

Moving forward: progress in implementing our response to the 31:8 Review

Dear Church Family,

It is almost a year since we received 31:8's Independent Lessons Learned Review. We want to share with you what has been done and how we can move forward. We hope that a shared understanding will help us all to embrace a change of culture and move forward together as a church family.

We remain deeply saddened by the hurt caused by the abuse of Jonathan Fletcher, who was Vicar at Emmanuel Church Wimbledon from 1982 until 2012, and which was the subject of 31:8's Review. We want to repeat the apology made by the Elders and Trustees, on the publication of the Review on 23rd March 2021, to all those whose lives have been adversely affected by his actions.

In order to consider how best to implement the recommendations in the 31:8 Review, the Trustees established an Implementation Group (IG) which comprised 6 lay members and 1 clergy member of the congregation. The IG met fortnightly from April to November 2021, assisted by an external adviser, Paul Harrison of Christian Safeguarding Services. The IG took into account the 31:8 Review as a whole, a survey of the church family conducted in response to the Review, and processed substantial additional feedback from members of the church family including comments raised in question-and-answer sessions. They held discussions with the Trustees, the Eldership and the Church Council. They also held discussions with the Diocese of Southwark and with the incumbents of other proprietary chapels in order to gain an understanding of possible structures for Emmanuel and ways of improving its culture. We are extremely grateful for the IG's godly and disciplined hard work in preparing a draft Action Plan on behalf of the Trustees.

After consideration and approval, The Trustees submitted the Action Plan to the Charity Commission at the end of last year. An updated Action Plan, which recorded further progress made, was submitted last week and is available via the additional link in this message. We are pleased to report that the Charity Commission are satisfied by the steps we are taking and, accordingly, have now closed their file. However, our response to 31:8's recommendations is an ongoing commitment. The Trustees will keep the Action Plan under review and monitor the steps being taken.

Theme 1: Developing a healthy church culture

It was clear from the 31.8 Review and the survey of church members that discussion of the church's culture and steps for change from the past were a priority. Issues identified included: status based on class, education or family; diversity (ethnic, social, cultural); women's roles; power; lack of room for doubt and perfectionism. It was recognised, both in the Review and in the survey, that there had already been significant changes since 2013. We have taken the following further steps:

- A series of prayer and reflection meetings were held to help process past events, brought to light by the 31:8 Review. These conversations proved valuable in providing a safe space to listen, talk and pray together and so to develop trust at a time of trauma in the church.
- Our Lent Bible School in 2022 examines key elements of church culture, led by external speakers with recognised expertise:

- 2nd March Perfectionism and doubt, Glen Scrivener, Director of Speak Life
- 16th March Class and race: welcoming diversity, Jason Roach, Director of Ministry at LCM
- 23rd March Power and gospel culture, Sam Allberry, pastor, apologist, author and speaker
- 30th March Gender: men and women in marriage and the church, Paul & Sue Harrison (together Paul and Sue have developed Christian Safeguarding Services)

These sessions give further opportunity for the church family to gather together and receive Biblical teaching that will directly address key areas of our church life, so that the gospel can penetrate and change our culture.

Theme 2: Healthy leadership, governance, and accountability

a) Leadership structures

Again, it was acknowledged in the Review and in the survey that there had already been significant changes since 2013, including the introduction of a more pluralistic leadership. However, both the Review and the survey highlighted the importance of:

- Further promoting and reinforcing a safe and healthy church culture
- Ensuring our leaders are held more accountable for their decisions and actions
- Improving communication to ensure greater transparency in how leaders are chosen and decisions are made
- Enabling the women in our church family to make a greater contribution to the decision-making process.

