

Mormon Church Set to Become World's Largest

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), better known as the **Mormon** church, is on track to become the largest both in the United States and in the world at large—and the second-largest religious body in the world during the next 100 years.

So says Mark Koltko-Rivera, Ph.D., an award-winning social scientist, in his latest book, *The Rise of the Mormons: Latter-day Saint Growth in the 21st Century*, after analyzing Mormon membership figures, global population, and social trends.

Contrary to popular belief, Koltko-Rivera reports that more than 90 percent of Mormon growth is the result of the baptisms of converts—*not* the baptisms of children raised in the faith. Mormon missionary work has a major effect on Mormon growth.

Koltko-Rivera—who has taught more than a dozen statistics courses at NYU—found that Mormon growth slowed after 1990 because the LDS church expanded its missionary efforts into many new areas where missionary work was more difficult, such as the former Soviet Bloc nations, and other countries in Asia and Africa. However, several of these countries now show huge LDS growth. Specifically, Russia saw an 83 percent increase in Mormon membership from the end of 1999 through 2009.

Koltko-Rivera also found that the slowdown of Mormon growth is about to end. A combination of factors—a forthcoming increase in missionary numbers; improvements in missionary preparation; the recent formation of Mormon “stakes” (dioceses) in places like Russia and India—has set the stage for major Mormon expansion worldwide.

Assuming an LDS growth rate less than what the Saints actually

achieved in the 1960s, Koltko-Rivera projects that the Mormons will grow to more than 2.6 billion members worldwide by 2120. The LDS church would be the largest church on earth, and the second-largest religious body in the world, following Islam. That, of course, assumes that Christianity and Islam won't also grow exponentially during that period.

In the United States, assuming a growth rate no higher than what the Mormons actually attained in the 1980s, Koltko-Rivera predicts that the LDS will grow to become America's largest church by 2106, again, barring the slowdown of **Christianity**, Islam and other religions.