

CEEC

**CHURCH OF ENGLAND
EVANGELICAL COUNCIL**

CHURCH CULTURES

REVIEW QUESTIONS

**First Edition
(November 2021)**

WHAT ARE WE RESPONDING TO?

The Church Cultures Review Questions below are offered by the Church of England Evangelical Council (CEEC) to help evangelical churches begin to review and reshape their cultures in the aftermath of the recent Thirtyone:eight¹ independent “Lessons Learned Reviews”² into two prominent evangelical churches and their leaders.³ They have been written in response to the criticisms and recommendations made by these reviews and the subsequent wider reflections of a representative group of Anglican evangelical church leaders (women and men, younger and older, lay and ordained, conservative and charismatic, and survivors of abuse) set up by the CEEC to reflect on current issues of culture, power and abuse within UK evangelicalism. They are just a first edition: what follows may need revision in the light of the Church of England’s Makin Review⁴, any further reviews – and feedback from churches who are seeking to use these review questions to help change their cultures. Any feedback should be sent to: office@ceec.info Do also use this address if you have any questions about using this tool, or you would like a conversation to help you get started, and we will try to help.

A dictionary definition of culture is:

“the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time”⁵ Every family, team, community, institution, church has its own culture with more different cultures emerging within it the larger and more complex they become. That is why we are talking of reviewing our church cultures: there may be a very different ‘culture’ on the staff team compared to that in the youth group or at the 11am midweek communion in contrast to the 7pm Sunday evening service.

WHAT IS THEIR PURPOSE?

These review questions are not a simple test to pass or fail. Instead, they are conversation starters that we hope enable churches to take the time to reflect together honestly on their cultures and potential issues of power and abuse within them. They are designed to bring hidden things to light and to lead to lament, repentance, and a renewed sense of our need for God’s forgiveness and grace – which is why they have been published alongside some liturgy that will enable this.⁶

¹ <https://thirtyoneeight.org/>

² A helpful explanation of what these type of reviews are – and are not – can be found on p.31 of *Independent Lessons Learned Review* - Jonathan Fletcher and Emmanuel Church Wimbledon

³ *The Crowded House Learning Review full report 26/10/20 and the Independent Lessons Learned Review* - Jonathan Fletcher and Emmanuel Church Wimbledon 23/3/21

⁴ <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/reviews-and-reports/john-smyth-review>

⁵ Cambridge English Dictionary

⁶ <http://www.ceec.info/>

RESOURCES

Books worth reading:

Chuck DeGroat, *When Narcissism Comes to Church: Healing Your Community From Emotional and Spiritual Abuse* (IVP USA, 2020)

Rachael Denhollander, *What is a girl worth? My Story of Breaking the Silence and Exposing the Truth About Larry Nassar and USA Gymnastics* (Tyndale, 2019)

Ajith Fernando et al., *The Leadership Files: From around the world, across a century* (Dictum, 2020)

Diane Langberg, *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church* (Brazos, 2020)

Laura McKnight Barringer and Scot McKnight - *A Church Called Tov: Forming a Goodness Culture That Resists Abuses of Power and Promotes Healing* (Tyndale Momentum, 2020)

Ed Moll, *Anglican Elders: Locally shared pastoral leadership in English Anglican Churches* (Latimer Trust, 2018)

Wade Mullen, *Something's Not Right: Decoding the Hidden Tactics of Abuse* (Tyndale, 2020)

Dr Lisa Oakley & Justin Humphreys, *Escaping the Maze of Spiritual Abuse: Creating healthy Christian cultures* (SPCK, 2019)

John Stott, *Calling Christian Leaders: Rediscovering radical servant ministry* (IVP, 2021)

RESOURCES

Resources freely available:

Sam Allberry & Ray Ortlund, You're Not Crazy

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/podcasts/youre-not-crazy/>

Felix Aremo, Building truly diverse gospel communities

<https://co-mission.org/article/building-truly-diverse-gospel-communities/>

Mike Cospers, The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/podcasts/rise-and-fall-of-mars-hill/>

Church of England, Guidelines for the professional conduct of the clergy

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/clergy-resources/guidelines-professional-conduct-clergy/guidelines>

