

**A message from the Elders and Trustees of Emmanuel Church  
following the publication of the independent Lessons Learned Review by thirtyone:eight  
concerning Jonathan Fletcher and Emmanuel Church Wimbledon**

As Trustees and Elders of Emmanuel Church Wimbledon we are enormously grateful to thirtyone:eight for their review published today, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2021, and we welcome their recommendations. While we at Emmanuel commissioned the review and provided evidence to thirtyone:eight, the report and findings are their own, and their findings have been published in full and can be read [here](#). We are grateful to the reviewers and to their Independent Advisory Group for their exhaustive work and commitment to this process, and to everyone who has contributed to the review in any way, recognising the courage this took.

We remain devastated by the hurt caused by the abuse of Jonathan Fletcher, who was Vicar from 1982 until he retired and left the church in 2012. We want to personally and sincerely say how profoundly sorry we are for every life that has been adversely affected in whatever way by his actions.

We know that abuse that takes place over many decades, involving many victims, is not something that can be blamed on just one individual, and that other failings and aspects of our church culture enabled Jonathan Fletcher's abuse, which is something the review makes plain.

We therefore embarked on this review desiring to gain an independent view of what occurred, and to learn what we as the leadership team must do to create a healthier and safer culture going forward. We have made the decision to publish the review in full, not holding anything back from public scrutiny, hoping that being open about what has happened might be the first step in rebuilding a level of trust with those who have been wounded by this situation at Emmanuel Church.

We apologise unreservedly for all we have got wrong and publicly commit to change, and seek forgiveness from all those who have been hurt, damaged or affected by our failures.

As the review reveals, whilst certain specific and secretive abusive behaviours were not known by the leadership team, or by the vast majority of Emmanuel church, we did see other things that should have troubled us and prompted us to act. Emmanuel was too willing to embrace a worldly definition of what many believe 'strong' leadership should look like, and when we saw bullying and domineering behaviour we excused it, believing too easily that, 'we all get things wrong' and therefore did not, as we should have, call out and report the clear, disqualifying patterns of sin and wrongdoing by Jonathan Fletcher. We are and will continue to be deeply sorry for the pain that has resulted because of this.

As the report highlights, there was no meaningful accountability around Jonathan Fletcher, either internally or externally. This meant that people did not feel they could speak out safely, or on the occasions when someone did try to speak out, their voices were not heard. Since 2017, as disclosures began to be made, at every stage we have sought to put the victims of the abuse first. However, we failed to identify quickly enough the need for a safe and independent body, beyond Emmanuel and the Diocese, for victims to disclose to. So we want to say again, clearly and unreservedly, that we are deeply sorry for this as well as for the ways that failings in Emmanuel's safeguarding and corporate governance have allowed many individuals to be badly mistreated.

In particular, we are sorry:

- that safeguarding wasn't taken sufficiently seriously from 1982 – 2012.
- for our failure to provide effective internal and external accountability - we allowed Jonathan Fletcher to be untouchable, which failed his victims.
- for our failure as a church to respond to the signs we did see. While no one in the current leadership team or the vast majority of the church knew of the massages, beatings or sexual behaviours (until the first detailed disclosures in late September 2018), many at Emmanuel between 1982-2012 have reflected that they did see some concerning behaviour. Some knew that Jonathan Fletcher sometimes: took saunas with young men after sport; belittled colleagues in staff meetings; humiliated individuals such as naming and shaming them from the front when they arrived late for church; made demeaning comments about people from different backgrounds; showed favouritism; and created a culture of fear.
- for our arrogance. We were proud that we had a minister who had a national and international profile. We enjoyed being a well-known church with a good reputation. We didn't believe something like this could happen to us.
- for our part in the confusion around Jonathan's loss of Permission to Officiate (PTO). Robin Weekes and Sarah Hall were first informed by the Diocese of Southwark in November 2017 that Jonathan Fletcher no longer held PTO because 'there was a risk of him behaving towards vulnerable adults who may be seeking his spiritual guidance in a manner which may be harmful'. No further details were given and Robin and Sarah were told that any further communications around this were a matter between the Diocese of Southwark and Jonathan Fletcher. At the point at which Jonathan Fletcher was involved in a service of thanksgiving hosted at Emmanuel in September 2018, Robin and Sarah knew nothing more than they had been told in November 2017, and it was the case that PTO was not required for an informal interview. However given what has since come to light, we sincerely regret that Jonathan Fletcher had a public platform at Emmanuel on that occasion, and we are sorry for the distress and confusion caused to victims.

