

Visioning Survey Summary (95 responses)

We are so grateful to all who responded to this survey about worship. We had 94 responses! How we experience worship is so varied. Numbers and graphics cannot fully explain our experiences but can help guide us.

We are sharing this report, not as anything that will define the worship options going forward, but as food for thought and conversation when we meet in the listening sessions which are much more important than these results. Please plan to attend one of these. They will be:

Saturday October 28 4-5:30 pm on Zoom only

Thursday November 2 7-8:30 pm on Zoom only

Saturday November 4 9:30 -11:00 am on site only at FMC

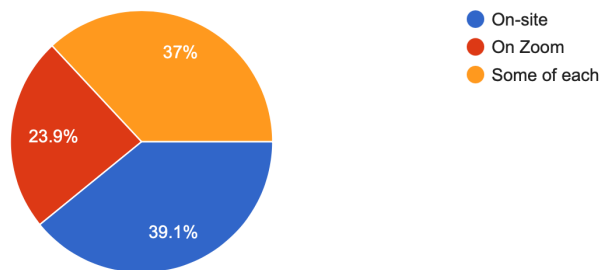
Some respondents worried that the survey was in place of Quaker discernment and regretted that we haven't discerned this as a community. This is what we are doing now following the process followed for community discernment about masking. After the listening sessions are complete the Visioning Group will bring a proposal to Meeting for Worship for Business for discernment.

Some also seemed to believe that the survey and discernment process is meant as an effort to do away with hybrid. That is not the case.

Now on to the survey results.

We should be encouraged that we have a full and reliable reflection of Friends Meeting at Cambridge (FMC) in these survey findings. Approximately 100 people attend FMC each week; we got over 90 responses with about 90% of respondents who have attended more than 3 years attendance. About 75% of respondents come weekly. In addition, both the quality of worship experience (appx 90%) and community experience (appx 80%) is very high for all respondents -- whether room only, Zoom only or a mix. We should celebrate this!

Do you typically worship on-site, on Zoom, or some of each?



What influences your mode of attendance?

Many people expressed a preference for worshipping at the meetinghouse when they could, but appreciated the option to worship remotely if weather, illness, risk of infection, or having other plans made traveling to Cambridge difficult.

Some people, as we know, do not have a choice of being with us physically in the room, so rely on remote connection to worship and our community. For those living at a distance who feel a strong connection to our meeting, hybrid worship is a gift.

There are also Friends who are concerned about infection from COVID or other illnesses, or have mobility issues that keep them from attending worship physically in the meetinghouse.

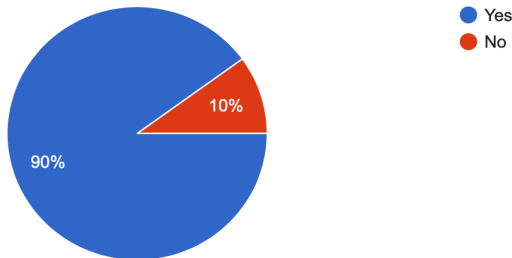
Friends who serve as tech hosts to facilitate worship for those who are remote say they will often perform those duties from home even if they would prefer to be in worship in the meetinghouse.

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Some Friends do not use Zoom at all to attend worship and feel that they cannot worship in that mode. Many Friends who use both modes still prefer to be with others physically and feel much more nurtured that way. One Friend shared “I feel a different sense of Presence and connectedness when I am in person. It is easier for me to make the spiritual movement from head to heart when I am not looking at a screen and when I am out of my habitual surroundings and when I am surrounded by living, breathing bodies.”

Do you believe that your mode of attendance provides a fulfilling worship experience?

Regardless of how people join worship the vast majority answered yes, they find it fulfilling, though many expressed the limitations they felt, that it was not a simple yes or no answer.

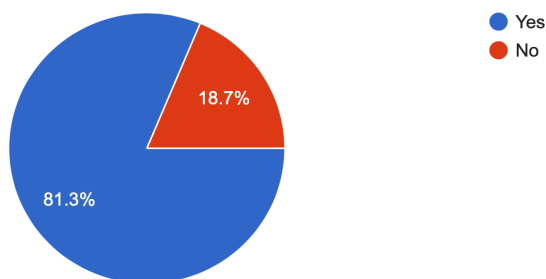


This Friend shares a common response: “It's not exactly a yes or no question. Do I think that attending a hybrid meeting when I'm in person is worship? Yes I do. Is it fulfilling? Sometimes yes and sometimes no. Do I feel that it gives the same sense of community, connectedness and expectant waiting that an all in-person meeting does: no I don't. Hybrid has a cost and it's one that I'm (mostly) willing to pay in order to include everyone but that doesn't mean it isn't a loss for me.”

