



Simpler Meetings Series

Imagining Ways with Zoom

Hello Friends,

I'm Jonathan Carmichael, a Quaker from Watford Meeting in Hertfordshire, and Britain Yearly Meeting's Simpler Meetings Project Manager.

This talk is about imagining things you could do with Zoom that could help your Quaker worshipping community to thrive, and interact more.

But first, think about what you have been using Zoom for (or something like Zoom)?

Family, friends, school, work, organizing, hobbies, services/shopping, learning,

Take a moment to think about what have you been able to do, online, that you've never done before, or was previously really hard

Today's session is about imagining some more new things for Quakers - dreaming, igniting sparks, leaps, possibilities.

It's like when thinking of a holiday, imagining a kind of destination before you start the planning or the practicalities. Eg we could go somewhere quiet, somewhere dramatic, past the hills, the sea!

You can do that, before working out how to get there. Sometimes that helps to get you to different places – ones that you'd not have gone to if you'd started with the issues of beginning.

Think of the imagining stage, when someone said: what if we could have a car that runs on electricity!

For today's session, try and put aside the doubts, the buts, what ifs, the critical assessment – today we are dreaming, imagining. There'll be plenty of time for thinking through, deciding, planning etc.

If you're the kind of person who tends to hold onto negative thoughts, you might want to just jot down a worry or objection, and turn the piece of paper over, or just let them go – you'll think of them again later.

For now, just focus on what could be possible, and see what emerges.

I'm going to show you in a moment some ideas of ways Quakers could be using Zoom (or something like Zoom – there are other programmes too!).

I just want to say a few introductory ideas first.

Looking forwards, I don't think the Zoom phenomenon is going to go away. So many people have experienced a revolution in how we can communicate and meet and talk and have fun, and indeed worship together. So let's imagine that a lot of it stays.

We needn't imagine however, that everything will be done this way – there can be a mix – some things in person, some things done online, some blended, some Quaker meetings doing more, some less or none.

We should face up to the fact that some of our old ways worked well for some people, but not working well for others. Zoom has opened some new ways to include people, and enable more variety in how we do things.

And we absolutely need to make sure we find ways that include people who don't find Zoom works for them, too – there's a balance.

There can be some more fluid ways of us coming together as communities, without some of the boundaries of geography, or time, or money, so we can have Quaker communities with different kinds of shapes, different sorts of connections.

Somebody said to me a few weeks ago: Early Quakers were always looking for ways to connect more deeply, to connect with the divine and with each other. Sometimes they found things that didn't work so well, and adapted. But they weren't going "let's just go back to how it has always been". They were moving forwards, exploring, seeking. That's the spirit of today.

As we come out of the pandemic, let's think of what good things we can take and use in our new future.

Here are some images, to show some ideas:

Lots of us have family far away



Here is perhaps a family before the pandemic.

Meeting up with family online



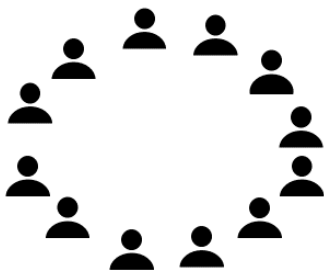
We began meeting with family online. My family did that as we live apart.

Brought us closer



It brought us closer.

Our Quaker meeting – in person



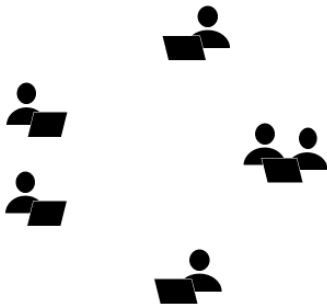
Here is an image of a Quaker meeting in person. You'll see there are no screens.

COVID – 19 !



Then along comes COVID 19 and we can't do that for a long time.

Starting to meet for worship online



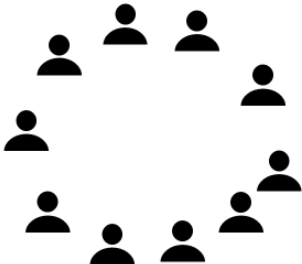
People began quickly meeting for worship online

More joining in



Then more people joined in. Some meetings experienced a lot of growth. And some different people coming.

Before, some were excluded



by
health
distance
time
money
Etc.

In the days before using Zoom, some people were excluded. They found it difficult to come along because of distance, or physical issues, or time or money.

