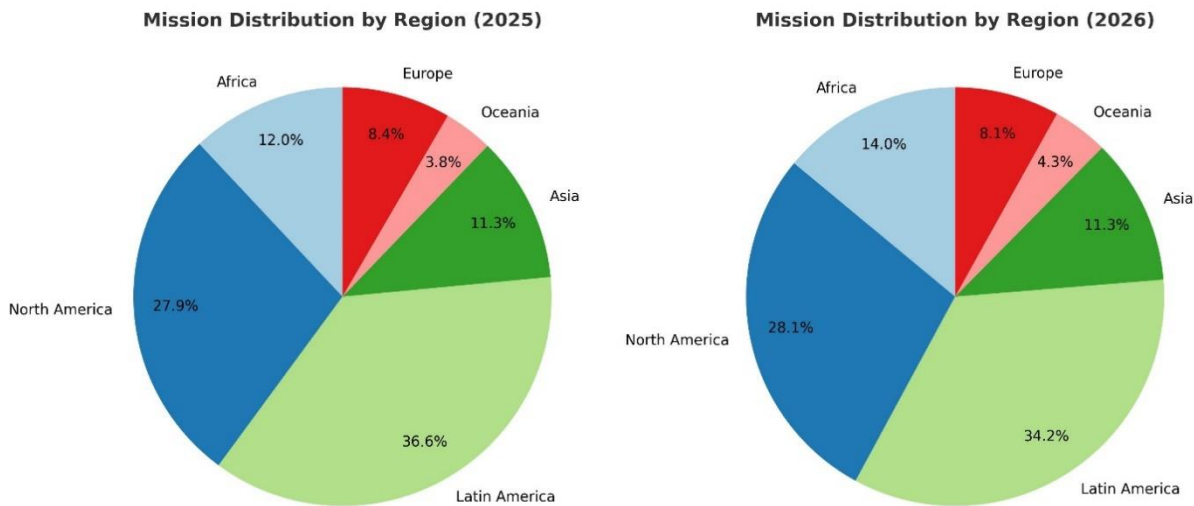
Figure 1



Geographic Distribution of New Missions (2026)

The number of new missions announced for 2026 and its percentage relative to all new missions announced is as follows by world region: Africa (17; 30.9%), North America (16, 29.1%), Latin America (8; 14.5%), Asia (6; 10.9%), Oceania (5; 9.1%), and Europe (3; 5.5%). The percentage increase in new missions by region for 2026 was highest for Africa (31.5%) and Oceania (29.4%) and lowest for Latin America (4.8%) and Europe (7.9%). New missions to be created in 2026 will increase the total number of missions in Asia by 11.8% and in North America by 12.7%. Overall, the distribution of the Church's missions by world region is unchanged except for African missions comprising 14% instead of 12% of the missions of the world (with a corresponding decline from 36% to 34% in Latin America). See Figure 2 for mission distributions by world region for 2025 versus 2026 after the 55 new missions are organized.

Figure 2



Major Points

Large Number of Missions Signals Strength in Resources and Optimism about the Future