Most people spoke of preferring being in the room and found that more fulfilling. They cited a greater sense of community and more ease in settling into worship.

A few expressed gratitude for the efforts to make hybrid happen as well as it does. Others said they find the technology jolting, such as when someone speaks from Zoom and it is loud and startling. It is hard to see who is on the Zoom screen. A few people felt that hybrid worship should end. Two said they stopped attending when technology was introduced and would only worship with a tech-free option. They spoke of f/Friends who no longer attend because of hybrid. Some who said they preferred the in-person experience were willing to sacrifice something to include those who can't travel to Cambridge, but they did say it was a loss for them.

Do you believe that your mode of attendance provides a fulfilling experience of community?



Again, the comments showed more nuanced answers than yes or no. As one Friend put it: “There is not much of a "sense of community'.....different issue from sense of worshipping together.” For those who rely on Zoom, many liked seeing other faces on Zoom, but did not feel it was easy to connect one-on-one with people with whom they wanted to speak.

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Many friends were grateful to have the opportunity to be part of the FMC community by worshipping on Zoom, as indicated by the responses below:

“Sometimes I can make it in person which is really great but most times I can’t make it so Zoom helps me stay connected to the community despite not physically being able to make it.

Different, perhaps more effortful but community, nonetheless. I have adopted the practice of holding each person on my screen individually in the Light as I enter worship.”

“The beauty of Zoom is seeing faces and hearing speech better. The beauty of on-site is the communication after, as well as a fuller sense of meeting per se.”

“It is much more satisfying to attend on Zoom than merely reading the bulletin. I feel the meeting has done a very good and inspiring job to integrate the technology and appreciate the many volunteers who make it possible.”

“The Zoom experience provides a satisfying experience of community because of all of the people that are on Zoom, and the fact that I can see their names, and I see them clearly when I’m on Zoom. The on-site experience is fulfilling of community in a different way, but very rich also.”

“Since I both attend and Zoom, I seem to have the best of both alternatives.”

“I would wish to be at 5 Longfellow as often as possible, and I still feel connected via zoom when I can't get there or choose to support the zoom space as a tech host. I also want to try to attend Afterthoughts more consistently, be it in the room or on zoom.”

“I enjoy my occasional visits to Cambridge and the chance to worship with FMC in person. For me, worship on Zoom has brought me back into weekly contact with a community that I loved.”

Others had more mixed feelings about community with hybrid worship:

A Friend shared: “Well this is the crux of the matter. Talking on Zoom can work ok if everyone already knows each other and has bonds of trust and affection. After three years of anyone who appears only on the screen without personal contact, how will I know if a Friend has cancer or lost a child? If you think ahead 20 years, where will the new members come from if they only met people by computer?”

One Friend said that their sense of community is better in hybrid than on Zoom only, “but I do not feel soul satisfied in the hybrid experience -- I cannot *feel* the people on zoom and I wonder if they can truly sense the people onsite.”

Friends generally agreed that small groups on Zoom or gatherings such as committee meetings are effective on Zoom both because of the number of people and that all are on Zoom, but that did not always translate into a feeling of connection on First Day between on-site and Zoom in either direction.

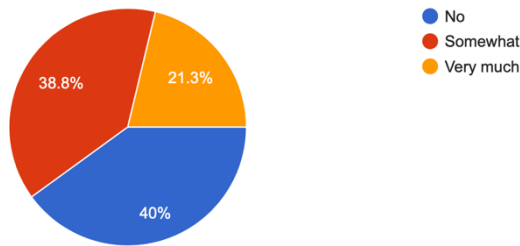
In what ways does hybrid worship benefit the community?

Most of our community believes the benefits of hybrid worship outweigh the cost, but this feeling is not universal, and not everyone agrees on how it should be implemented. The Visioning group feels it is important for the community to discern on this, which is why we have started this process.

