



ATTENDANCE TRACKING PRACTICES FOR CONGREGATIONS DURING COVID-19 STAY-AT-HOME ORDERS

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At a time like this, numbers are the last thing we want to think about. Many people in our church families are struggling with their health, worried about their income, and lacking social interactions with others, and many of our congregations are not able to gather. While all this is going on, tracking church attendance should not be a main priority. But there will come a time when we look back and ask, how do we count worship attendance for these weeks? With many congregations turning to virtual gatherings over the internet, we are forced to ask, what qualifies as attending a worship service?

It is helpful to track online views, but these are not the same as worship attendance, and, as such, they must not be included when calculating your average weekly worship attendance.

For many congregations, this means there will be no recorded worship attendance during the COVID-19 outbreak for multiple weeks. For others, it will mean dramatically reduced numbers. Some may want to use their metrics for online engagements (such as clicks or view counts) or other creative methods of counting to keep their numbers up. But for the sake of consistency in these numbers throughout the Synod and over time, we must not include anything in weekly worship attendance numbers other than people who were physically present.

During this outbreak, we would offer the following guidance for counting and tracking statistics:

- If you provide any sort of online content, it will be helpful to track how people engage with it, but do not add these numbers to or use them in place of weekly worship attendance.
 - > *Online engagements* may be clicks (from an email or a link), “likes” to a post, views of a video, comments, or other similar interactions.
 - > Tracking online engagements is a helpful way to determine how effectively your online efforts reach various people. Most platforms make this easy to do or even do it for you.
 - > These numbers are not the same as “worship attendance.” Worship attendance is explicitly defined as the number of individuals who are physically present for weekend worship services.
 - > Keep in mind that online engagements are not a measure of individuals reached:
 - It is never clear how many individuals are represented in a single view or click. (There are likely whole households watching from a single device, as well as individuals who view the content multiple times.)
 - It is rarely clear how long an individual remains engaged with a post. (Some may watch or read the whole thing, while others may close it right away.)
 - Different sites (YouTube, Facebook, Vimeo, etc.) have different counting strategies, so numbers from different sources are not easily comparable.

- For as long as your congregation is/was able to meet in person for worship, count physical attendance as usual, but *do not* add your online engagements to this number.
- If your congregation cancels any worship services during this time, be sure to keep a record of which weeks were canceled for when you report your annual statistics.

Early next year, when it is time to report your annual statistics for 2020, we will provide specific instructions on how to exclude the weeks that were affected by this outbreak.

After this crisis is over, the Synod will have a time of reflection where we attempt to measure congregations' efforts to minister during this crisis. We will likely ask what your congregation did during this time, including your online engagements on various platforms, as well as the degree to which this outbreak had an impact on your resources and ministries, such as giving, worship attendance and community support both during the crisis and afterwards.

