

How to count Church at Home attendance

These notes are intended to help churches count the attendance at their Church at Home services.

Terminology

By “Church at Home” services we mean any services offered remotely, including online services (live-streamed or pre-recorded), services by telephone, and services that were emailed or posted.

By “attendance” we mean the equivalent of “being in a congregation”, as it applies to the form of Church at Home service offered.

Counting attendance

We know that counting Church at Home attendance is not straightforward. We also know that there are many different ways in which churches are offering Church at Home services – online, by email, by telephone, by post – and the advice we give will not cover every situation. Whether or not the advice covers your situation, please keep some broad principles in mind:

- Principle 1: As far as possible, try to find an attendance number that means something reasonably equivalent to attending an in-person church service.
- Principle 2: Don't worry too much about precision. A sensible, approximate, attendance number is often the most useful thing to aim for.

NEW advice for counting attendance at Facebook and YouTube services

Facebook and YouTube are the most commonly-used platforms for offering online church services. Unfortunately, neither provides a count of the number of views of an entire service.

Facebook gives the number of views lasting 3 seconds or more, 10 seconds or more, and 1 minute or more. YouTube does not specify how it defines a “view”, but the consensus is that it means views of 30 seconds or more. All of these figures will be an overcount of the number of views of the entire service, and can be very misleading.

For Facebook and YouTube services, we suggest you take the figure for the service's “number of minutes viewed” and divide it by the duration of the service. This will give a reasonable approximation of the number of devices that showed your service in full.

If your service is being live streamed, then these platforms show you the number of live views during the service. If you know that most of your congregation watches “live” rather than viewing the service on “catch-up”, then the number of live views – e.g. counted at the midpoint of the service – would be a good approximate count of your Church at Home attendance.

General advice

If you are using an online platform that tells you the number of “views” of different durations, don't report the number of short-duration views (e.g. 3-second views on Facebook) – it's the digital equivalent to the number of people walking past your church when there's a service happening!

Many ways of counting Church at Home attendance don't actually provide a count of people; instead, they are counts of computers, email addresses, postal addresses, etc. If you are confident that you can convert the available number into the number of people, do so. If not, report the available number. For instance, if you post service sheets

to 20 families, and you know that each family has 4 people, then you might report a figure of 80 – but you’d need to know that all of the 20 families used the service sheet, and that everyone in the family participated.

If you offer the same Church at Home service on several different platforms, e.g. on Facebook and YouTube, we advise obtaining a viewing figure for each platform and adding them together. You might also find it useful to keep track of the figures for each platform, to help you decide where to focus your time and energy (if lots of people watch your YouTube videos but no one watches your Facebook videos, you can probably stop providing Facebook videos). Avoid double-counting if possible – for instance, if you send an email with a link to a Zoom service, don’t add the number of emails sent to the number attending the Zoom service.

If your service is available both “live” and on “catch-up”, we advise that you report the total attendance within a week of broadcast.

Many forms of Church at Home give people the opportunity to watch the same service multiple times. There is probably no reasonable way to adjust for this, and unless you’re very sure what’s happened, don’t worry about the effect this might have on your figures.

Specific advice

For each type of Church at Home service we suggest a “baseline” number to report, and some ways that you might be able to report a more accurate number.

Type	Baseline	Improvements/adjustments
Services circulated by post (including posted service sheets, CDs, DVDs, etc.)	+The number of service sheets (CDs, DVDs, etc.) posted/delivered.	+Adjust for the number that are unused; +Adjust if there are multiple users in a household.
Telephone services	+The number of people telephoned.	+Adjust if there are multiple listeners in a household.
Online services (including YouTube, Facebook, Zoom, Vimeo, Instagram)	+The number of people who watched the whole service. If this is not available, then use the nearest equivalent; +If you broadcast your service “live” and make it available on “catch-up”, report the total attendance within a week of broadcast. +See above for additional advice regarding Facebook and YouTube.	+Adjust if there are multiple people watching on a device; +Adjust for the number of people who watch for a minute but don’t stay for the whole service; some platforms show you what fraction of the “viewers” are still there at various points in a service.
Downloadable services – e.g. service sheets, podcasts, or videos on a church’s web page	+The number of downloads.	+Adjust for the number that are unused/unwatched/not listened to; +Adjust if there are multiple users in a household.
Services circulated by email	+The number of emails sent.	+Adjust for the number that are unused/unwatched/not listened to; +Adjust if there are multiple users in a household.

These notes, revised in September 2024, were originally written in September 2021 by members the British and Irish Network of Church Statisticians, an inter-denominational group that brings together people with statistical roles and responsibilities across churches in Britain and Ireland.

We would welcome suggestions that would help us make this guidance more useful. If you have any comments or suggestions, please email statistics.unit@churchofengland.org