

Mormon missionary applications soar by 471 percent

by [Peggy Fletcher Stack](#)

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Mormon apostle Jeffrey R. Holland predicted that lowering the age limits for young Mormon missionaries would trigger a "dramatic" uptick in their numbers.

Turns out, "dramatic" was an understatement. Try a 471 percent jump in applications – so far.

Just two weeks since Mormon President Thomas S. Monson announced that young men could go on full-time missions for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at age 18 (down from 19) and young women could go at 19 (down from 21), the Utah-based church has seen applications skyrocket from an average of 700 a week to 4,000 a week.

"Slightly more than half of the applicants are women," LDS Church spokesman Scott Trotter said Monday (Oct. 22).

That represents a massive shift. Typically, women make up fewer than a fifth of the LDS missionary force, which currently stands at more than 58,000 worldwide.

Ultimately, Mormon leaders hope more missionaries will translate into more converts. Indeed, that may happen.

Matt Martinich, who tracks LDS growth, said in the past 33 years, he found each missionary has baptized – on average – six converts, though that number has dipped to five during the past decade.

The church reported 281,312 converts last year. If it sustains the current ratio of one missionary for every five converts a year, Martinich said, there would be 300,000 such baptisms when the number of missionaries reaches 60,000; 350,000 if the number of missionaries reaches 70,000; and 400,000 if the proselytizing force reaches 80,000.

This missionary age adjustment could generate as many as 15,000 more young male missionaries and 7,500 more female missionaries in the first year, Martinich said in a report at ldschurchgrowth.blogspot.com.

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