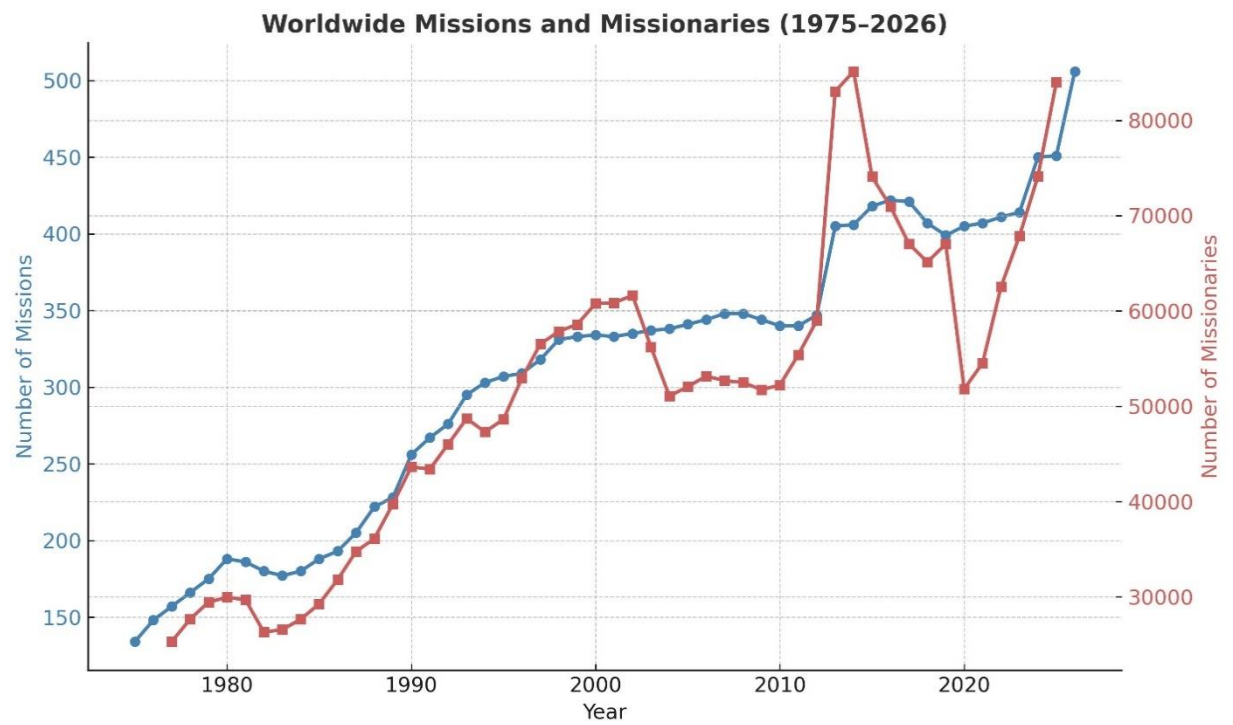
Missions consume significant church resources in terms of money, personnel, time, and energy. The financial demands of organizing 55 new missions (i.e., renting and furnishing mission office, supporting the mission president, housing needs for larger numbers of missionaries) will add significant perpetual expenses to the Church's budget for maintaining its missionary forces around the world which are currently organized into 451 missions. The decision to create so many new missions in a single year signals that the Church can meet these financial expenses in advance, suggesting strong financial stability. Sustained increases in the number of full-time missionaries serving has warranted the creation of more missions to keep the size of missions more manageable for mission leaders to meet administrative needs.

The average mission had 182 missionaries in 2000 which fell to 151 in 2008, increased to 210 in 2014, and decreased to 168 in 2019 (see Figure 3). Currently, the average mission has 186 missionaries. There will be an average of 166 missionaries per mission following the creation of the 55 new missions in July 2026 assuming the worldwide missionary force remains at 84,000. Trends in the increase and decrease in the number of missions and full-time missionaries have generally been well correlated over the past 50 years, although full-time missionary numbers have had more dramatic fluctuations than the number of missions in operation (see Figure 4).

Figure 3



Figure 4



Church leadership is optimistic about future missionary successes, and this appears to be at least partially due to recent progress. In the October 2025 General Conference, Apostle Elder Quentin L. Cook announced that the Church had reported a more than 20% increase in convert baptisms during the first six months of 2025 compared to the first six months of 2024 for all world regions individually except for North America where there was a 17% increase compared to the first six months of 2024.² Elder Cook previously reported an “at least a 20% increase in convert baptisms” for every world region for the first quarter of 2025 compared to the first quarter of 2024, and the Church had its “largest number of convert baptisms in any-12-month period” between June 2024 and May 2025.³ Convert baptisms totaled 308,682 in 2024—the highest reported since 1997—and the number of convert baptisms increased at a rate faster than the number of members serving full-time missions, resulting in the average missionary baptizing 4.16 converts in 2024 (compared to 3.71 in 2023; see Figure 5).

