

FAQs—Guidelines for Counting Online Worship Attendance

Why should we track online worship participation?

Last year, 84 percent of Church of the Brethren congregations responding to a Yearbook survey said they had worshiped online during the pandemic. When asked if they planned to continue this in the future, 72 percent said yes. That means online worship numbers are now a meaningful part of total worship participation.

Why keep online participation separate from in-person (on-site) attendance?

Technologies change rapidly. What platforms will we use thirty years from now? No one knows. Those studying trends must be able to compare numbers consistently from year to year, trusting they are comparing apples with apples. Denominations with congregations that have held online worship services for years have kept these statistics separate because of the long-term purpose of gathering data, and we are drawing on their expertise.

Why is it so difficult to measure online participation?

Counting participants on any online platform can be complex and unreliable. Even with Zoom, where attendance is simpler to count, it's still difficult to tell how many people in a household are participating, as family members float in and out of view. Metrics for Facebook and YouTube are more complex: Some views are too brief to count. What's the best way to handle views that occur after a worship service ends? How many viewers are represented by a single device? All of this is more difficult than counting people in pews.

How should we count online worship attendance?

Some denominations use a complex formula for calculating online attendance, but that doesn't seem quite right for the Church of the Brethren. Here are some best practices that we've learned from others:¹

- Check viewership statistics for the **seven-day period** following the service. The goal is to gauge your congregation's weekly rhythm of participation. Don't wait until the end of the month or the end the year to obtain totals for each week's video.
- Count only those present for **most of worship**. Each platform tracks this differently, but the goal is to track those viewing all or at least half of the service.
- **To estimate the number of viewers**, count viewing devices and then convert it to the number of individuals based on what you know about your congregation's households. Or multiply by 2.5, the national average household size (you can also look up your state average).

Do your best, even if it's an estimate. Just be faithful to your intent and be consistent in your calculations.

¹ Thanks to Scott McConnell of Lifeway Research for helpful language. For more detailed tips on counting views on different platforms, visit https://lifewayresearch.com/2021/06/10/online_participation/.