

Statistics for Mission information sheet: Worshipping Community

Why have churches been asked to collect worshipping community information?

Many churches have told us that decreases in their average weekly attendance reflect a reduction in how often people come to church rather than a fall in the number of individuals who are regularly a part of the church.

To help to give us a clearer indication of how big the Church of England is and how it is changing, since 2012 we have measured the size of churches in an additional way – their “worshipping community”. You may have come across other terms used to describe worshipping communities, e.g. “participants”, “agreed membership figure”, “members”, “declared members”, “regular worshipping community”, “active members”, “committed members”.

How is worshipping community defined?

Following consultation with dioceses, the “worshipping community” of a church is defined as anyone who attends that church (including fresh expressions of Church) regularly, for example at least once a month, or would do so if not prevented by illness, infirmity or temporary absence. It includes activities such as fellowship groups and other activities that have a distinct act of worship or prayer. It also includes acts of worship not on church premises (e.g. at a school or community centre).

We include those who

- come to midweek services;
- are ill and unable to come to church;
- are away on holiday or business;
- have home communions;
- are part of a regular 'fresh expression' of church;
- live in care or residential homes and would consider themselves to be full members of their church;
- give regularly to their church;
- lead worship (e.g. clergy).

We do not include those who

- are visitors – e.g. holidaymakers, baptism parties;
- consider their 'home' church to be another church.

How do I accurately calculate the worshipping community of my church?

We know that many churches keep a list of those who come to church regularly; other churches report that they know their congregations well enough not to need a formal list. If you do not have such a list you may like to use your Electoral roll as a starting point, particularly as a reminder of those unable to attend because of sickness or infirmity, then add other people who attend regularly but are not on the Electoral roll, including children. You may have a regularly updated ‘prayer diary’ of current members, which might remind you of people who are unable to attend due to illness or those who have recently died.

What do I do if I cannot answer these questions accurately?

We realise that in some cases collecting detailed information about your worshipping community, including people’s approximate ages, is challenging. Not every church can keep track of where those who joined their worshipping community came from and where those who left went to.

In general, your best estimates are much more useful than no information at all. However, if you are unable to provide estimates for the number of people in different age groups, and the more detailed information about joiners and leavers, then please try to give an estimate of the totals.

Thank you for your help. If you have any queries or would like to discuss this topic further please email statistics.unit@churchofengland.org