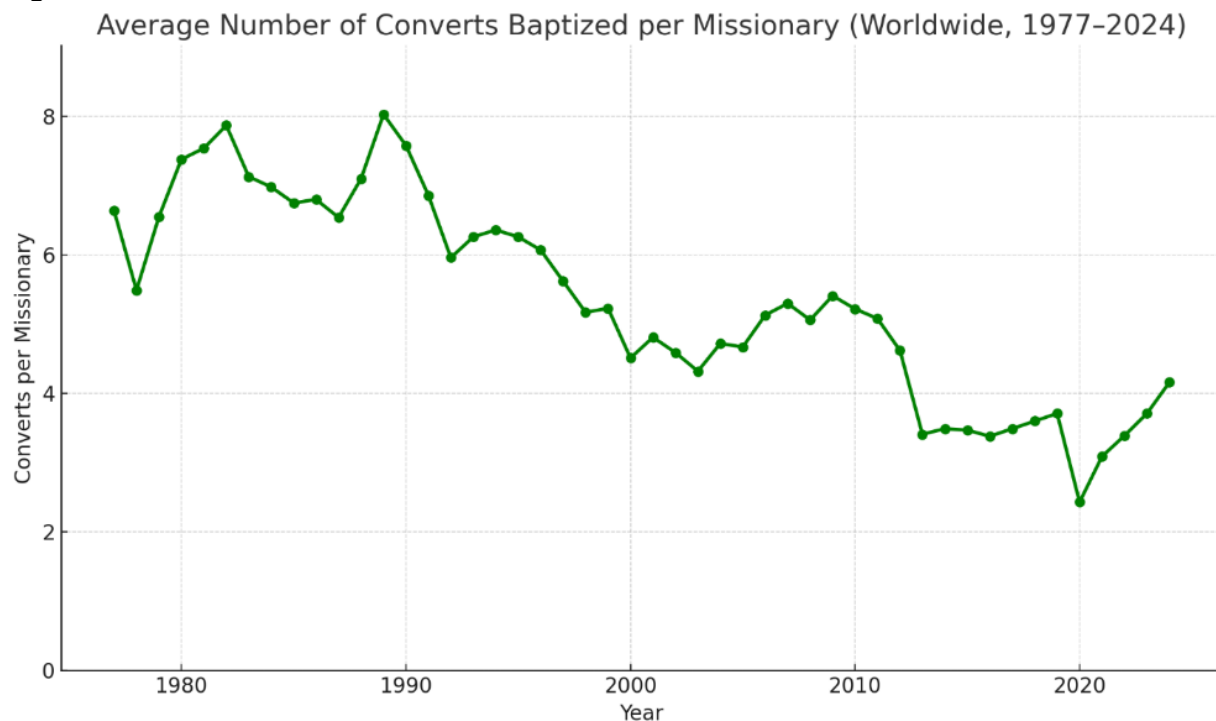
Accelerated numbers of convert baptisms is likely attributed to rebalancing mission resources to more productive areas and improving receptivity. For example, recent data suggest that the decrease in the number of Christians in the United States has not only slowed but has plateaued in the United States since 2019 per the Pew Research Center.⁴ It is unclear whether similar findings may be occurring in other world regions that may have contributed to increasing numbers of new converts around the world. Factors that have resulted in apparent increases in receptivity worldwide deserve additional research and exploration to better understand the interplay between demographic shifts, cultural openness to religious engagement, and the Church’s evolving missionary strategies.

² <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2025/10/27cook>

³ <https://www.thechurchnews.com/leaders/2025/06/19/quentin-l-cook-missionary-purpose-miracles-new-mission-leaders-seminar/>

⁴ <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/02/26/religious-landscape-study-executive-summary/>

Figure 5



Missions in More Countries

Five of the new missions announced for 2026 are in nations where missionary work is currently administered from another country: Greece (807 members as of year-end 2024), Malawi (5,937), Senegal (310), Solomon Islands (1,627), and Togo (7,684). The last—and only—time five countries received a mission for the first time in the same year was in 1990, when the Church rapidly mobilized missionary resources to open Eastern Europe to formal proselytism following the end of the Cold War. Those countries were the Czech Republic (fewer than 100 members as of year-end 1989), Greece (300), Hungary (fewer than 100), Poland (fewer than 100), and Russia (none officially reported). In contrast, none of the 36 new missions created in 2024 were located in countries without an existing mission headquartered within their geographical boundaries. By comparison, in 2013, three nations received a mission for the first time—Angola (1,257 members as of year-end 2012), Botswana (2,152), and Liberia (6,709; technically a reinstatement of the original mission that operated from 1988 to 1991).

Missions Opening Where There Are Few Members

Several new missions will be organized in locations with relatively few Latter-day Saints. Angola (population 37.2 million; 7,321 members as of year-end 2024) will receive a second mission. Assuming an even division of membership, each Angolan mission will include roughly 3,600 members. The new mission may also include São Tomé and Príncipe—a Portuguese-speaking island nation off the Atlantic Coast of Central Africa with a quarter of a million people, where no official Church congregation currently operates.

The Kenya Kisumu Mission will have no stakes within its boundaries. Membership in Kenya's two missions totaled 21,204 in 2024, a figure dwarfed by the nation's massive population of 58.3 million. The Mozambique Nampula Mission will likely include only one stake and one district in northern Mozambique, with fewer than 4,000 members, despite this region encompassing most of Mozambique's 33.4 million people. Nearly all the country's 32,000 members reside in Beira and Maputo—two cities that together account for just one-tenth of the national population. As noted previously, new missions in Greece (population 10.5 million) and Senegal (18.8 million) will have fewer than 1,000 members in the country where each mission is based, although both will likely administer additional nations (e.g., Cyprus for the Greece Athens Mission and The Gambia, Guinea, and Mali for the Senegal Dakar Mission).