Some are now included more online



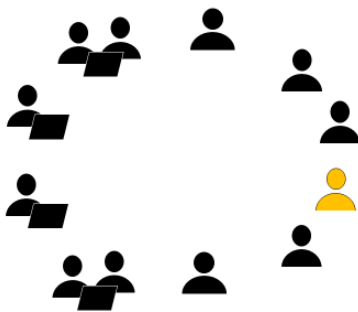
Some of them are delighting in being more included now.

Others now possibly excluded



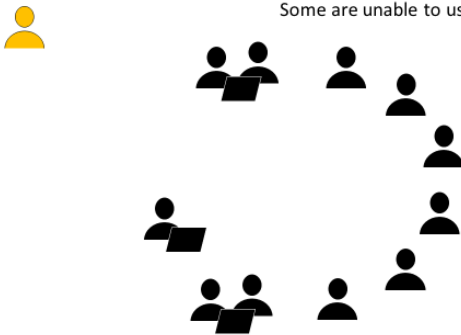
There are others who were involved before who now feel excluded.

Blended worship – or a blended activity


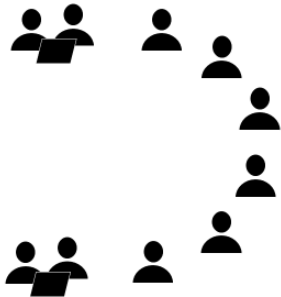
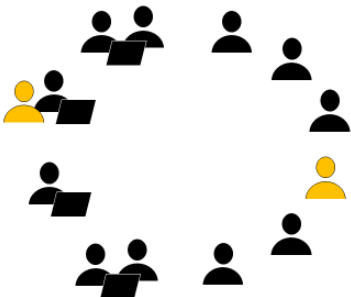

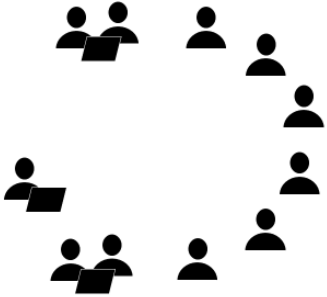

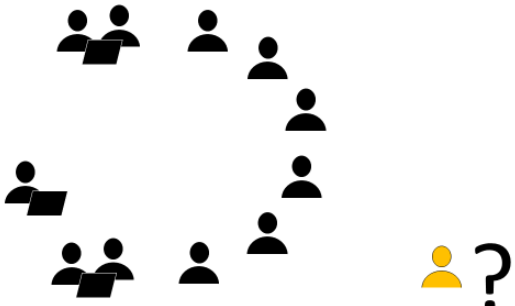


One way we can resolve that is through blended worship or blended activities. This is when some people are in the meeting online, some are physically together - the two are connected into a single activity. A lot of what we'll think about today is how that method can be used in other ways.

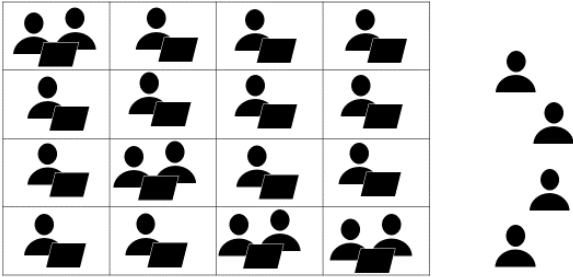
Some are unable to use computers



Someone may be unable to use a computer to join.

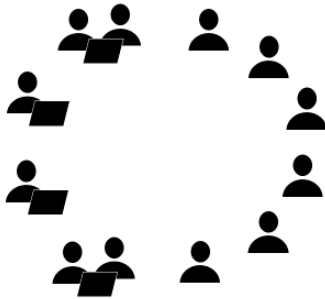
 <p>Going to help</p> 	<p>As we move out of some of the restrictions, we'll have a new option of people going to help. To show someone how to use it.</p>
<p>Enabling inclusion – online or in person</p> 	<p>This will enable them to be more included.</p>
 <p>Providing an online device</p> 	<p>Another thing some meetings have been doing is to provide the person who doesn't have equipment with some equipment. People have been very generous. It can be relatively cheap.</p>
 <p>What other ways can we include people?</p> 	<p>What other ways can we include people?</p>

Try not to think of blended meetings like this!



I encourage you not to think of blended meetings like this: a wall of people online and some people in a physical space.

