

2020 CONGREGATIONAL STATISTICS REPORT FORM INSTRUCTIONS

2020: A Unique Year & an Updated Form

2020 has been a very unique year. COVID-19 impacted every church. Congregations have had questions about how to track certain statistics. For example, how do you track worship attendance when services are held entirely via live stream?

2020 was also the year WELS planned to update its annual Congregational Statistics report form. Some fields that were not being used were eliminated. Others fields were added, ones which will provide valuable information that will help WELS areas of ministry with their planning and programs.

Because of the uniqueness of 2020 and the updated form, we produced these instructions to help walk congregations through the statistical report form. Our prayer is that it helps explain the information requested in each field.

If you have any questions as you are filling out the report form, do not hesitate to contact WELS Congregational Services at congstats@wels.net or 414-256-3288.

Getting Started

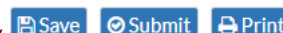
When you open the web form, the shaded instructions box at the top of the page contains some important information. Note that any field marked with an * is required. You will not be able to submit the form until you enter data in that field. Also note that many fields have a information icon next to them. When you hover the cursor over that icon, you are provided with more information about that field.

Find your congregation by entering your congregation’s name, city, or ZIP code. If there are multiple matches for what you entered, select your congregation from the dropdown list.

Church	Zip/Postal Code	WELSource ID
Peace Lutheran Church, Bradenton, FL (1611 30th Ave W)	34205-6363	23852
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Englewood, FL (2222 Englewood Rd)	34223-6348	23854
Peace Lutheran Church, Trinity, FL (2209 Duck Slough Blvd)	34655-5008	23862
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Martinez, GA (3703 River Watch Pkwy)	30907-2707	23870
Abiding Peace Lutheran Church, Simpsonville, SC (401 Batesville Rd)	29681-4818	23872
Peace Lutheran Church, Cottonwood, AZ (1450 E Fir St)	86326-4885	24004
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Yuma, AZ (5954 E 38th St)	85365-2639	24013
Peace Lutheran Church, Santa Clara, CA (885 Pomeroy Ave)	95051-5217	24018

Once you select your congregation and click on the “Continue” button, you will be taken to a series of tabs.

We will now walk through those, tab by tab. If you want to take a break at any time, simply click the “Save” icon at the top right corner of the page.



“Contact” Tab

Church Information

If your church’s information is inaccurate or has changed, please update it. Simply hover your cursor over the information icon to find out how.

Submitter Information

This is the person we will contact if we have any questions about the submitted data.

“Membership” Tab

The statistical report breaks membership into two groups:

- “Total membership” is the count of every single member of the congregation, regardless of age. (This used to be referred to as “baptized membership.”)
- “Communicant membership” includes all members who have completed either a youth instruction course (8th grade confirmation) or an adult Bible information class (BIC). Communicant membership cannot be greater than total membership.

With that in mind, we are asking for the following data.

Membership Gains

These fields list all the ways your congregation might add new members—a baby is born into a member family; a couple transfers in from another WELS church; an adult is confirmed in the faith. Youth confirmations would not be counted here. (Those will be counted in the “Ministry” tab.) When a youth is confirmed, a current member’s membership status changes from “baptized” to “communicant,” but the church does not gain a new member.

If you aren’t sure of a field definition, hover your cursor over the information icon, and it will provide a detailed definition.

As you enter data into the four fields, the “Total members gained” field will automatically add them together.

Now, move to your right in the form, to the six fields that comprise “Membership Losses.”

* Births ⓘ	<input type="text"/>
* Adult confirmations ⓘ	<input type="text"/>
* Received by profession of faith ⓘ	<input type="text"/>
* Transferred in from sister congregations ⓘ	<input type="text"/>
Total members gained	0

Membership Losses

These fields list all the ways your congregation might lose members—someone dies; a family moves away and transfers to another congregation; someone indicates they are joining the non-denominational church in town.

Note that in this updated statistical report form, we have taken certain types of losses that were previously categorized together and broken them down. Specifically, the field “removals” has been split into three fields: excommunications, removals, releases. The distinctions?