Mongolia had 12,624 members in 2024, organized into two stakes and one district. A second mission will be created to serve this small but steadily growing Church community in a nation of only 3.3 million people. Another small nation, Cabo Verde (population 611,000), will also receive a new mission—the Cape Verde Mindelo Mission—which will likely include just one stake and one district. The decision to create a second mission in Cabo Verde may be related to the recent organization of the first branch in Guinea-Bissau, a West African nation assigned to the Cape Verde Praia Mission, and the beginning of more concerted missionary efforts there. Guinea-Bissau's population of 2.1 million is more than three times that of Cabo Verde.

These examples illustrate a willingness to establish missions proactively in frontier areas with small member bases — a significant evolution from the Church's earlier focus on centers of strength.

Most African nations with large Latter-day Saint populations will have new missions organized in 2026. Nigeria (population 237 million), however, will not, despite being both the most populous African nation and the one with the most Church members (250,341 in 2024). This is likely due to the multiple new missions recently organized there—Nigeria Aba and Nigeria Abuja in 2023, and Nigeria Calabar and Nigeria Port Harcourt North in 2024—which brought the total number of missions in Nigeria to 11.

Missions to Reach Major Population Centers

Many of the new missions to be organized in 2026 are concentrated in major metropolitan areas, including in Africa (Côte d'Ivoire Abidjan South, DR Congo Kinshasa North, Ghana Accra South, Zimbabwe Harare West), Australia (Brisbane South), Canada (Toronto East), Europe (France Paris South, Spain Madrid East), Latin America (Brazil Guarulhos, Brazil São Bernardo, Peru Lima Northwest), and Southern California (Oceanside, Ontario, Victorville). Although most of these metropolitan areas already have a significant Latter-day Saint presence, they are vast urban centers with millions of inhabitants and many neighborhoods where the Church remains underrepresented. Organizing additional missions in these regions will enable more focused outreach, improved coordination in densely populated zones, and greater engagement with diverse communities that have historically been difficult to reach within large urban contexts.

Greater Mission Saturation of the Philippines

The Philippines (population 118 million) had the most new missions announced for 2026 outside the United States. Five new missions will raise the total number of missions in the country to 31—approximately one mission for every 3.8 million people. The Philippines Ormoc Mission will be organized from a division of the Philippines Tacloban Mission and may encompass as few as two million people within its boundaries, including two to three stakes and three to four districts. The Philippines Puerto Princesa Mission, to be created from the Philippines Manila Mission, will likely cover the province of Palawan, which has a population of about 1.25 million and includes one stake and two districts. The Philippines Ozamiz Mission will likely be formed from divisions of the Philippines Cagayan de Oro and Philippines General Santos Missions, becoming the fifth mission on Mindanao and serving roughly five million people. The Philippines Lingayen Mission, created from the Philippines Urdaneta and possibly the Philippines Olongapo Missions, may include four to five stakes and one district, with a population of one to two million. The Philippines Lipa Mission, organized from the Philippines San Pablo Mission, may include three to five million people and several stakes and districts depending on final boundaries.

The Church in the Philippines has achieved remarkable progress over the past 15 years, with notable increases in sacrament meeting attendance, self-sufficiency in staffing missions with Filipino members, growth in the number of stakes from 80 to 137, and expansion in dedicated or planned temples from three to 14—solidifying the Philippines as one of the Church's strongest centers of growth worldwide. However, there remains an ongoing need to organize additional missions to more effectively reach significant populations that are geographically isolated across the country's many islands. Large areas inhabited by millions of people still lack an official ward or branch, including Basilan, Batanes, Dinagat, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, and the interior of north-central Luzon (i.e., Apayao and Mountain Province). Many other provinces remain only lightly reached, such as Masbate and Romblon, where congregations operate in just a few locations.