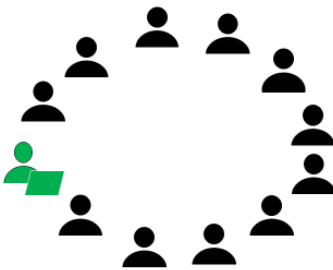
Think of us as a circle



Try to think of us as all part of a circle. This helps us to feel more of a single entity.

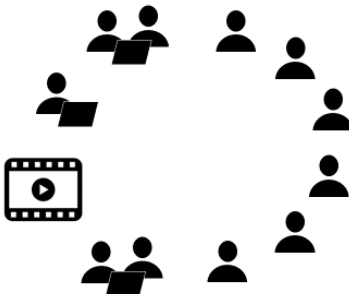
In worship, closing our eyes can help that effect.

Speaker joins a physical meeting from afar



You could have a speaker who joins from afar.

Watch a video then discuss it



Or watch a video together, and discuss it.

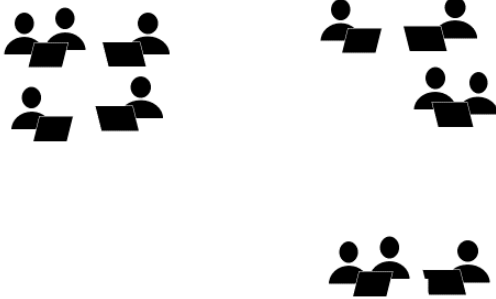
We can have social times online



We can have social times together online.

My meeting ran a 20 questions evening and had a great time. More people came than would have to a physical occasion – and different people.

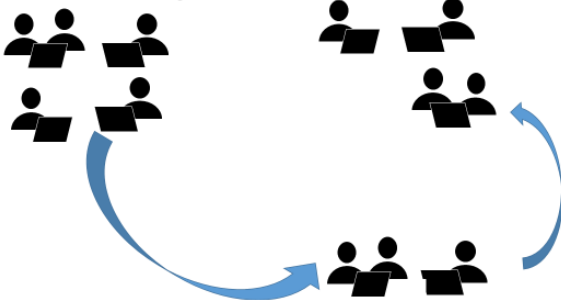
Break-out rooms for socialising, discussion



Quakers have been using breakout rooms for socialising and discussion. Some meetings have been doing this for a long time. Others are just beginning to do it.

Short times after meeting can be good. And allocating people randomly helps you meet people you'd not normally speak to, and get to know them.

Moving round / choose a named room / see who's there



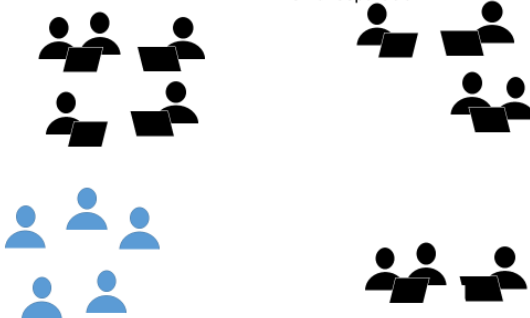
You can move around between breakout rooms.

You can name breakout rooms and allow people to choose which one to go to.

You can now see who's in the room, and choose which you want to join.

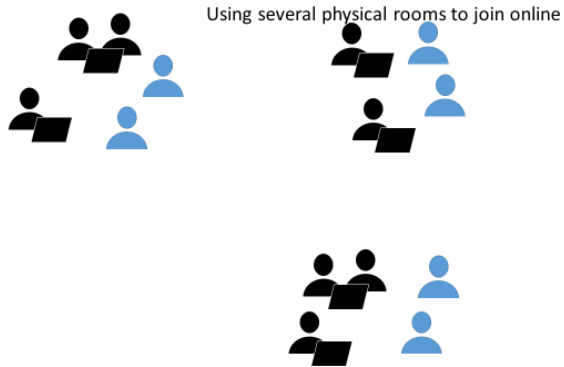
And move around.

Risk of separation



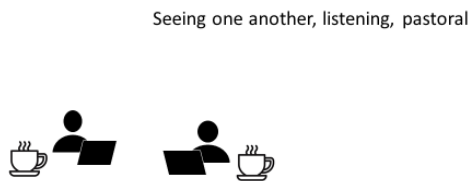
But there is a risk of separation. If you're running online discussions, what does it mean for the people in the physical space?

Or vice versa?