Of the 87 people who responded to this question, the majority spoke of the advantages of inclusion of those at a distance, with mobility issues, older, increased diversity, and the gift of meaningful messages even if they mainly/only attend on site. However, there were people who desired an end to hybrid feeling it interferes with community and the worship experience—that hybrid served a purpose during the pandemic but should not just be continued forever.

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It is hard to know how many Friends have stopped attending because Zoom or hybrid worship did not work for them, but one respondent let us know “I do not want to prevent others from joining virtually, especially if they have to be confined to protect their immunities. But it is a very different Meeting experience now. This is why my family has left--after 30 years of attending.”



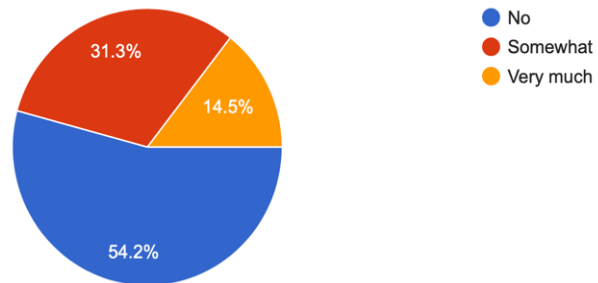
If you turn your video off during worship, what are the reasons you do so?

Friends gave varied reasons for turning their video off when in worship, mostly to avoid distracting other worshippers. Some did so because their mode of seeking nurture in worship involves activities such as writing, doing hand crafts, or doing yoga. Although we would not expect to see those activities in the meetinghouse, these practices seem to help some remote Friends. Some Friends didn't like looking at their image (perhaps not realizing they can hide their self-view) or don't want others to be looking at their image. A few said they might be driving, cutting up vegetables, or cleaning during worship time.

If Friends turn their video off during worship, does that affect your experience of worship?

Some Friends said it bothered them at least somewhat to see blank boxes in Zoom. Although comments were not invited after this question or the next, a few people expanded on their answers.

Some Friends could not feel a connection to a blank screen. One Friend said, “I really do like the feeling of seeing people on Zoom, as opposed to simply to seeing their names.”



If Friends turn their video off during worship, does that affect your experience of community?

Someone said, “I think videos off with just names or phone numbers and black screens would not be a way to build community. If we know the person, we can imagine what they look like. This favors building an already familiar community.”

If you are a person who enables hybrid to happen, how does that affect your experience of worship and community?

22 survey respondents help facilitate worship and answered how it effects their worship.

Answers to this question varied. Here are some that show the range of responses:

“I find it difficult to enter into worship in the way I might when I am not in that role, though at sometimes I can feel very in tune with Spirit. However, I do feel that being able to serve in such a role provides for me a strong and meaningful sense of connection to the community and provides for a very rewarding experience even if it is different from times I would simply be attending meeting.”

“When I TechHost I am unable to sink into deep worship. One needs to be aware of what is happening on Zoom, be watching.”

“I’m not [a person who enables hybrid to happen]- because it would make it impossible for me to worship.”

What leads you to attend Friends Meeting at Cambridge remotely?

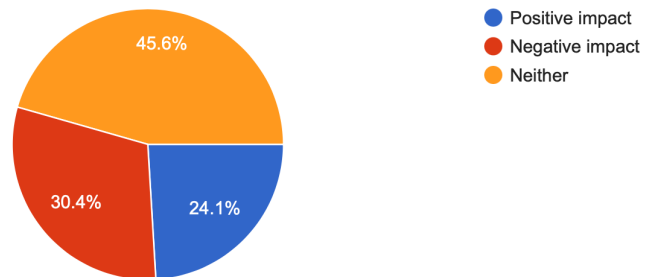
The main reasons for remote vs. on-site attendance are distance, age/mobility issues, and concerns about contagion. Some comments shared the reasons to be part of the FMC community—“ Our commitment to the web of testimonies, our commitment to actual process, and real discernment in worship, safely, peacefully, among those I trust, in a real sense.”

A few Friends used this space to say they have stopped coming rather than attend remotely or decided they would only attend on site.

Not all Friends who attend remotely feel a strong community connection but appreciate the access to worship. “It is still very much my spiritual home and I am grateful to be able to worship with others, even if I am not building relationships with them beyond worship.”

If, occasionally, separate Zoom-only and on-site worship were offered, how would it impact your experience of worship as a Zoom worshipper?