“Membership” Tab (CONTINUED)

- “Excommunications” are individuals who have been removed from membership for unrepentant sin.
 - “Removals” are individuals who have been removed from membership because the congregation has lost touch with them. Perhaps they moved away, and the congregation cannot contact them.
 - “Releases” are individuals who are released from membership because of self-exclusion. Their speech/action makes it apparent they do not want the pastor or congregation to serve them spiritually.
- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Deaths ⓘ * Transferred to sister congregations ⓘ * Excommunications ⓘ * Removals ⓘ * Releases ⓘ * Joined other Christian churches ⓘ | <input style="width: 100%; height: 20px; border: 1px solid #ccc;" type="text"/>
<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px; border: 1px solid #ccc;" type="text"/>
<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px; border: 1px solid #ccc;" type="text"/>
<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px; border: 1px solid #ccc;" type="text"/>
<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px; border: 1px solid #ccc;" type="text"/>
<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px; border: 1px solid #ccc;" type="text"/> |
| <p>Total members lost</p> | <p>0</p> |

If you want further explanation of these fields, simply hover your cursor over the information icon. ⓘ

We believe these distinctions will provide valuable historical data, both to the congregation and to the synod. For example, “removals” (as defined above) are negative. Many removals might suggest the congregation has members slipping through the cracks and needs to increase elder work. However, “Excommunications” are a positive—a loving attempt to warn an unrepentant individual. Thus, breaking these apart gives a congregation a better snapshot of the health of ministry efforts.

NOTE: Most churches do track those categories separately, even though they were lumped into “removals” in past statistical reports. However, **we understand that perhaps not all congregations tracked membership losses in this much detail in 2020. If that is the case, we would ask church leadership to provide their best guess.** Example: Trinity Lutheran knows they had 15 removals in 2020. When the pastor talks to his elders, they express the belief that breaks down into: 1 excommunication, 10 removals, and 4 releases. That guess work is acceptable in 2020. We ask congregations to track those “membership losses” fields separately moving forward.

As you enter data into the various fields, the “Total members lost” field will automatically add them together.

“Total members...”

Move to the center of the page, below the “Membership Gains” and “Membership Losses.” The form will have combined those two numbers to calculate “Net gain or loss of members.” Using that net gain (or loss) compared to your 2019 membership (if available), the form automatically fills in the field “Total members at the end of 2020.”

The “Total member override” field lets you correct your 2020 membership if something is inaccurate due to your congregation not submitting statistics, or submitting incorrect membership statistics, in 2019.

Say, for example, the report form says that “Total members at the end of 2020” is 101. Yet, you know the total membership is 103. You know that the reason for the difference is the congregation did not submit statistics in 2019, a year where they experienced a net gain of 2. That net gain is missing. The submitter can correct that by entering “103” in the “Total member override” field.

Total members at the end of 2019 ⓘ	92
Net gain or loss of members ⓘ	9
Total members at the end of 2020 ⓘ	101
Total member override ⓘ	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px; border: 1px solid #ccc;" type="text" value="103"/>

“Communicant membership”

Total membership has been automatically calculated by applying “Net gain or less of members” to your 2019 membership totals.

Move just to the right in the form, and you see the field “Communicant membership.” This is a manually entered field, i.e. it is NOT auto calculated. It is data every congregation tracks. When it is entered, the form automatically calculates the percentage of members that are communicants.

Membership Demographics

At the bottom of the “Membership” tab are two columns which break down your congregation’s membership along two lines: “AGES” and “ETHNIC ORIGIN.” We ask WELS congregations to provide this detailed demographic information once every five years. Tracking it over time allows us to see if WELS is “greying,” if it is becoming more ethnically diverse with our cross-cultural efforts, etc.

We understand that few congregations use databases that track this level of information. (Some church membership software allows you to enter birthdates, which would provide age information.) For most congregations, providing this information will require someone familiar with the membership to go through a directory and manually count. (“I think we have eighteen members who are aged 25 to 34, but I am not entirely sure about two of them.”) The same holds true with the “ETHNIC ORIGIN” column. Your best guesses are entirely acceptable! Those estimations will be extremely helpful. They will provide us with a snapshot of WELS’ demographic makeup.