The report identifies in detail other failures, and we apologise unreservedly for all that we have got wrong.

Now, and in the future, our main priority remains putting victims first and responding appropriately and swiftly to any further revelations regarding Jonathan Fletcher's (or any other) abuse. It is never too late for new victims to speak up, either by contacting the independent helpline run by thirtyone:eight on 0303 003 1111, or if preferred by speaking to a safeguarding officer at Emmanuel Church or in the Diocese of Southwark whose details are available [here](#). As a church we will continue to provide anyone affected with free, independent, therapeutic support, access to which is being independently facilitated by thirtyone:eight to help ensure anonymity for all those seeking such support. Please see further details [here](#) about this service; how to access it and how it is funded.

Some have wondered why we have not publicly apologised or said more sooner. We have wrestled with this ourselves, not wanting to presume that our own analysis of our failings would be adequate.

We have waited for this independent review before speaking further so that there could be a shared understanding and more complete picture of what happened, allowing us to then meaningfully and sincerely apologise.

The review reports substantial change in the culture at Emmanuel since Jonathan Fletcher's departure from the church in 2012. We are committed to continuous reflection and improvement to address new or surviving blindspots or any continuing unhealthy aspects of our culture. By God's grace, and with the support of our internal team and an external adviser, we will seek to implement the recommendations of the review to ensure Emmanuel is a safe, transparent and healthy church for everyone who is or wishes to be part of it, with a culture marked more and more by faith not fear.

To facilitate this, we have already established a small group to lead the whole church in implementing the recommendations of the report that are addressed to Emmanuel and to keep us accountable. No one in this group had any senior leadership role under Jonathan Fletcher.

This implementation group consists of: Gilly Briant – Safeguarding Officer (Chair), James Bryce – Church Council member, Ian Buchan – Trustee & Church Warden, Joanna Grainger – Trustee, Josh Skidmore – Elder & Curate, Charles Westerby – Elder, Sally Willis – Church Council member. The group will be responsible for developing, giving effect to and monitoring Emmanuel's implementation plan. Their role will also be important in helping us with our commitment to pastoring the Emmanuel Church family, including victims of Jonathan Fletcher who attend the church.

Recognising our need for help, we have asked for outside assistance to better enable us as a church family to action the review's recommendations to us so that we can continue to create the right church culture with God's grace at the centre. We are pleased that Revd Mark Meynell<sup>1</sup> has agreed to work with the implementation group and the wider church family on this important task. He will act as an adviser, bringing independence and accountability to this work. Emmanuel Church will also continue to be accountable to the Charity Commission for our implementation of the recommendations.

We recognise that Jonathan Fletcher's decades of abuse raises questions about wider cultural issues in evangelicalism, not least because of the inter-connectedness which the review rightly points out. While other churches and organisations beyond Emmanuel, were not the focus of this review, we echo the review's call for each of them to benefit from the opportunities for wider learning and improvement given in recommendations 29-66. We hope and pray that what has happened at Emmanuel will help others to learn from our mistakes and go on to create healthier and safer churches which will continue to have a positive and lasting impact on their communities, towns and cities, both here in the UK and further afield.

We are heartbroken, not only for those who have been victims of Jonathan Fletcher's abuse, but also by his wholly wrong and inadequate response to the abuse being exposed over the past few years. We long to see credible evidence of his heartfelt repentance in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Revd Mark Meynell is a freelance writer and Director (Europe) for Langham Preaching. He has experience in local church ministry, most recently on the senior staff of All Souls Langham Place, and well as overseas ministry in Uganda. Mark has written about the breakdown of trust, and is well placed to help us think through the areas the review has raised.

In all of this, we continue to “look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2). We look to him for forgiveness for our own past failings, and we look to him for present and future grace and wisdom. In Christ, and with the power of his Spirit, we will prayerfully and practically strive for Emmanuel Church to better reflect the character of Jesus as we seek to be His disciples and make disciples.

The Emmanuel Church Elders: Ed Coleridge, Tim Malton, Martin Osborn, Mark Shand, Josh Skidmore (Curate), Robin Weekes (Minister), Charles Westerby, Nick Wooldridge (Associate Minister).

The Emmanuel Church Trustees: Kevin Barrett, Ian Buchan (Church Warden), Ed Coleridge, Joanna Grainger, Janet Lawes (Church Warden).

23<sup>rd</sup> March, 2021.