

How to Count Online Worshippers

The purpose of counting online worship is to capture data consistently over time to ascertain information and trends. These are not truly “attendance” numbers in a way we understood when physical bodies are present.

With the state-wide cancellation of all in-person worship beginning March 15, 2020, most Virginia churches have moved to electronic or digital forms of worship. We recognize during these unusual days that the ability to count per person attendance accurately as we have in the past is not reliable online given the current technology and various reporting data processes by online service providers.

Here are our guidelines on how to fill out line 7a in EVC for online worship given these purposes and technological limitations and some special instructions for these times of no in-person worship:

1. Online worship should be recorded separately (Statistical Table 1, line 7a) from the Average Worship Attendance for Sunday in-person worship (Statistical Table 1, line 7).
2. Please be consistent, no matter how you count these numbers. Consistency will allow you to see trending – are you up or down over last week? Was Easter a boom or bust in online worship views?
3. The most useful standard from a traditional understanding of attendance would be to count those who register their attendance in some way (actual form filled out, some sort of engagement by name), those who register and watch most or all of a replay during the week of that worship service posting, and those who give financially or ask for prayers and give their name during a service broadcast, if their registration was not otherwise accomplished. This will be a smaller number than those who ‘saw’, but it is a verifiable number, and about the best understanding of the number of people your church serves in a given week. This also allows you to engage people over time, because you have an idea of who they are and even how to reach them.
4. Registration, however, is not required. If you are not going to do registrations envisioned in #2, then keep consistent numbers based on your current platform. Again, you are looking at trends.
 - a. Ideally, if possible to access on your platform, a worshipper should participate in at least 50% of the full livestreamed or recorded worship service or 80% of a partially livestreamed or recorded worship service (e.g., if the sermon only is offered online).
 - b. Most social media accounts (Facebook, YouTube, Vimeo) and websites have insights or data reports that can help you determine how long a video has been viewed. This can also be achieved live by having a person keep an eye on the number of persons participating during the actual broadcast. If you are

not taking registrations/check-ins or don't have the means to view the percentage-watched statistics, then use the number of persons online at the close of the service as your worshipping number.

- c. The spirit of this guideline is that you can't just count someone who only watches for one or two minutes as a participant online worship. This mirrors in-person worship, in that someone who sits for the first five minutes of an in-person service and then leaves is not included in the numbers of the usher or counters.
5. Please do not include generic hits/visits to your website if you have access to better numbers. This is a temptingly high number sometimes – but it is used more for advertisers, not worship services. It counts people who skim by and may see your page, not those who are engaged or participating and watching for any length of time.
6. Counting multiple persons at the same IP address (watching from the same device or household), should come from some kind of registration or sign in. That registration, sign in form, or chat window should have a place to record total number participating/watching. If that is filled in, those additional participants may be added to the worship total. Otherwise, every IP address should be counted as one person participating in the online worship service.
7. Only worship service numbers may be included in the EVC online worship/Statistical Tables. Podcasts or other forms of online presence such as Bible studies may not be included in these counts. This is true even when there is no in person worship.
8. The cutoff day for counting the prior weekend's livestreamed or recorded worship services is Saturday of the week the service is broadcast. If persons have not viewed the service by Saturday night (11:59 p.m.), their participation cannot be reported in the weekly number.
9. ***For the duration of the times we are not worshipping together in person, the following additional guidelines should be used:***
 - a. During online only times, entire families at home watching together is a more likely scenario. To capture this in a conservative but reasonable manner, and only during times when there is no live worship for your church, it makes sense to have a multiplier of 2x the IP addresses. Also, if you have moved into taking registrations, you could ask 'how many people are watching from this IP address', and use that number instead of a multiplier. Again, consistency is the key to this IP multiplier or registration of multiple worshippers.
 - b. For those who are using alternate means of communicating worship – telephone conference calls, etc. – put those numbers in 7a as an online broadcast would do.
 - c. When we return to a mix of both in person and online worship, please stay as consistent as possible in the way you did the numbers.