Reinstating Former Missions

Nine of the missions to be organized in 2026 are reinstatements of previously operating missions. These include the Arizona Phoenix East Mission (formerly the Arizona Scottsdale Mission, 2013–2018), the California Oceanside Mission (formerly the California Carlsbad Mission, 1993–2019), the California Ontario Mission (formerly the California Rancho Cucamonga Mission, 2013–2019), the Canada Halifax Mission (discontinued in 2019), the Canada Toronto East Mission (discontinued in 2011), the Greece Athens Mission (1990–2018), the Mississippi Jackson Mission (1979–2018), the Paraguay Asunción South Mission (formerly the Argentina Posadas Mission, 2013–2019), and the Virginia Norfolk Mission (formerly the Virginia Chesapeake Mission, 2013–2019).

Reestablishing missions in former locations provides several advantages. These areas typically possess sizable populations and residual Church infrastructure that can be reactivated with relative ease. Most were closed in past years to rebalance missionary

resources amid declining or stagnant numbers. Their reinstatement reflects both improved missionary availability and renewed opportunities for growth. Historically, such areas have undergone cycles of consolidation and reorganization as the Church adjusts to shifting patterns of resource distribution and expansion.

Papua New Guinea Missions

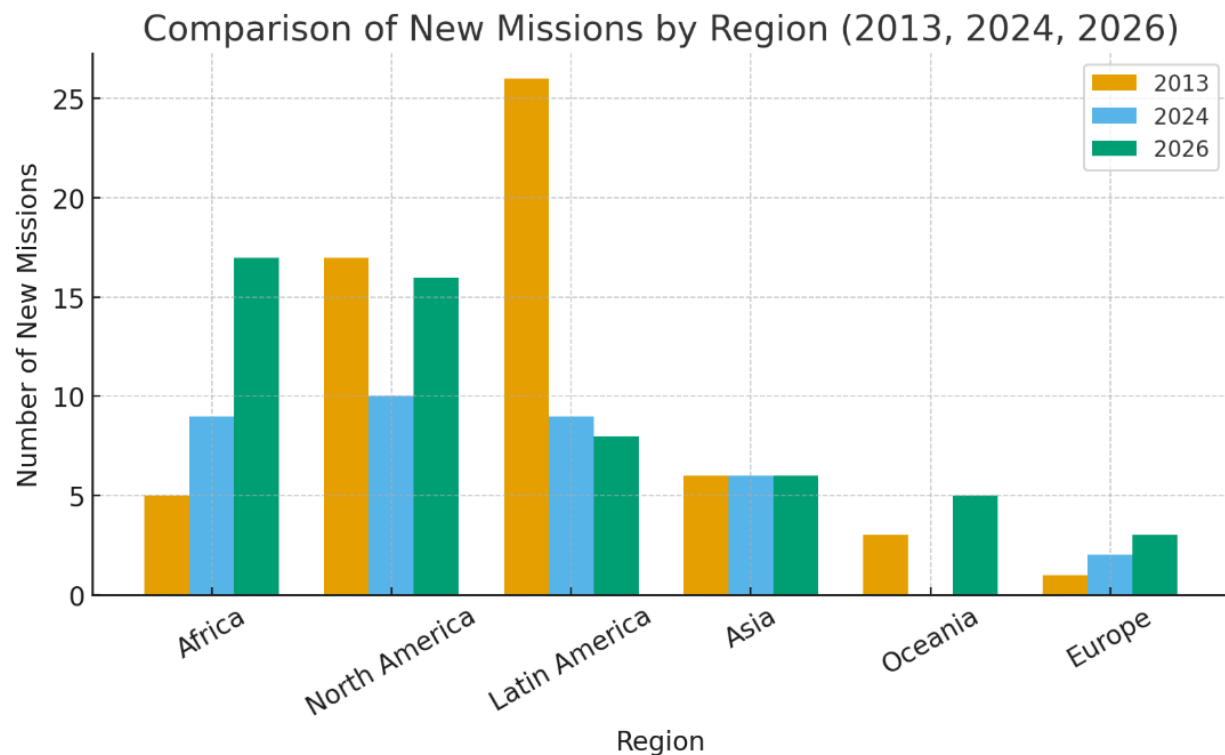
The creation of two new missions in Papua New Guinea represents a major development, even though these missions account for less than five percent of those to be organized in 2026. Papua New Guinea is the second most populous nation in Oceania with 10 million people and is among the least urbanized countries in the world. The establishment of the Papua New Guinea Daru Mission and the Papua New Guinea Madang Mission will double the total number of missions in the country from two to four, likely facilitating significant expansion of missionary efforts nationwide. With this change, Papua New Guinea will have the second most missions of any nation in Oceania, better aligning mission resources with population size. Despite having only 0.41% of its population as members of the Church—one of the lowest percentages in the region—growth has been rapid. A recent report indicated that meetinghouse construction cannot keep pace with rising attendance.⁵ Annual membership growth rates have fluctuated in recent years, ranging from 4.6% in 2022 to 13.7% in 2020.