Note that with both of these columns, the “Total members listed above” for the columns will have to match either the “Total members at the end of 2020” field or (if you entered data into it) the “Total member override” field.

“Ministry” Tab

This tab is where congregations report various types of ministrations. Many of the fields were found on prior report forms. However, some are new.

The new fields are *not* mandatory. (Required fields are marked by an asterisk*.) Even if those fields are left blank, you can still submit your report form.

However, many congregations already track this data on their own—the number of members who are homebound; the number of individuals on the congregation’s prospect list. If your congregation tracks this data, we ask you to share it. If you do not closely track this data, you can either make your best estimate or simply leave the field blank. We would encourage congregations to consider tracking these fields in future years. They provide important information for planning.

Let us look at the various field categories.

Worship

“Average weekly number of members in worship.” We anticipate many will ask, **“How should we count attendance during COVID-19?”** Anecdotally, WELS congregations are all over the map. For the sake of consistency, we are asking you to use the average of in-person worshipers for the weeks when in-person worship of any format (e.g. capacity limits) was allowed. DO NOT count online viewers, such as the family who watched the service on YouTube. You will be asked to provide an estimated number of weekly online viewers in the COVID-19 tab. For our purposes here, it will be more meaningful to have consistently recorded in-person attendance.

For example, there were twelve weeks where, due to government regulations or self-imposed health decisions, your congregation did not hold in-person worship services. You would provide the average weekly number of members in worship for the other forty weeks. (Most likely, the average weekly attendance will be higher *prior* to the twelve-week lockdown and lower post-lockdown, as some have been reluctant to return to in-person worship.)

We are asking congregations, as much as possible, to avoid double counting people because they attended a normal weekend service and a special midweek service. For example, Peace Lutheran had 300 people come to church on the first Sunday in Advent. That Wednesday, 150 attend a mid-week Advent service, all of whom were at worship the previous weekend. For the purpose of this statistical report, Peace’s attendance for that week was 300 people, not 450, since 150 people attended twice. This provides a clearer picture of how many members are (or are not) in regular contact with the means of grace.

We know this has been a challenging year to track data like this. Thank you for your best efforts!

Bible Study

You will note two changes from previous report forms. First, we are no longer tracking three groups: youth, teen, and adult. We are only asking for data on Bible study activity for those who are pre-confirmation age and communicant members.

Second, note the words “some form of...,” such as “Average weekly number of communicant members in some form of group Bible study.” This is to accommodate the fact that a growing number of WELS congregations offer Bible study opportunities beyond the pastor-led Sunday morning class at church. For example, in-home small group Bible studies are very common. We want to capture all of this Bible study activity.

We ask congregations to do their best to *not* double count individuals when they attend more than one Bible study per week. Double counting provides an unrealistic view of things. For example, a congregation

of 300 has the same twenty people attend five different weekly Bible studies. If they report that 100 people (20 X 5) attended Bible class weekly, it looks like 33% of their members are in organized Bible study. In reality, only 7% (20/300) of their members are in Bible study.

We understand this may be a challenge. Churches can easily track how many people are in a Bible study at church. Congregations would actually have to track *who* is at Bible study at church and elsewhere to avoid double counting. Therefore, best estimates are permissible. At your church, approximately how many different members go to *any sort* of church operated Bible study during the week? Imagine you average 40 communicants at Sunday Bible class and average 50 in weekly small groups. Of that 50 in small groups, you believe half also go to that Sunday class. You would report 65 in “average weekly number of communicant members in some form of group Bible study.”

Visitation, Delinquency, Evangelism

These are new fields, but ones that congregations typically track. Because they are new fields, they are not required. (You can submit the report form even if these fields are blank.) However, if you can provide your best estimate, please do so.

WELS Schools

All of these fields were on previous statistical report forms. Therefore, they are required fields.

“COVID-19” Tab

This is a one-time tab to help provide a snapshot of how congregations have been impacted by COVID-19. There are questions about attendance and offerings pre and post-COVID. There is a question about the utilization of online worship platforms. These fields are all mandatory. The questions are pretty straight forward. However, if you have any questions about the information requested, please contact Congregational Services at congstats@wels.net or 414-256-3288.

