



# The World's Best Missionary Programs

## Best Missionary Literature Printing and Distribution Program: *Jehovah's Witnesses*

The Jehovah's Witnesses distribute over 5,000 tons (10 million pounds) of religious literature in Russia alone each year! In contrast, the average LDS missionary worldwide distributes only one copy of the Book of Mormon every five days. Even the best and most spiritually prepared individuals can't accept a message unless they have an opportunity to hear it! In light of these facts, it can hardly come as a surprise that there are over 120,000 active Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia and similar numbers in Ukraine and Poland, compared to only about 4,000 active Latter-day Saints (out of 12,000 'on the rolls') in Russia, 2,500 active (out of 8,000 'on the rolls') in Ukraine, and 250 active out of 1100 'on the rolls' in Poland. Nor can it come as a surprise that there are over 13,000 active Witnesses in Kazakhstan and over 10,000 in Georgia, compared to only a handful of LDS members in both countries.

A comparison of statistics in many other Eastern European and Asian nations is similar (Slovakia-- 12,000 JWs to about 40 active LDS, Romania -- 30,000 JWs to under 500 active LDS, et cetera.) Why are the Witnesses growing so rapidly in these countries with very few foreign missionaries, while Latter-day Saints are experiencing very slow growth in spite of a large contingent of full-time foreign missionaries? It isn't that JW commitments are easier - meeting schedules are comparable and JW members actually have to be attending church for much longer before they can be baptized. The answer lies in the Jehovah's Witnesses strategic planning and literature distribution to reach every soul and sound their message in every ear, often many times over.

The Apostle Paul asked, 'How will they believe in him of whom they have not heard?' Good question. And, judging by the statistics above, there are far, far more people who are having the opportunity to hear the Jehovah's Witness message, than the message of the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ. It isn't that people are hard-hearted - it's that they aren't having enough exposures and opportunities to receive the Restored Gospel.

## Best Member-Missionary Program *Jehovah's Witnesses*

Of the more than six million active Jehovah's Witnesses, almost all spend a minimum of ten hours a month sharing their faith with others, and 850,000 - almost 15% - spend fifty or more hours a month. According to George Barna's study of religious practices by denomination published on July 9, 2001, only 26% of U.S. Latter-day Saints make any attempt at all to share their faith with non-members over the course of an entire year. So Latter-day Saints aren't even in the running.

## Best Proselyting Magazine *Jehovah's Witnesses - Watchtower and Awake!*

This one isn't even a close. The hands-down winner is the Jehovah's Witness organization for Watchtower and Awake! Watchtower has an average circulation of over 22 million -- the largest circulation of any religious magazine, while Awake! follows behind at 19 million. No other religious magazines even approach this distribution. The Watchtower is translated into 144 languages for simultaneous release, and so it escapes the English-language cultural stigma of many other religious magazines that are translated into other languages weeks or months after the English version. If you pick up a copy of Awake! or the Watchtower, you'll quickly see why these magazines are so successful. Many religious magazines are directed primarily to existing members and use vocabulary and references that are not understandable to non-members who aren't 'in the know.' Not so with the Watchtower and Awake! Thumbing through one of the numerous of copies of Awake! in front of me, I see well-written articles on Louis Braille's invention of the Braille script, the volcanic creation of the

Santorini Island, Chagas ' disease, Olympic facts, the life cycle of Beavers, a recent earthquake in Taiwan, Jehovah's Witnesses service projects, and much more - all masterfully tied into Bible themes. One Jehovah's Witness friend of mine mentioned not long ago that he had never completed college, but that he felt that he had learned many college-level items by reading Awake! over the course of his life. The Watchtower contains more life-application type articles related to Biblical doctrines. While the articles definitely carry the Jehovah's Witness' theological slant, they are also full of interesting and relevant facts that one would be hard-pressed to find elsewhere. The authors have definitely done their homework, although I do not agree with many points of their theology.

The Jehovah's Witnesses do a wonderful job of making their publications engaging and relevant to both Witnesses and non-witnesses alike. Also, many religious magazines today are permeated with flowery blandishments with little substance. Some denominations filter religious media to present a glowing media image, while failing to confront or acknowledge significant real-world challenges. Inspirational stories of individuals --however moving -- get old after a while without more real-world content, and besides-- many types of inspirational stories are claimed by all denominations, and prove nothing. The Jehovah's Witnesses are pragmatic enough to acknowledge that living Christian ideals in the real world doesn't always make for neatly-packaged fairy-tale stories. No one could ever accuse Watchtower or Awake! of fostering complacency -- to the contrary, they generate a sense of awareness that I have rarely encountered in other religious publications. The Watchtower and Awake! are refreshing in their factual-based, well-researched, relevant real-world content. Regardless of the tenuosness of Jehovah's Witness theology, it is no surprise that these magazines are so popular worldwide.

## **Best Convert Retention**

### *Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and LDS*

In contrast to 20-25% average LDS retention rates worldwide, both the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Adventists manage to retain the considerable majority of new converts.

Short-term baptismal goals, hasty teaching with limited attempt to assess the true depth of the investigator's understanding and commitment, and 'baptize them quick while they feel the Spirit and hope that they decide to come to church again' approaches, have resulted in a 20-25% average LDS retention rates in Latin America and Asia. I have never known of anything good to come of converts being rushed to baptism. Indeed, while rushing baptisms may result in quick, temporary increases in statistics, it also ignites a long-burning fuse that results in serious member problems, or even in the eventual collapse of local branches. Perhaps in this we have a lesson to learn both from our own scriptures, from our current prophet (Gordon B. Hinckley: 'it is not necessary for us to lose any of those who are baptized') and from the Jehovah's Witnesses, who take pre-baptismal preparation much more seriously than most Latter-day Saints.

Jehovah's Witnesses would never consider rushing an individual to baptism in two weeks or less: individuals must first prove their dedication to Jehovah and worthiness to serve as his spokesman. As a result, they achieve 80+% long-term retention, compared to an average 25-30% worldwide LDS retention rate.

(Source: <http://www.cumorah.com> )