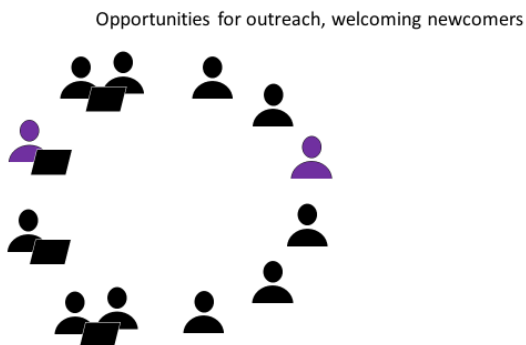
One approach is to use several different physical rooms - people taking a device into the room with 1 or 2 others, and joining in to a breakout room online.

This is a way people can participate on a level with each other, and reduce separation.



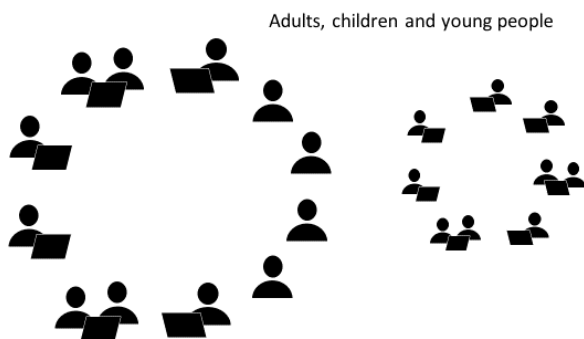
Another important use of video connection is to be able to see and listen to each other, for pastoral time: 1:1 or in a group.

There have been good examples of that across the country during the pandemic. I think it will continue after the pandemic, to eliminate travel and keep in contact with people.



We've seen newcomers to meetings online.

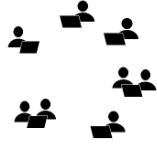
We need to think about ways for outreach, and how to make people feel welcome, and enable people to find out about our worship and communities.



What's going on in the other room at a Quaker meeting?

The children.

Lots of scope



There is lots of scope for things to do with children and young people online. They are often quick to get to grips with it.

Often isolated children/young people in our meetings



Often meetings don't have a whole group of children and young people - they can be isolated.

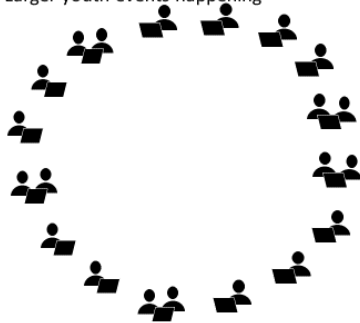
Children's meeting beyond one meeting.
Connecting youth across several meetings.



Using online children's meetings can be a way to include children who are the only child of their age in the meeting.

Could we have a children's meeting covering more than one meeting?

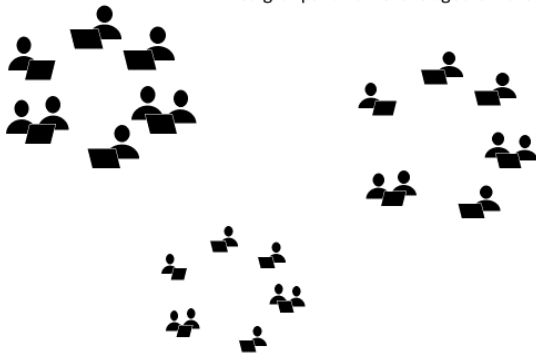
Larger youth events happening



There have been successful larger youth events: single occasions or weekend events.

Britain Yearly Meeting has been running weekly national youth groups of different ages. That has enabled people to join in without the distance and time that there was in the past.

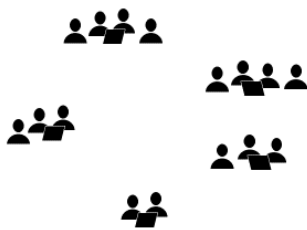
Area groups for different aged children



Some area meetings have come together to run regular children's or youth session for different age groups.

Could we run a junior one, an older one, and a much younger group, by pooling across a larger area?

Meeting up as families, or parents



It's not just about children, but about families. There have been supportive meet-ups between families doing activities together online.

And a network of Quaker parents.

Blended children's meetings

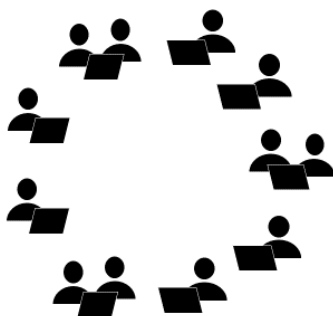


Soon we'll have some blended children's meetings: some at their place of worship and some online.

