

Woodbrooke-EMES Online Worship Survey – October 2020

Thanks to everyone who took part in our recent survey. Here is a short summary of our findings, followed by a more detailed report. The report ends with a reflection on 'Is Woodbrooke-EMES online worship a Quaker community?', followed by information about how to offer your services as a worship facilitator.

Summary of our findings

1. Woodbrooke-EMES online worship is greatly valued and appreciated
 2. Worshippers particularly appreciate the international reach of our online worship
 3. Worshippers value the variety of worship opportunities during the week
 4. There is a strong desire for this online worship to continue after the pandemic
 5. Online worship helps people to attend worship when they otherwise cannot
 6. Online worship 'works' for most people, but for some people it does not work as well as worship in person.
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Detailed report

1. Woodbrooke-EMES online worship is greatly valued and appreciated

People responding to the survey expressed overwhelming appreciation and gratitude for Woodbrooke-EMES online worship. It is clearly greatly appreciated and valued, being described as 'precious', 'wonderful' and 'a blessing'. Many people wrote of how supportive and helpful they've found online worship. Online worship is inspiring and sustaining people, and is frequently described as a 'lifeline'.

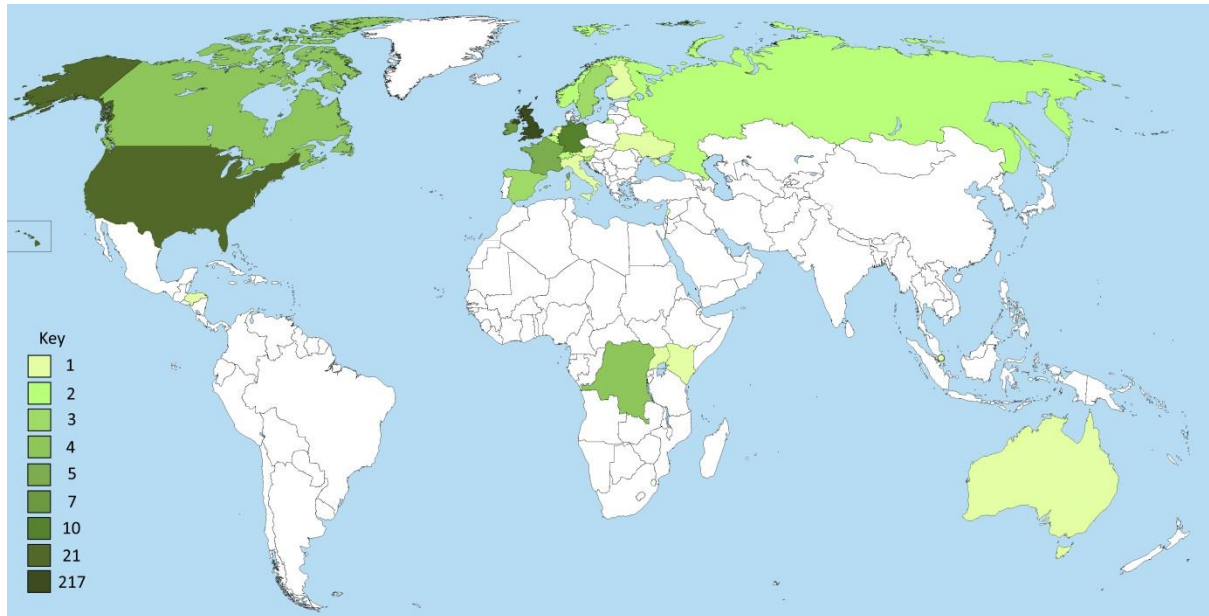
"I find Woodbrooke-EMES online worship deeply spiritually uplifting. It has provided a lifeline to many during the Covid-19 lockdown and I now consider it to be an essential part of my continuing faith commitment."

2. Worshippers particularly appreciate the international reach of our online worship

Many commented on how they particularly appreciated the international reach of our online worship.

"I am so grateful that you are offering this. It is an absolute delight. I love that people from all around the world attend and I really appreciate the hosts' involvement."

Of those who gave their location, the majority (73%) were from the United Kingdom.¹ Worshippers also joined from the following countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Democratic Republic of Congo, Finland, France, Germany, Honduras, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Norway, Russia, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Uganda, Ukraine and USA.



Other things people value about our online worship include its spiritual depth, our team of worship facilitators, and the way the programme of online worship provides stability and structure during a very uncertain time.