Church Society's Crossway Magazine – Autumn 2020

https://churchsociety.org/crossway/page/the_autumn_2020_edition_of_crossway/

Church Society's Crossway Magazine – Spring 2021

https://churchsociety.org/crossway/page/the_spring_2021_edition_of_crossway/

Andrew Graystone, We asked for bread but you gave us stones

<https://abuselaw.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Stones-not-Bread.pdf>

John Kuhrt, Hero Worship and our need for humility

<https://gracetruth.blog/2021/02/27/hero-worship-our-need-of-humility/>

CS Lewis, On the Reading of Old Books

<https://learning.hccs.edu/faculty/christina.hematiphil1301/readings/lewis-on-the-reading-of-old-books/view>

Living Out, Church Audit

<https://www.livingout.org/church-leaders/the-lo-church-audit>

Tanya Marlow, But his books are still good, right?

<https://tanyamarlow.com/5-stupid-things-christians-say-sexual-abusers/>

Scott McKnight, Kingdom Roots

<https://open.spotify.com/show/7hjRedTooXmqscWaaSDQHF>

HOW MIGHT YOU USE THEM?

These themed review questions are designed to be useful in a range of different ways and contexts depending on the history, size and structural complexity of your church. Prayer and thought will need to go into using them well in your church. It might help to consider:

- Who needs to be persuaded to use these questions to review your church culture(s)?
- Which people are best placed and most trusted to manage this review process?
- How can you ensure they get a representative range of different answers to the questions?
- How are you going to get responses – via an on-line survey, through in-person or on-line meetings, or a range of different methods?
- Would it help to get people from outside your church to help in this process?
- Who will be responsible and accountable for bringing about the changes needed?
- How will you identify progress?

You will potentially get a variety of different responses to these questions – sometimes contradictory. This is normal! In assessing the differences and complexity of people's answers look out, in particular, for patterns that emerge which will help you discern what is really going on. Even if something is only raised by one individual, you may wish to consider how to follow it up pastorally.

You might feel that one or two of the themed sections are especially relevant to your context (although the sections/questions that are quickly dismissed are the ones you might find it most fruitful to spend time pondering). You may be able to set aside a day to work through all the questions (and any answers previously collated) – or commit to working through a group of themed questions at regular meetings over the course of some months. Having gone through them all once you might then decide to return to all of them regularly – or just a few that highlighted particularly important areas to work on together.

Each themed section begins with a passage of Scripture to help us turn our eyes to the Lord and seek his will as we talk together. The passages chosen are not an exhaustive theology of the subject and the review questions that follow are not a study of those passages. Rather, they are there to help us reflect and discuss more deeply. Alert to the danger of people just giving the "right answers", there are questions that get you exploring your intentions as a church (what you hope is the case) and then a number of follow-up questions that are checking the reality of church life (what is actually happening). Church cultures are more than good intentions, structures and processes: it is also how they are perceived and experienced by everyone in the church (which is why you'll want to get as many people in your church involved in asking and answering these questions).

HOW ARE WE USING LANGUAGE?

We are aware that the New Testament talks more of 'servants' and 'service' rather than 'leaders' and 'leadership' but reluctantly chose the latter in what follows for clarity's sake. We also wanted these questions to be as widely useful as possible and so have deliberately used the generic language of 'leaders' and 'leadership' rather than disappearing into the Anglican world of vicars/rectors/curates/church wardens/lay readers or ministers/parochial church councils and the rest. As you use the questions in your local church context you will have to make a call as to whom you are talking about when leaders or leadership are referred to – for clarity's sake you might want to have a conversation about this before you begin. We'd urge you not just to focus on those in paid employment as leaders or office holders but all who might be in a position to significantly shape the culture(s) of your church family.

WHAT IMPACT DO WE HOPE THEY WILL MAKE?