Just looking at the numbers, one could say that “only” about 25% of people would feel good about separating Zoom and Hybrid worship at least sometimes. Or that about 70% would be OK with that. But there are many reactions that numbers can’t convey.



The survey was just meant as an initial temperature-taking. The question did not include specifics such as how often, and whether it would mean two meetings on a Sunday or skipping a Sunday, so we can’t be sure what Friends were imagining when they responded.

Many respondents supported trying occasional Zoom-only and on-site only worship or having an option at some times for on-site only. Others had concerns about not having the shared worship time—that it would feel divisive. There were also some who would prefer Zoom only because then everyone could see each other, and it would feel more equal.

Some comments shared were:

“I would be eager to see what a Zoom-only worship might feel like on Zoom--it may be a much more satisfying experience.”

“Both, really. There would be fewer of the people I love in attendance, but on the other hand, I would actually be able to see everybody (at least the names of everybody) in my current meeting for worship; I can't really see many people well who are on-site when I am on Zoom.”

“We would all be on equal footing. I found it easier to worship on Zoom when we were all on Zoom than I do with hybrid.”

“I’m unsure about the impact. It could for that occasion split the community when we offer both modes, but I recall when we had two separate Sunday morning meetings, this seemed not to negatively impact FMC.”

“Quakerism historically ALWAYS embraced experimenting! At our best, we are very clear that we haven’t yet found the final truth or way of living. Spirit isn’t static. It is very Quakerly to try things and observe as part of our discernment.”

“When I worshipped at Sandwich Meeting, I found their hybrid system to be much more appealing than ours. They share audio but not video. People in the room can only see the people in the room,

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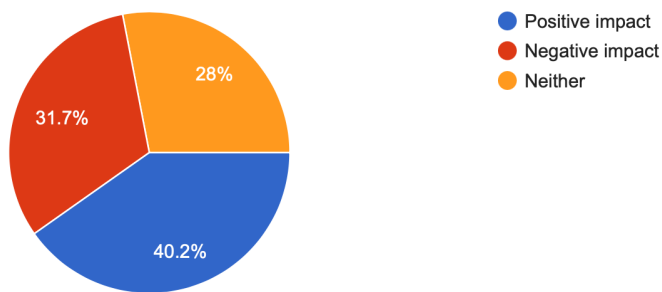
but they can hear everyone. People on Zoom can only see people on Zoom, but again, can hear everyone.”

“It might be nice if there were occasional meetings which were not hybrid. I would find it peaceful to not have the Zoom screen and not have people need to speak with microphones.”

“Let's not segregate or fracture our already struggling community.”

“YES! I feel heard. Many meetings offer 2 a week and this feels so balanced to me. We used to hold 2 meetings and I miss the earlier one. If we alternated which fell to Zoom and which to plain that would seem most elegant. One other related thing- forum and afterthoughts have become non-spiritual, chatty, and hybrid focused. I would welcome some alternating here also. Not changing back, no— just ameliorating— showing a mediation among forms.”

If, occasionally, separate Zoom-only and on-site worship were offered, how would it impact your experience of worship as an on-site worshipper?



Although there was a stated longing for worship without technology and comments about how much more meaningful that would be, there was also a common desire not to distance Zoom attenders or separate the community.

“Both, really. Fewer people in attendance would be a negative, but not having disembodied messages at unregulated volume could be a positive.”

“I say negative because I would anticipate Zoomers feeling distanced and I would regret that.”

“The one in person only meeting we had last May was glorious. You could really feel the difference in the silence in the room and a sense of togetherness that just doesn't happen for me with hybrid. It felt like gathered worship which is something I've never experienced with a hybrid worship. I recognize that hybrid is here to stay but it does truly change the experience of worship.”

Is there anything that would make worship more meaningful to you?

Friends expressed a wide range of ideas about what might make worship more meaningful to them. Friends longed for more children, for worship to be more intergenerational; more vocal ministry; opportunities to share ways Friends settle into worship; worship in smaller groups; and better audio or video. Some said, “worship is my own responsibility: it requires more preparation and discipline on my part.” Friends hoped for less tension and discord in the meeting, more people with a background in Quaker practice, more attention to issues of peace and war, and “more love and trust and spirit present.” There was a spectrum of views, noting the need for inclusion as well as the challenges of technology.