We might get to having 2 groups of people physically in different buildings but connected together.

It's a bit complicated but well may be worth it.

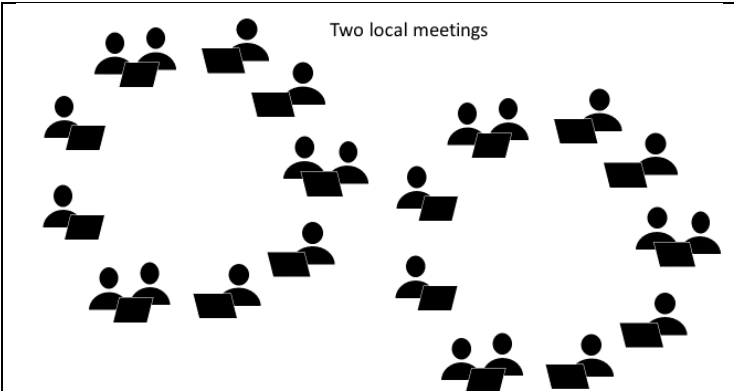
Meeting at different times, days



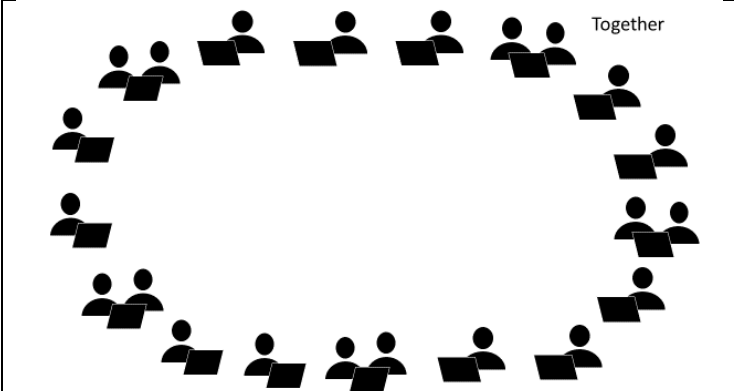
Other things we've seen people using the technology for are to meet at different times and days of the week. There has been a growth in mid-week worship, and learning times, coffee mornings, epilogues. You can find a time that works for people.

Or meet for 15, 30 or 45 minutes.

For children's meetings, I've noticed a few that are run in the hour before the adults are together. This allows the parents to really focus on the children's time, and then join in with the adults.

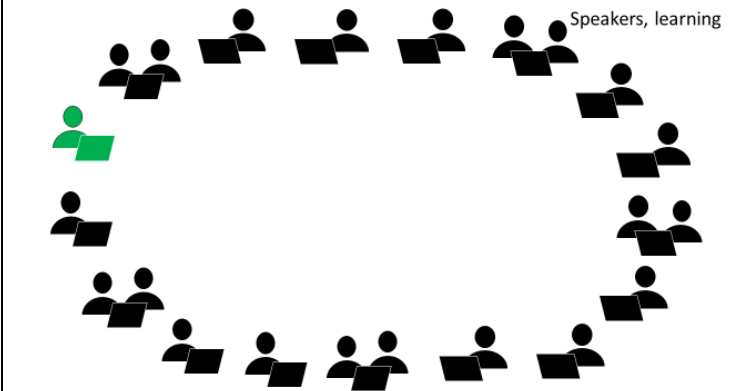


Here are two local meetings.

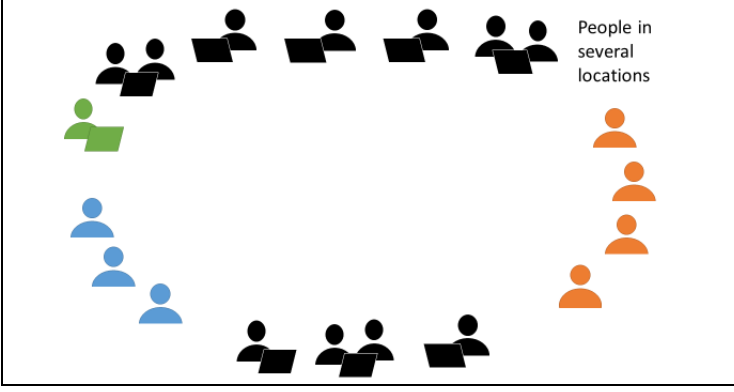


They can do things together: learning, worship, socialising, activities.