Many wrote about the sense of connection and community they experience in our online worship. People are getting to know one another, and feeling less isolated. For some people, this is their first experience of Quaker worship. For others, online worship is helping them reconnect with Quakerism.

“I find the online worship surprisingly powerful. By attending regularly the faces have become familiar, and I find myself looking forward to it. The early morning Meetings work especially well for me. They anchor my day.”

“Online worship is my first experience of a Quaker meeting. I have wanted to attend a Quaker meeting for many years - practicalities of transport from where I live in the countryside was a factor but also the courage to step into a new environment. Stepping into a new environment from my own home has been an easier step.”

¹ Quakers do not organise themselves according to UK borders (with Quakers in Northern Ireland being part of Ireland Yearly Meeting). However, a number of people gave ‘UK’ as their location, so we felt it best to refer to the UK for the purposes of this survey.

3 & 4. Worshippers value the variety of worship opportunities during the week; there is a strong desire for this online worship to continue after the pandemic

The meetings with the largest attendance are those that were established before the pandemic (Wednesday 09.30 and Friday 13.00 GMT), and those on Sundays. The other meetings in order of decreasing attendance are Monday 09.30, Thursday 19.30, Tuesday 19.30, Friday 21.00, Thursday 11.00, Tuesday 7.00 and Wednesday 7.00.

It is clear that the number of worship opportunities during the week is appreciated. This allows people to worship almost daily, or choose a meeting for worship that best fits with their other commitments. A large number of responses also asked for online worship to continue once the pandemic is over.

“The zoom meetings have made meetings for worship more accessible for me... If at all possible please don't reduce the number of online meetings for worship as the choice means I stand more chance of being able attend at least once a week.”

5. Online worship helps people to attend worship when they otherwise cannot

Many people find online worship accessible and convenient. It allows them to worship when attending a physical meeting for worship is difficult. This might be because of their health, their distance from a meeting house, or their family commitments.

“I hadn't previously managed to try a meeting in person due to various mental health issues making that difficult. But I can attend online Meeting for Worship easily.”

For some people, our online worship was helpful at the beginning of the pandemic. Now that their own local Quaker meeting has set up online worship, they attend Woodbrooke-EMES worship less frequently. Some people may not attend our online worship very often, but are glad it's there if they need it. Some people would like to be able to attend our online worship more.

6. Online worship 'works' for most people, but for some people it does not work as well as worship in person.

People's attitudes to online worship are mixed. Most people find that online worship 'works'. Some people were surprised to discover that they could worship online, and our online worship has helped people to appreciate what is possible. Some people prefer online worship. For some people, worship doesn't work as well online as it does in person.

“I'm a fan! The 'connection' in your online meetings is a different sense from physical meetings, but is still present and sometimes tangible. In some ways, online gathered silence is preferable to a 'talkative' local physical meeting.”

“My love of online worship has diminished somewhat in recent months as lockdown has continued - I realize more and more what it lacks in comparison with in-person Quaker Meeting.”

Is Woodbrooke-EMES online worship a Quaker community?

There were a number of suggestions made about how our online worship could be improved. This included using breakout rooms for small group discussion after worship, and offering ‘programmed’ worship (worship that includes prepared content e.g. readings or music). This has prompted us to think about how our online worship is similar to, and different from, a more typical Quaker meeting.

Is Woodbrooke-EMES online worship a Quaker community? From one angle, the answer is clearly ‘yes’. Our online worship are places of connection and spiritual communion. Each meeting for worship has a group of regular worshippers, who are getting to know one another, and who look forward to seeing one another. In this sense, our online worship is definitely a Quaker community.

At the same time, there are limits to what Woodbrooke-EMES online worship can offer, and there are many things a typical Quaker Meeting does that we don’t. For example, we cannot offer pastoral care as you would expect from a Quaker meeting. Our worship facilitators, who are all volunteers, are only responsible for the meeting for worship. They do not offer personal, one-to-one support. This is part of the reason we don’t offer breakout rooms for small group discussion. We are also not a decision-making, action-taking community, the way a typical Quaker Meeting is.

Woodbrooke-EMES online worship offers the opportunity to share a Quaker spiritual practice, but cannot offer the full experience of Quaker community.

Offering to serve as a worship facilitator

Several people offered their services as worship facilitators. We are grateful for all offers of support! If you feel led to offer your services as a worship facilitator, please email worship@woodbrooke.org.uk.

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