Some comments Friends shared about how worship could be more meaningful for them:

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“More opportunities to share the variety of ways that Friends settle in worship, access the presence of Spirit/the Divine/the sacred, whatever the language that fits is, and experience the ways that Spirit moves among us and through us in worship.”

“I have found myself struggling in meetings recently that are abundantly silent, or silent but for a message about the silence. I return to our peace testimony and wonder how we are not crying out in objection to the war and death that continue to pervade our culture, that our taxes fund, that our leaders celebrate. And yet I also often am silent in these meetings, not crying out myself or feeling moved to deliver a message. I don't know that something could spark fuller vocal ministry in our meetings but I have been in discernment around this in the past year.”

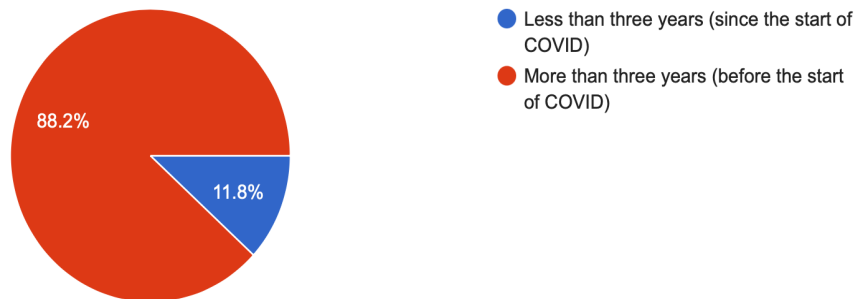
“I would love to have music incorporated, at least occasionally.”

“Making sure that people can be heard when they have a message with whatever equipment is available at the time (microphones, etc.)”

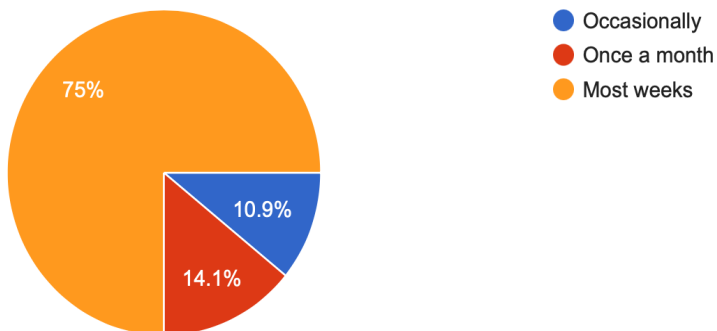
“Less fear of disruption.”

There were other ideas that the Visioning Group will pass on to the Blue Sky Group and relevant committees to consider.

How long have you been coming to Friends Meeting at Cambridge?



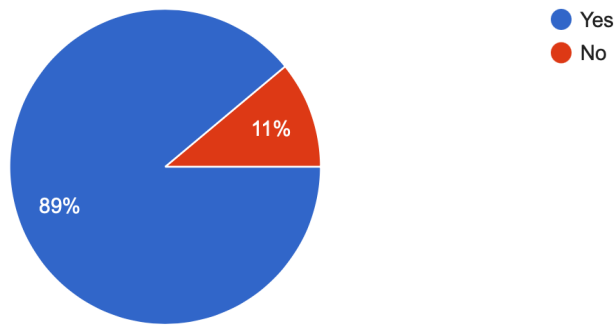
How often do you worship with Friends Meeting at Cambridge?



"There was a realization that the very unnamable and experiential mystery of Meeting for Worship holds us together and from this flows the love, community, and service which sustain us." (FMC Epistle 2010)

Do you feel that we share in the "experiential mystery of Meeting for Worship which holds us together"?

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Is there anything else you would like to say?

89% still felt the “experiential mystery of meeting for worship,” though many would have liked to add “sometimes” or “occasionally.”

Many expressed gratitude that we were beginning this conversation. Some mentioned technical issues: a need for better images, better sound. Some did not come on Zoom during the pandemic because of “Zoom overload“, juggling work and school on Zoom, or simply because they associate Zoom with work. Some felt that Zoom worship was better than hybrid. A few were angry— about having hybrid, or about the possibility of not having hybrid.

Friends shared:

“I feel we’re in a time of spiritual chaos, a bit, and not sure of our identity or what we mean by community. Also unclear what we mean by Quaker, unclear how to do business together, and not sure what our testimonies are telling us. We are thirsty for unity we have not worked for in a while, though we’re starting to. We have a lot of interested folks, loving folks, well-meaning folks – but we seem confused. Maybe some time in plain worship will lead us home?”