“Servants” Tab

This new tab provides a snapshot of the body of saints who are involved in some way in the congregation’s mission.

Called Workers (as of Dec. 31, 2020)

This half of the page will auto-fill from WELS called-worker database. Because this is the 2020 report, it will use December 31 as the cut off date. If you had someone accept a call *after* December 31, they will show up on *next year’s* report. If any information is incorrect (e.g. a worker who accepted a call elsewhere in 2019 is listed here), use the provided contact information to correct the error.

Hired Staff and Volunteers

These two fields relate to individuals other than called workers involved in the congregation’s mission.

“Equivalent of paid full-time employees” includes all hired staff members that are financially compensated by the congregation for their service (administrative assistant, teachers aid, maintenance/janitor, etc.). Please include the equivalent of full-time employees. For example, a congregation has a full-time church secretary and a half-time janitor. They would enter 1.5 here.

“Total number of members involved in some sort of volunteer service to the congregation” includes all members who serve the congregation in some regular, recurring role (Sunday school teachers, elders, board/team members, ushers, grounds crew, etc.). If a member serves in more than one role, please count them only once.

“Cultural Info” Tab

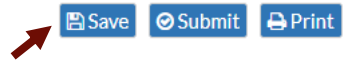
This tab remains unchanged from previous years. The information collected here helps both WELS Home and World Missions identify and support multi-cultural ministry opportunities.

“Finances” Tab

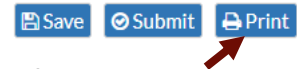
This tab remains unchanged from previous years. Note that some of the fields are provided by WELS Ministry of Christian Giving, such as “Congregational Mission Offering (CMO) sent to WELS.”

Printing the Report Form

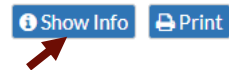
When you have finished the “Finances” tab, it’s wise to click “Save” in the top right corner of the page.



You may wish to double check your data (or to have others look it over). The simplest way to do that is by selecting “Print,” also at the top right corner of the page. When you click on “Print,” the report for your congregation will open in a new tab in your web browser.



If you want to see the field details/definitions in that printed report, you can click “Show Info” in the top right corner of the page. When you are ready, click “Print” again, and a hard-copy of the report will be printed.




Submitting the Report Form

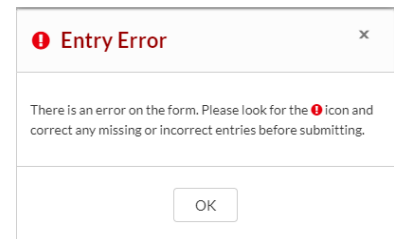
If you are ready to submit the statistical report form to WELS, select the Submit button in the top right corner of the page.







It is possible that you will get an “Entry Error” pop-up. That is typically caused by two things: 1) A required field was left blank, or 2) Self-validating fields do not match.

The “Entry Error” pop up states, “Please look for the  icon and correct any missing or incorrect entries before submitting.”

In this example, the congregation has errors in two tabs: “Membership” and “COVID-19.”



When the reporter went back to the “Membership” tab he sees that the “Total members at the end of 2020” does not match with the “Membership Demographics: AGES” below. In adding gains and losses, the congregation reported they had 1400 members. Yet, when entering in the number of members in various age groups, the total came to 1401. The reporter needs to reconcile those numbers so they match before the statistical report form can be submitted.


Total members at the end of 2019 	1,459
Net gain or loss of members 	-59
Total members at the end of 2020 	1,400
	 Mismatch

When the reporter went to the COVID-19 tab, he sees he simply missed a required field, i.e. one that is preceded by an asterisk.

* Prior to COVID-19, did you share your weekly worship service online

Yes

No

 Please choose one

After those two changes are made, the reporter can click “Submit.” When he does, a “Thank You!” page will pop up. The reporter will also receive a Thank You email.

Thank you!

Thank you for taking the time to complete the statistical report form. You can find a summary of your congregation’s year-to-year statistics at the WELS Yearbook (yearbook.wels.net). Note that the 2020 statistics will not be available in the online Yearbook until all statistics have been approved. This takes 1 to 2 months.