Moving Away From Concentrating Missionary Resources in Latter-day Saint Heavy Areas

Unlike other years when the Church organized large numbers of new missions, none were announced in regions of the United States with high Latter-day Saint populations, such as Utah and southern Idaho. Over the past two decades, mission resources have often been concentrated in heavily Latter-day Saint areas based on the premise that missionaries are most effective when supported by strong local membership. However, while missions in these regions have historically ranked among the most productive in the nation—sometimes baptizing more than 1,000 converts annually—this approach has limited opportunities to expand into previously unreached areas or assign missionaries to more populous, less evangelized regions. The distribution of new missions in 2026 marks an important turning point in how the Church allocates its surplus missionary capacity—from further saturating existing strongholds of membership in the Intermountain West to advancing into new frontiers of proselytism. Figure 6 shows the number of new missions by world region during the three years when the most new missions have been organized. The year 2026 stands out as the most balanced year among these three years of major mission expansion efforts with a particularly strong emphasis on greater saturation of Africa than ever before.

⁵ <https://news-pg.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/the-church-of-jesus-christ-continues-its-remarkable-growth-in-papua-new-guinea>

Figure 6



Missed Opportunities

There may have been missed opportunities for the Church to more aggressively target lesser-reached countries with such a large increase in the number of missions to be organized in 2026. The Central African Republic (CAR) had its first full-time proselytizing missionaries assigned in early 2025 and also had two new branches and the first district in the country organized during the year. However, the CAR's 5.7 million inhabitants remain minimally reached by the Cameroon Yaoundé Mission (which also services Equatorial Guinea and Gabon), and Cameroon Yaoundé Mission will not appear to be affected by the creation of the new missions in 2026 notwithstanding 41 million people living within its geographical boundaries. Burundi and Rwanda, each with a population of approximately 13.6 million, will continue to be serviced by the same mission, the Rwanda Kigali Mission, notwithstanding some of the highest annual membership growth rates in the world in these two countries, not to mention rapid growth and significant expansion of the Church into additional cities in the eastern DR Congo which is also within the mission boundaries. Cuba's 11 million inhabitants remain serviced by the Dominican Republic Santo Domingo East Mission. Within the boundaries of the Indonesia Jakarta Mission, Timor-Leste (East Timor) is a predominantly Christian nation of 1.5 million people with widespread religious freedom, yet only one branch (organized in 2024) operates. Many missions in Europe have reported increased numbers of convert baptisms and higher receptivity to the Latter-day Saint gospel message in recent years, yet the total number of missions in Europe in 2026 (40) will be less than half of what it was as of year-end 1999 when there were 104

missions in Europe.⁶ The population of Europe during the past quarter century has increased by approximately 16 million.⁷ Future mission creations in these nations and world regions would further align the Church's organizational presence with global population distribution

Future Prospects

There is considerable momentum with the current trajectory of growth in the size of the full-time missionary force and the expansion of new missions worldwide. There will be 95 new missions organized during the three-year period from 2024–2026, constituting a 23% increase since year-end 2023 once the 55 new missions are organized in 2026. The placement of many of these missions in rapidly growing, highly receptive areas has the potential to generate a multiplier effect—both in the number of convert baptisms and in future missionary service from these same converts. As missions are divided and localized, missionaries can focus more intensely on major population centers and newly opened regions, improving contact rates and follow-up opportunities. If current trends continue, this expansion could mark the beginning of another sustained wave of Church growth comparable to the late 1970s and 1980s, when the highest growth rates of the past half century were achieved. The infrastructure being established now—through mission creation, leadership development, and geographic diversification—positions the Church to sustain and even accelerate this spiritual momentum in the years ahead. Growth in the number of missions may also correspond with future temple announcements in additional locations, as many temples announced in the past decade have been situated in cities with a mission presence or organized to serve a specific mission. Nevertheless, some of these newly organized missions may eventually be discontinued if the number of missionaries stagnates or declines, particularly as resources are rebalanced from less productive to more productive areas. Moreover, while the creation of new missions increases local outreach capacity, retention rates and long-term congregational growth will ultimately determine whether this expansion yields sustained results.

Note: population figures presented in this article were obtained from the CIA World Factbook at <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/population/>.

⁶ *Deseret News 2001-2002 Church Almanac*, page 596

⁷ <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/europe-population/>. Accessed November 4th, 2025