“Before the pandemic, I experienced the mystery that holds us together quite regularly. Now I sometimes feel it with others who are physically in the room, but I have no sense of the people on Zoom and don’t feel held together with them. There has been so much conflict around Zoom that I despair of ever being able to experience the mystery in the same way I did before the pandemic. “

“There are also members, however, for whom hybrid meetings do not meet their worship needs.’ How is it possible that these members don’t share their feelings with the whole community but only with M&C while Zoomers have to fight for the opportunity to worship in community in our meeting? Who are they? If they can’t face us they know they are wrong. I can’t believe all the effort to make them happy while hurting Zoomers. It is a power and privilege situation. Even people in this group have avoided the uncomfortable conversations and abuse the “power“ you have making decisions in the groups where you are serving without listening.”

“Zoom is not Quaker meeting. Zoom makes people lazy. Zoom kills the spirit and soul of meeting. Please end it now or lose me altogether.”

“This survey should probably only have gone to those who access meeting remotely.“

“I don’t mind the Zoom in worship, but I really feel like it gets in the way of connection during Afterthoughts. I notice I don’t speak as easily or freely because of the Zoom screen—I really dislike facing the Zoom screen— I want to sit in community and engage fully. Many thanks for this inquiry.”

“If you all acknowledged more all that you do well and gave thanks to yourselves and the efforts you make to build a pretty amazing and vibrant community. I’ve attended tons of online Quaker meetings for worship and you are by faaaar the most warm, welcoming, consistent and well

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organized. All the effort you all put in is amazing and can y'all stop being so negative about yourselves and each other? There's an all too common theme/testimony of "never enough" and "not good enough" that is woven in the fabric of FMC, somehow. A pervasive perpetual state of being disappointed in "ourselves." It's my theory that white guilt or privilege guilt is an undercurrent that several of you suffer from which makes you accept bad behavior from others in the community. Sometimes, quite strongly, it seems to me that the message is: to be Quakerly is to accept harm from others. There's a ton of verbal abuse in this meeting that is couched as "worship" or "testimony" or "witnessing." ... It has been the rampant negativity that has kept me away lately. It's the lack of joy." "Enough discrimination already against those unable to attend in person. Where does this rigidity come from? Is this the Quaker way?"

"I have felt a deep loss of connection with the community since we are no longer a purely live meeting."

"I have been pleasantly surprised as to how hybrid worship is going."

"I desperately hope that we, as a community, will be creative and continue to find ways to provide a variety of opportunities for worship and community activity for those who are able to attend only on Zoom, that will allow them, despite the remoteness, to feel they are active and valued members of our community. I also hope we cannot wear out the current tech volunteers with ever-increasing requests for their service. I hope more individuals can be encouraged to become tech volunteers to spread the workload."

"Something I am uncomfortable with in a hybrid meeting for which I am present in the meeting room is that I don't see names/faces of more than a portion of the hybrid attendees. Who is with us? It feels strange especially to speak without knowing who is present that I cannot see. The same is true of attending by Zoom and not being able to know who is in the room, including sometimes who is speaking. And speaking through masks leads to muffled ministry."

"We need to hold our differences with love and give preference to the needs and expressions of those who are less confident and expressing themselves."

"As a faith community grounded in (founded in) the importance of gathering, deeper discernment on the limits and possibilities of digitally-enabled worship needs to be explored. The tools we use are corporate, the digital communications we share with each other tend towards the same tone of divisiveness as other online speech. What is an ethic of digital Quaker practice? What are its norms? Worship and MFB practices have arisen over centuries and differ significantly from common or secular practices. In the digital space, we have adopted modes of interaction wholesale from daily life, while the greater hybrid/digital experience has landed without years of seasoning. We—both FMC and a broader Quaker community—need to discern its greater benefits and boundaries."

Thank you for considering these issues and for sharing your thoughts. We are blessed to have such a thoughtful, creative, and loving community which longs to come together in Spirit and discern a path together. May this exploration of our varied hopes for worship return us to "that unnamable and experiential mystery of meeting for worship which holds us together" to find "the love, community, and service which sustain us."

Visioning Group Members:

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