If, above all, they result in more prayer for your church, and its leaders they will be on their way to bringing about the help that we all need from God's Holy Spirit increasingly to live like God's Son Jesus in ways that will draw others into union with him. We do not have the power to change ourselves: we need God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit graciously to change us. So perhaps the best context to keep returning to these questions and your answers might be times of corporate repentance and prayer using words like these:

Almighty and most merciful Father,
We have erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep,
We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts,
We have offended against thy holy laws,
We have left undone those things which we ought to have done,
And we have done those things which we ought not to have done,
And there is no health in us:
But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us miserable offenders;
Spare thou them, O God, which confess their faults,
Restore thou them that are penitent,
According to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesu our Lord:
And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake,
That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life,
To the glory of thy holy Name.
Amen

RESOURCES

Below are a range of resources that members of the CEEC workstream on culture, power and abuse have found helpful. Listing here does not, of course, imply full CEEC endorsement and the order is alphabetical.

Websites worth visiting:

Christian Safeguarding Services
<https://thecss.co.uk/>

Church of England
<https://www.churchofengland.org/>

Evangelical Alliance
<https://www.eauk.org/>

Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches
<https://fiec.org.uk/>

Living Leadership
<https://www.livingleadership.org/>

Living Out
www.livingout.org

Mind and Soul
<https://www.mindandsoulfoundation.org/>

Restored UK
<https://www.restored-uk.org/>

Thirtyone:eight
<https://thirtyoneeight.org/>

Exploring your intentions

How good is your church at handling disagreement?

How is your church leadership struggling to maintain the balance between transparency and confidentiality in what they share about difficult decisions and pastoral circumstances?

Checking the reality

Are Bible passages, prayer, prophecy, words of knowledge or pictures used in potentially manipulative ways in discussions and decision-making? Has this danger ever been highlighted and openly discussed?

Are a range of perspectives heard and weighed in discussions and decision-making processes? Does any person or viewpoint dominate? Is any person or viewpoint silenced?

Are there any individuals who people find it difficult to disagree with? How does this impact relationships and decision-making?

What happens after a meeting if there has been disagreement or differing views expressed? Is it seen as a problem to be resolved or a constructive part of decision making?

When there has been disagreement about a decision that needs to be taken, how did the church handle it? Is there an individual or a small group whose view has typically prevailed? Was this because of their role or responsibility, or because of their personality, history or characteristics?

Do church family and those with leadership responsibility have a similar view of whether transparency and confidentiality are appropriately balanced? Has there been tension in particular situations? Why/why not?

THEME 1

CHARACTER & ACCOUNTABILITY

¹ Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.

³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!

Philippians 2 (NIV)

Exploring your intentions

What Christ-like qualities does your church look for in the character of its leaders?

Checking the reality

How do the characters of those in leadership of the church consistently reflect these Christ-like qualities? Are there qualities that are valued that do not reflect Jesus? What fruit of the Spirit are absent? Are there any contexts of ministry or patterns of work that lead to less Christ-like behaviour?

Are the voices of anyone raising questions about the character of leaders being listened to? How do you know?

cont.

Exploring your intentions

How does your church seek to ensure that those who serve as leaders are neither put on pedestals nor bullied?

Do those holding your church and its leaders accountable have the necessary authority, independence, and experience to do so?

Checking the reality

Do questions around character form part of regular appraisals of leaders that draw in feedback from a range of people that see them in action? Has any justified criticism led to change?

What has happened when someone is not displaying the Christ-like qualities needed in Christian leadership? How have they been graciously challenged and encouraged to change? Has anyone ever been removed from leadership because they haven't positively responded to feedback?

What are the signs that your church leader(s) are not being idolised? What are the signs that your church leader(s) are being shown an appropriate level of respect? Is there anything about your church's history and theology that makes either idolisation or a lack of proper respect more or less likely?

How do those leading from the front of church communicate their fallibility and frailty? What was the response from others? Have you heard your leaders acknowledge their own weakness or failings in specific terms – appropriately and authentically apologising when necessary? How does your church distinguish between grumbling within the church and appropriate accountability?

When have external accountability structures brought challenge and change to your church and its leaders? Who will you be sharing your answers to these questions with?

