

Tips on Counting Online Worship Attendance

Since 2017, GCF&A (General Council on Finance and Administration) has asked churches to report online worship attendance on Line 7a of Table 1. These are the instructions for that line:

“7a. Report here average weekly number of unique viewers who access worship online. This includes those livestreaming your worship service and views/downloads of recorded worship services (audio or video,) sermons, and/or podcasts. Do not include generic hits/visits to your website.”

Regarding the changes to worship caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, GCF&A recognizes that it is a brand-new situation and is not an exact science. GCF&A emphasizes that perfection is not achievable. (Even in-person counts aren't always accurate!) You are asked to simply do your best to accurately and fairly track these numbers, using the best method you can according to the technology you are using.

And remember that GCF&A is asking you to report on Table 1 the *average* worship attendance for the year, just as you would with in-person worship. The formula is

Number of viewers or participants divided by number of weeks.

1. If you are live-streaming and/or podcasting, there may be analytics connected to your platform telling you how many viewers you had. It should be the same if you post a recording and viewers see it throughout the week. Just be aware that you can't really know if, for example, 3 views equals 3 different people, or one person viewing it 3 times.

Consider asking your viewers to comment on how many people are viewing as a group.

Remember that with livestreaming and recorded worship posted to social media (and to a lesser extent, your website,) you are likely reaching viewers beyond your membership, as your worship is accessible to the public.

2. If you are using an audio and/or video conferencing platform, such as Zoom, GoToMeeting, or FreeConferenceCall, you should be able to count your participants quite easily, as you can use a sort of check-in process.
3. If your congregation prefers a different technology, such as receiving a written sermon or video by email, simply count the number of people it was emailed to. For further accuracy, you could ask for email confirmation that the message was heard, and by how many people in the household.
4. Length of views: should you count a view even if it was only five minutes? First, you may not know how long the viewer stayed with you. If you can track that, however, create a standard, such as 15 minutes, and stick to it consistently. Know that some analytics, like Facebook, will count someone who clicks on your post and then scrolls on, as a view.

Questions? Please email me at pstewart@michiganumc.org and I will try to find answers for you.