

From the Heart of the VP

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I want to use this edition to talk about online attendance and how we are going to begin to count this in our regular attendance statistics. Some churches have been offering their worship services online for several years. However, this dramatically increased when COVID hit in 2020. Now almost every church, big or small, offers their services on livestream. It is fairly obvious that this is a trend that is with us to stay.

While we have surveyed online attendance the last two years in the Annual Report, we have not counted this as part of the actual attendance. Now for the 2022 Annual Report, we will begin to count it. We will be asking for in-person to be reported on one line, then online attendance on the second line. These two numbers will be totaled on the third line. To standardize the way churches count these numbers, we will ask that the count be taken at the 30-minute point in the service and that the number of views be multiplied by 1.5, thus accounting for multiple viewers on each view in a way that experts on such things believe to be the norm.

If churches use a slightly different way of arriving at their online count, that is acceptable. For example, some only air the pastor's sermon and limit its length to less than 30 minutes because of having multiple services. They could certainly take their count at the 20-minute mark. We are not interested in counting everyone who clicks on a livestream or recorded version of the service and stays for a minute or two, which would inordinately expand the numbers. We are seeking to count those who are truly attending the service in an online format.

Our ultimate desire is for our churches to engage online attendees in ways that will contribute to making disciples—whether that means professing faith in Jesus Christ or going deeper in their relationship with Him. We hope they find creative ways to find out who's watching and encourage two-way communication. Perhaps some online small groups or online spiritual mentoring relationships can be initiated. At some point, online attendees could be invited to an in-person gathering to meet pastoral staff members. I'm old enough to hope that online engagement eventually leads to in-person engagement. At the same time, I realize that won't always happen and is less likely to if we aren't seeking to enrich the engagement of online viewers.

District superintendents, will you please pass this information onto your pastors and churches? This will help them to align their counting methods during the second half of this year. We will accept their estimates for the first half of the year. Thanks for helping our churches adjust to the new realities of this sort of the post-COVID era.

Keep the faith!