In response:

- The Ministry Team was created and held its first meeting on 17th January. Its first elected members will be introduced prior to this year's AGM. Our two wardens and a serving elder are acting as elected members during the period of transition. As the diaconate, this team will be the "engine room" of Emmanuel's activity, as we promote a safe and healthy church culture.
- We are introducing more transparent procedures for electing role holders, which will also come into effect ahead of this year's AGM on 15th May.
- Job descriptions and formal appraisal procedures, introduced for the staff team and role holders in 2015, will continue to embed stronger governance and accountability.
- In order to simplify the governance structure and improve transparency, the Patrons have disbanded and their powers have passed to the Trustees for the time being, with the intention to use CPAS in relation to the appointment of any new incumbent.
- Communication with the congregation will be maintained through our regular church family meetings, as well as through small groups, weekly emails and other channels.

b) Leaders and role holders

Letters have been sent to all current and former role holders (those with responsibility for the spiritual and pastoral direction of the church or a substantial part of it) encouraging them to reflect on their behaviours (past and present) in light of the disclosures of unhealthy patterns of leadership, and commit themselves to formal review, as appropriate, and training as needed. 31:8 concluded that very few, if any, knew of the behaviour of a sexual nature which was disclosed more recently. Our Minister, Robin Weekes, has carefully considered his own position and patterns of leadership, in discussion with the current role holders in the light of the 31:8 Review. The Review expressly

acknowledged that, when allegations of Jonathan Fletcher's abuse were reported, Robin became the whistle blower, and the abuse was brought to the attention of the church authorities. Despite the inevitable consequences, Robin followed the correct safeguarding procedures and has paid a high personal price for doing so. He has suffered both directly from Jonathan Fletcher's bullying behaviour over a prolonged period and, in the aftermath of its exposure, through relentless speculation on social media. Robin has now returned to full-time ministry following the four month leave of absence which he took, with the Trustees' full agreement, for health-related reasons. As we continue to reflect on the lessons we have learned, the Trustees and Robin, as Minister of Emmanuel, are united in a shared commitment to an ongoing process of change which will ensure that our church has a safe and healthy culture, both now and in the future.

Theme 3: Effective safeguarding culture and practice

- We have built on the significant progress that has already been made in raising our safeguarding standards (acknowledged in the 31:8 Review), by hosting a church family training seminar in July 2021, and training seminars for our youth group leaders.
- The Trustees and our safeguarding officer continue to monitor and address safeguarding issues that might arise, to ensure we promote a safe environment within all areas of Emmanuel church life.
- Church members have been encouraged to take up the training offered by the Diocese and the church's safeguarding team works in close liaison with the Diocese.
- More volunteers are needed to take up roles, including an additional safeguarding officer, and to provide support for existing safeguarding personnel.

Theme 4: Support for victims, survivors and others

- Fully funded 31:8 counselling services continue to be available for victims of Jonathan Fletcher's abuse who request it.
- Letters encouraging reflection and offering support have been sent to current and past missionary partners, while our International Mission Committee is committed to ongoing engagement with missionary organisations, to ensure we are familiar with their safeguarding policies.

Summary

We thank God for all that has been done, while we also acknowledge the ways in which we have failed as a church. We recognise that more needs to be done, so that we can fulfil our aim to restore trust, move forward together and renew our mission to be and to make disciples of Jesus.

Over the coming months up to Pentecost, the Ministry Team will support and encourage us as we go on:

- Praying together for our healing, for unity, for deep commitment to each other and to the Gospel, and for those most adversely affected by the past.
- Listening to God's word through the regular preaching, small groups and Lent Bible School
- Listening to each other in order to understand our different experiences and concerns as we adjust to new structures and ways of doing things.
- Reflecting on aspects of our culture and what the Gospel says to it.
- Reaching out to our community in love and service, seeking opportunities to share the good news of Jesus, especially through 'A Passion for Life'.

Specific plans include:

1. The Lent Bible School in March
2. Passion for Life events over Easter
3. Reflection on the Lent Bible School in all our small groups after Easter (the speakers will give us guidelines) - April 27, May 4, 18, 25.

These reflections will feed into opportunities to come together as the whole church around the time of Pentecost – to share our responses, confess, give thanks and pray for each other as appropriate, and to break bread together.

Through this we seek appropriate and adequate closure of the issues of the past 3 years, and behind them the previous 30 years, committing them to God for His forgiveness, renewal and re-commissioning.

The Emmanuel Trustees

10th March, 2022