

# Church News

## United States territory: Puerto Rico

**Published: Wednesday, Feb. 3, 2010**

Jan. 1, 2009: Est. population, 3,971,000; Members, 20,064; Stakes, 5; Wards, 26; Districts, 2; Branches, 17; Missions, 1; percent LDS, .51, or one in 198; Caribbean Area.

The easternmost island of the Greater Antilles in the east Caribbean Sea, Puerto Rico is a U.S. commonwealth with a population that speaks Spanish. Most of the people are Roman Catholic.

In 1945, returned missionaries from the Argentine Mission, Donald Brown and Bryon C. Wheeler, began working in Puerto Rico and were the first known Church members to live in the country and hold their own Sunday School services.

Gardner H. Russell began holding Church meetings with his family and LDS servicemen at Guajataca in 1951, and later in San Juan. For the first few years, those who attended the meetings were LDS servicemen. Later, other members moved to Puerto Rico, including Morris Burk, Sr. and Heber Haws, whose wives were Puerto Rican. On 7 October 1959, these spouses Cristina Burk and Irma Haws, and Cristina's son Morris, became the first native Puerto Ricans baptized in the country.

Florida Mission President Ned Winder visited Puerto Rico in October 1963 on a routine visit and felt inspired to send missionaries. As a result, in January 1964, Verl Tolbert and Dwight K. Hunter were sent to Puerto Rico. They visited several branches in the Caribbean District, which had been organized earlier for military personnel. Elder Tolbert baptized Becky Fraticelli who, with others, became part of an increasing group of young Puerto Ricans in the Church.

The next Florida Mission president, Glen L. Rudd, sent Spanish-speaking missionaries Steven Johnson and Craig Van Tassell to the island in May 1969. The first Spanish-speaking branch was organized in 1970. On March 8 of that year the first meetinghouse in the Caribbean District of the Florida Mission was dedicated in San Juan by Elder Sterling W. Sill of the First Quorum of the Seventy. On October 17 home seminary was started. The Spanish branch became an independent branch a year later. Members' spirits were lifted 8 March 1981 by a visit from President Spencer W. Kimball, the first president of the Church to visit there.

The Puerto Rico San Juan Mission was created 1 July 1979 with a membership of 1,892. The first stake was created in San Juan on 14 December 1980 by Ezra Taft Benson, then president of the Quorum of the Twelve. New stakes were also created in 1982, 1984 and 1985. President Benson visited again on 12 April 1987. By this time membership had increased to more than 12,000.

However, primarily due to the continual emigration of members to the United States, in December 1993 the four stakes were discontinued and eight districts were formed by Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve. Between 1996 and 1998 the four stakes were reinstated. There are currently four districts in operation as well.

Beginning in 1991 Jose O. Moreno spent 10 years coordinating the microfilming of genealogical records from the government and local churches throughout Puerto Rico for the Genealogical Society of Utah. En route to Brazil to dedicate two temples, President Gordon B. Hinckley stopped in Puerto Rico on 13 December 2000, his first visit ever to the "enchanted island." He addressed a member meeting in Roberto Clemente Coliseum in San Juan.

The Puerto Rico San Juan East Mission was created on 1 July 2007 from a division of Puerto Rico San Juan and West Indies missions.

Sources: Maria Wheeler phone conversation, 12 April 2004; Richard L. Millett, History of the Church in the Caribbean, 1977-1980; Delbert Goates, "Puerto Rico organizes two branches," Church News, 25 June 1955; Florida Mission Manuscript history and historical reports, Church Archives; Morris and Cristina Burk interview, 9 March 2004, Church Archives; Gordon Irving, "Caribbean beginnings," Church News, 22 April 1978; "First Puerto Rican stake organized," Church News, 27 December 1980; Gerry Avant, "History is made: Prophet visits Caribbean islands," Church News, 21 March 1981; Gerry Avant, "President Benson visits Puerto Rico," 18 April 1987; Virgil N. Kovalenko, Development of LDS Church presence in Caribbean nations, 1993, Church Archives; Jose O. Moreno interview, 10 March 2004, Church Archives; Jerry D. Fisher, "Prophet's spirit, counsel, bless Puerto Rico," Church News, 23 December 2000.

Stakes — 5

(Listed alphabetically as of Oct. 1, 2009.)

No. / Name / Organized / First President

Caribbean Area

2707 Caguas Puerto Rico 26 Feb 2006 Jose Manuel Santos G.

2217 Mayaguez Puerto Rico 11 Aug 1996 Tomas Olmo

Reinstated from No. 1580

2240 Ponce Puerto Rico 22 Sep 1996 Rafael Ortiz

Reinstated from No. 1349

2347 San Juan Puerto Rico 4 May 1997 William A. Burk

Reinstated from No. 1215

2473 Toa Baja Puerto Rico 7 Jun 1998 Jorge Miguel Alvarado

Stakes discontinued

1480 Carolina Puerto Rico 17 Jun 1984 Jesus Nieves

Discontinued 5 Dec 1993

1580 Mayaguez Puerto Rico 1 Dec 1985 Heriberto Hernandez Vera

Discontinued 5 Dec 1993

1349 Ponce Puerto Rico 13 Jun 1982 Noah Jefferson Burns

Discontinued 5 Dec 1993

1215 San Juan Puerto Rico 14 Dec 1980 Herminio De Jesus

Discontinued 5 Dec 1993

Mission — 2

(As of Oct. 1, 2009; shown with historical number. See MISSIONS.)

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(346) PUERTO RICO SAN JUAN EAST MISSION

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