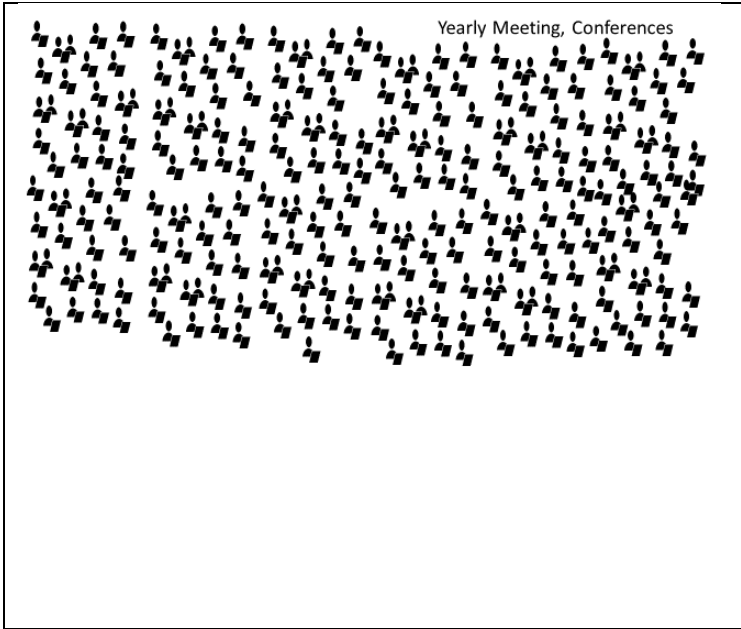
(They can do this in person too!)



They can have different speakers coming from a distance.



You could have people in several different physical locations joining together, for a discussion session or talk or business.

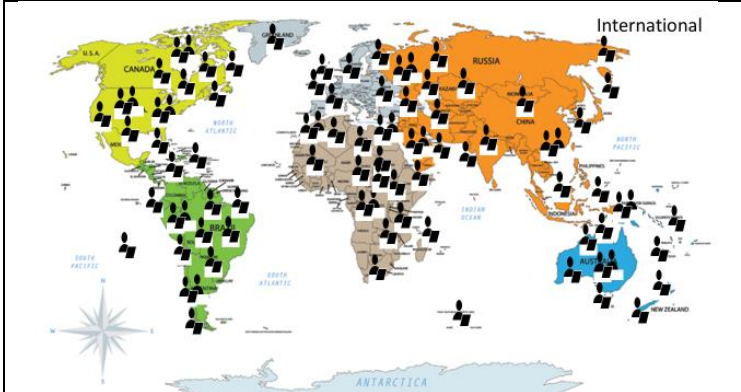


Here is a yearly meeting online: nearly 1000 people in November last year joined together on Zoom.

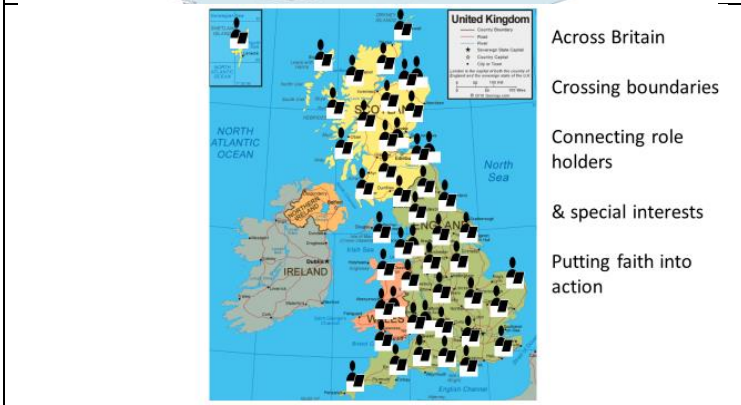
And we will have Yearly Meeting Gathering in the summer of 2021.

There are lots of opportunities for conferences and larger groups, which previously would have taken a lot of time and energy.

It means we can do it more often and with different groups.



Internationally there has been a flourishing of connections between Quakers. There are Quakers all over the world.



And bringing it back to Britain, there are lots of opportunities for meeting with Quakers with similar roles, or interests, or issues, across our Yearly Meeting.

Imagine what you could do... !	
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This technology can open up so many possibilities.

Imagine what you can do... !

And give some a try.

Jonathan Carmichael

May 2021