

The Episcopal Diocese of Colorado 2023 Convention
October 6, 2023

Resolution ____

Title: Online Worship & Live-stream Inclusion

Whereas, that this 136th Diocesan Convention of the Diocese of Colorado acknowledges that we are living in a time when technology has created new possibilities to connect communities and individuals through online worship and digital ministries that positively impact spiritual growth, participation, and accessibility.

Whereas, that Jesus said, “when two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20) does not need to be exclusively limited to physical proximity but can also include digital proximity to one another using technology.

Whereas, that we recommit to, “reimagine how we will incarnate the living body of Christ ... through online meetings, live-streaming worship, and online giving.”¹

Whereas, that tremendous resources, expenses, and energy has been spent by congregations to invest in equipment, training, and are incurring ongoing expenditures to offer online meetings, live-stream worship, and online giving alternatives.

Whereas, that individuals participating in online worship and online meetings, regardless of geographic location, are recognized, valued, and part of the Body of Christ.

Resolved, that each parish shall track, record, and report online worship views and those participating digitally using the Diocese of Colorado Online & Digital Tracking Guidelines, effective January 1, 2024, and each parish shall self-report online worship views and digital participation annually by March 1, for the prior calendar year, using a mechanism provided by the Diocese of Colorado.

Explanation: A generation ago few could have imagined how technology was going to impact the ways we follow Jesus. Nearly every institution and aspect of our society has been altered by technology, including the church. The internet has allowed the Episcopal Church’s mission field to be limited only by the imagination and resources of a congregation. Prior to the global pandemic of 2020, several Episcopal churches in Colorado were *early adopters* to broadcasting worship services on the internet with varying results. Since 2020, many more churches have invested in equipment and high-speed internet to live-stream worship services and provided an online digital space for meetings and small groups. When in-person gatherings were prohibited by government and health officials, as well as the diocese in 2020, the 20-year digital gap in our country was closed in a matter of months. Video calls replaced phone calls, Conference Rooms were replaced by Digital Meeting Rooms, and in-person services were replaced by carefully crafted online liturgies and worship services designed to provide a sense of routine and normalcy.

To the surprise of many, when in-person gatherings resumed in 2022, online participation remained strong for many churches. The value of providing an online worship experience has been praised by seasoned Episcopalians and newcomers alike.

¹ Bishop Kym Lucas’ Letter to Diocese March 2020

Pew Research Center conducted a survey in November 2022 with 27% of U.S. adults saying they recently watched religious services online compared to 33% of U.S. adults saying they attended a religious service in-person.² With 43% of online viewers citing the major reason for watching online as “convenience”, it could be surmised that online worship is here to stay. Pew Research Center also reports that of those who watch online worship services, 63% of Mainline Protestants watch online by themselves with 37% reporting that they watch with others. Of those who watch worship services online 39% report being involved in other ways with the church.

Streaming providers use different data points, and some have more robust tracking capabilities. Unless using a two-way streaming service where you can count individuals who are participating in online worship, one must use estimates with the data available. A survey conducted by St. Michael’s Episcopal Church Colorado Springs in April 2023 had 58% report that two or more individuals watch online worship services together. Among some industry leaders, consensus is growing for using a multiplier of 1.8 for each individual streaming view.

During the 80th General Convention in 2022 two specific resolutions were passed to help The Episcopal Church better understand and leverage technology: **A156** created a task force to consider ways The Episcopal Church can re-evaluate how it counts membership to better align with how people today connect with the church including “a wide range of cultural and regional contexts.” **A132** created a task force to study “indicators of 21st century congregational vitality and how The Episcopal Church can collect data that measures those indicators.” While this is a positive start there are many opportunities for churches and dioceses to be trailblazers when it comes to recognizing online participants.

With ongoing encouragement from the diocese to provide a livestream worship option, many parishes have made the ongoing commitment to invest in digital ministries. It is the hope and expectation that with a diocesan wide initiative to track and report online participation, we are making a statement that all people matter and count, especially those who are unable to physically walk through the doors of a brick-and-mortar building while we seek to better understand our reach and impact in the world.

Fiscal Impact: Diocesan staff to provide tracking mechanism and communicate to parishes in a timely manner (10-30 hours per year). Provide report in Diocesan communications within 60 days of deadline.

² <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/06/02/americans-experiences-with-virtual-religious-services/>

Online & Digital Tracking Guidelines

The Diocese of Colorado

Effective January 1, 2024

Technology, subscriptions, and equipment vary by parish. Each parish should track the following information to the best of their ability using the guidelines below:

Worship & Service Participation

1. Online views or connections should be tracked separately from in-person participants.
 2. Only views lasting in duration of 1 minute or more count as an online connection.
 3. Only views watched within first 72-hours of broadcasted date count as an online connection.
 4. Each eligible online view (or online connection) should be multiplied by 1.8 to determine online attendance, unless you are able to identify exact number in attendance.
 5. To the extent possible, please track each platform separately (ie. Facebook, YouTube, etc.)
- A parish can track online views or connections using any means necessary.
 - Parishes can also use an excel file provided by the Diocese of Colorado.
 - Parishes are encouraged to track digital participation on a regular basis as some streaming services do not store data for more than a few months.

Online & Digital Tracking Excel File Fields


- Date of Service
- Time of Service
- Service (Lent 1, Pentecost 20, Easter, etc.)
- Platform (Facebook, YouTube, Vimeo, Zoom, etc.)
- Total Individual Views
- Total Individual Views x 1.8

Signature Page

Designated Person for this Resolution:

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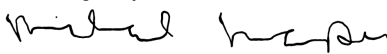
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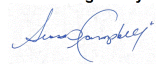
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