THEME 4 POWER & DECISION-MAKING

- ³ Let love and faithfulness never leave you;
bind them round your neck,
write them on the tablet of your heart.
⁴ Then you will win favour and a good name
in the sight of God and man.
⁵ Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
⁶ in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.
⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the Lord and shun evil.
⁸ This will bring health to your body
and nourishment to your bones

Proverbs 3 (NIV)

Exploring your intentions

Where does the power to make the big decisions officially reside in your church family – in a person, a group, a regular meeting?

Do you have a process for making significant decisions?

How aware are your leaders of the power they hold over different people in different contexts?

Checking the reality

Is this where the big decisions are actually made? How is the plurality of leadership we see in New Testament churches reflected in your church's decision-making structures? What effective checks and balances are in place to protect against sinful or unwise decisions being made?

Have significant decisions been taken that did not follow expected process? Why? What impact did following a different process have? How do you know? Were the right people involved?

Are your leaders able to demonstrate how they have behaved and spoken differently due to their awareness of power dynamics? Have others seen this in action?

cont.

Exploring your intentions

Checking the reality

How effectively are those involved in safeguarding, pastoral care and mentoring themselves supported pastorally? Do they exhibit a self-awareness of their own vulnerabilities as well as the presenting or potential vulnerabilities of those they are seeking to help?

Have you ever sought to independently gather feedback from those they are caring for? Can you identify instances where pastoral care has been inadequate or overbearing? How was it handled? What has been done to improve the handling of such situations in future?

THEME 2

DIVERSITY & DIFFERENCE

¹² Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ And so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

¹⁵ Now if the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰

As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

1 Corinthians 12 (NIV)

Exploring your intentions

Who are your church family seeking to serve and reach with the Gospel?

Is there the possibility of everyone in your church family exercising their gifts, or are there any characteristics that disqualify someone from sharing their gifts - including (but not limited to) ethnicity, sex, class, age, sexuality, marriage status?

Checking the reality

To what extent does your church and its leaders reflect the diversity of people in the communities it is seeking to reach? Who feels included? Who feels excluded? How do you know?

Which gifts are most valued by your church family? Which gifts aren't?

What are the range of life experiences and circumstances of those involved in leadership? Who feels undervalued and/or excluded?

Exploring your intentions

What range of differing experiences do people have of your church family life together?

How open is your church to being positively influenced by other times, traditions, tongues, and networks?

How does your church tell God's better story of relationships, sexuality, identity and gender?

Checking the reality

Why do people stay? Why do people leave? How are the experiences of those who leave your church gathered? Are there any patterns in the reasons people give for leaving? How are criticisms of those in leadership raised or handled if they don't match the positive experiences of others?

Generally, how is the mood and atmosphere at your church described? Is there room for a range of emotions?

What examples can you give of faithful voices from different eras, church traditions, the global church, other denominations or movements, shaping your church's cultures? What voices are people encouraged to listen to? Why? What voices are ignored? Why?

What is presumed? Is your church's posture felt to be one of grace and welcome or legalism and fear? What unbiblical and unhealthy rules have caused shame and confusion?

Are there people from sexual minority groups in your church family? Are different experiences of relationships, sexuality, identity and gender acknowledged and graciously explored in the light of the whole of God's Word?

THEME 3 SAFEGUARDING & PROTECTION

⁶ 'If anyone causes one of these little ones – those who believe in me – to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung round their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. ⁷ Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come! ⁸ If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. ⁹ And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

Matthew 18 (NIV)

Exploring your intentions

Does your church provide clear, publicly available, and regularly commended information about safeguarding procedures, and how other concerns and complaints can be raised both internally and externally?

Are all those involved in pastoral care and mentoring at your church recruited carefully, trained properly, and held clearly accountable to others under regularly reviewed guidelines?

Checking the reality

When were your safeguarding and complaints procedures last mentioned up-front in a Sunday church service? How long does it take to get from your church's home page to the number to ring with a safeguarding concern?

Has anyone in the church ever indicated that they would have raised a concern earlier but they did not know how to do it? Have you ever spot checked whether individuals know the appropriate procedures for raising safeguarding and other concerns? If so, was there any action taken in response?

Are there records of who in your church is involved in pastoral care and mentoring and who they are caring for? Have you ever spot checked whether your church's guidelines are being followed?

cont.