

MEMO: COUNTING WORSHIP ATTENDANCE

January 2022

Greetings:

Worship attendance is one of the many aspects of congregational life that have been upended by the pandemic. But congregations have found creative ways to meet during difficult times. We've heard the stories.

Many of you added an online option to weekly worship. Over the past year, the Yearbook Office has learned some best practices for measuring online engagement. The Church of the Brethren is a member of the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB), where data gatherers from many religious groups share ideas and learn from one another. Last year's meeting focused heavily on the issue of online worship data. Some Christian denominations have years of experience on this topic, and we benefit from their knowledge.

One metric that ASARB members agree on is the need to keep in-person (on-site) attendance *separate* from online attendance. Technologies change rapidly, and measuring online participation is a puzzle. What platforms will we use thirty years from now? No one knows. Statisticians must be able to compare numbers consistently from year to year, trusting they are comparing apples with apples. Denominations that have had multiple platforms for years have always kept these numbers separate, and we must do the same.

What should you do for 2021? On the Statistical Form, report only in-person worship attendance (even if you had no in-person services at all). Be assured that everyone recognizes that statistics for this period of time will carry a big asterisk.

If you've tracked—or wish to estimate—online worship attendance, complete the addendum (see page two). Filling this out is completely optional.

How do you begin to count online worship attendance for this coming year? This is complex because of the technology involved. (For example, “views” may count people who watched just a few minutes or times the video autoplayed, and there's no way to know how many viewers are represented by a single device.) Guidance on counting online attendance is posted at www.brethren.org/yearbook. If you have further questions, please contact us by email or phone.

We appreciate your patience and help as we all navigate these changes. Thanks be to God that church communities have been able to gather for worship, even in challenging times.

In ministry,

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“Don't stop meeting together with other believers.” —Hebrews 10:25a, *Common English Bible*

ADDENDUM: REPORTING ONLINE WORSHIP ATTENDANCE

The Statistical Form gathers only in-person (on-site) worship attendance. As described in the cover memo in this packet, it's important to keep in-person and online counts separate because of the long-term purpose of data-gathering.

But many congregations worshiped partly or fully online during 2021. For some, counting online worshipers is the only way to provide a sense of overall worship attendance.

Counting participants on any online platform can be complex and unreliable. You may have created your own system for counting, or you may have not kept track at all. Either way, if you'd like to provide a number, even if it's an estimate, please use the simple form below. Filling this out is completely optional.

Guidance on counting online worship attendance for 2022 is found in the FAQs posted online. Please visit this web page for more information:

www.brethren.org/yearbook

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❶ Did you offer an online worship option at any point in 2021? This could be any form, whether it was livestreamed or pre-recorded for later viewing. *(Examples are Zoom, YouTube, Facebook Live.)*

_____ Yes _____ No

❷ Using the counting method you devised, even if it's an estimate, add the weekly online attendance at each worship service and divide by the number of services held. Round off to the nearest whole number.

Average online weekly worship attendance for 2021: _____