

Statistics for Mission *Worshipping Community*

Adapted with kind permission from Barry Hill from the Leicester Diocese document, 'Knowing Your Worshipping Community'.

“This is what the LORD says - He who created you, Jacob, He who formed you, Israel:
“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are Mine.”
Isaiah 43:1

Why should we collect the Worshipping Community statistics?

Since 2012, the annual ‘Statistics for Mission’ return has asked a question about the overall size of a worshipping community. As this question gains greater prominence, it might be helpful to explain a little more on why this is asked and, more importantly, how this question can prove vital in seeing your worshipping community grow.

Growing churches are places where people are known. God knows us by name. We know that churches who keep an up to date list of who is part of the worshipping community and regularly review it to note and respond to those who have joined and left, who has particular pastoral concerns which require greater attention and the like, are much more likely to grow.

Obviously we don’t love and care for each other in order to see our churches grow. We do it in response to the love, compassion and welcome we have known from God. However, being more intentional about it is also a major contributing factor to numerical and spiritual growth.

As attendance and membership patterns change, less prominence is being given to traditionally used measures, like Electoral Roll and Usual Sunday Attendance, and much more to the overall size of the worshipping community. This has many advantages; not least, it includes all ages and is based on those who regularly worship as part of a given community (or would if illness did not prevent).

So, whilst the measure is important for diocesan life, the practice for the local church which makes measuring it possible is significantly more important. We are reminded in the scriptures and at some of the key points in our lives that God calls us by name. The church is called to mirror God in knowing the names of those He has sent to be in fellowship together.

Who should we include?

‘Worshipping Community’ includes all those who are part of any of the congregations (weekday or Sunday) including Fresh Expressions of Church, on a regular basis, (e.g. at least once a month), or would do so if not prevented by illness, infirmity or temporary absence. This includes all ages

(although the annual form loosely separates them into four age categories *as best as can be estimated*). It includes those who take part in activities such as fellowship groups and other activities which have a distinct act of worship or prayer. It may also include Christian activities with worship not on church premises (e.g. school or community centre). Those who lead worship, such as clergy, and those who live in care or residential homes and would consider themselves to be full members of your church, should also be included.

Those who are visitors (e.g. holidaymakers, baptism parties) or those who consider their 'home' church to be another church should not be included.

What information should we collect?

Key things to include are obvious: Name, Address, E-mail and Phone. In many places a date of birth will also be very helpful, but this may not be appropriate in all instances. Some churches find keeping it in family groups where applicable can be helpful. Some publish a version to other members for those that opt into it being published.

For any organisation holding data, the Data Protection Act applies, but for the kind of data held in a single list this shouldn't be too burdensome (it means holding it the same as other sensitive data, such as that on the church Electoral Roll).

How might we use the list?

- Many churches find regularly reviewing the list within a Ministry Team (or Standing Committee if there isn't one) is a good way of thinking about who has started to 'come alongside the worshipping community' – maybe attending once or twice over the previous few months – and how they might be given the opportunity to explore and experience faith more. It's important to add new people as soon as possible and ideally let key people within the worshipping community aware of the list so that they can suggest people they notice are starting to join, etc.
- Equally, research tells us that many people simply drift away from church and, by the time it has been noticed, it is too late. The most effective way of helping someone not to leave is to notice early on. Such a list can help us spot these people.
- Some churches also find such a list helpful as a memory aid for reviewing any pastoral or discipleship needs and deciding who within the ministry team takes responsibility.
- Other churches use a list to consider who the key people on their fringe are, and who might like an opportunity to become more involved or explore more of what it means to be a follower of Christ. Some churches informally link those on the fringe of church with particular small groups, who endeavour to invite them to one or two social events a year.

Conclusion

Much of this will read like grandma and eggs! Most of this is already happening in many churches. But with new people coming into our churches each and every week, and with more and more people involved in pastoral care and evangelism, such a list is proving increasingly critical in not letting people slip through the net.