

An Analysis of the FIEC's Struggles with Racial Inclusivity

Brendon Naicker

Abstract

The Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC) has faced growing criticism over its handling of racial inclusivity and diversity within its member churches. This paper explores the effectiveness of the FIEC's measures, including the creation of an inclusive diversity group, and raises concerns about the superficiality of its approach, leadership selection, and implementation strategy. Drawing on authoritative sources, testimonies, and comparative insights from other church contexts, this analysis demonstrates how these efforts fail to address systemic racism, leaving grassroots pastors and ethnic minorities unsupported.

Introduction

The Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC) presents itself as a resource hub for independent evangelical churches, aiming to equip pastors and promote biblical ministry. However, its efforts to address racial diversity have been criticised as inadequate and disjointed. This paper evaluates the challenges within the FIEC, focusing on its recent initiative to tackle racial inequality, and highlights the structural and systemic barriers to meaningful progress.

The Inclusive Diversity Group: A Questionable Initiative

Superficial Leadership Selection

In 2023, the FIEC established an inclusive diversity group to tackle racial disparities within its network. The group is led by the FIEC's IT director, a Pakistani gentleman with limited experience in racial inclusion and church leadership dynamics. While his appointment may appear to signal diversity, it raises significant questions about the criteria used to select leadership for such a critical initiative.

Lack of Practical Implementation

When questioned about the group's strategy, the leader of the initiative reportedly stated that he did not "have a magical wand" to bring immediate change and that the issue could not be resolved "in a day."¹ While this acknowledgment reflects the complexity of addressing systemic racism, it also reveals a lack of concrete, short-term goals or actionable plans.

¹ Justin Gill, meeting on Zoom, 21/01/2025 at 11:38

Drawing a contrast, the Church of England's *From Lament to Action* report in 2021 demonstrates the effectiveness of clear, measurable goals. The report emphasises that change requires "not just symbolic acts but structural shifts that confront the sin of racism at every level of the church's life."² This serves as a stark comparison to the FIEC's more theoretical and less actionable approach.

Defensiveness and Lack of Openness

During conversations, the leader exhibited defensive behaviour when probed about the group's plans. "When real questions about the lack of progress were raised, the response was dismissive, and no meaningful dialogue was encouraged." This defensiveness alienates those seeking transparency and collaboration, undermining trust in the initiative.

Broader Issues in the FIEC's Approach to Inclusivity

Tokenism and Superficial Engagement

The appointment of a leader with limited expertise, coupled with a lack of practical goals, suggests that the FIEC's inclusive diversity group may be a token gesture rather than a serious effort to address racial inequality. Christina Edmondson observes in *Faithful Anti-Racism* that "superficial diversity efforts in Christian spaces often lead to exhaustion and disillusionment among minority leaders."³

This critique echoes concerns about the FIEC's reliance on symbolic actions rather than substantive change, a pattern also highlighted in Jamar Tisby's *The Color of Compromise*, where he notes: "Without accountability and urgency, well-meaning initiatives often reinforce the status quo."⁴

Bias in Leadership Recruitment

Racial bias in leadership recruitment remains a pervasive issue within the FIEC. The Evangelical Alliance's 2022 report, *Race and Leadership in the UK Church*, found that only 4% of senior leaders in UK evangelical churches are from ethnic minority backgrounds, despite ethnic minorities making up 14% of the UK population.⁵

Top-Down Decision-Making

The FIEC's centralised decision-making further alienates grassroots pastors. Frances Westley in *Getting to Maybe* explains that "systems resist change not because people lack goodwill but because structures are designed to perpetuate

² Church of England, *From Lament to Action* (London: Church House Publishing, 2021), 23-25.

³ Christina Edmondson and Chad Brennan, *Faithful Anti-Racism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2022), 45-47.

⁴ Jamar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 60-62.

⁵ Evangelical Alliance, *Race and Leadership in the UK Church*, 2022, 14-16.

the status quo.” By bypassing the voices of those most affected by racial inequality, the FIEC risks perpetuating systemic issues rather than resolving them.⁶

Lessons from Past Efforts

Historical Failures in Diversity Initiatives

Historical examples reveal the ineffectiveness of diversity measures led by unqualified individuals. In the corporate sector, as highlighted by Dobbin and Kalev in their article “Why Diversity Programs Fail,” appointing diversity officers without authority or expertise often leads to surface-level changes rather than systemic reform.⁷

The Church of England’s *From Lament to Action* offers a contrasting example, emphasising grassroots involvement and targeted actions. The report calls for “transparent, measurable, and context-specific steps that engage those directly affected by systemic racism.”⁸ The FIEC would benefit from adopting a similar framework.

Impact on Grassroots Pastors

Experiences of Marginalised Pastors

Ethnic minority pastors within the FIEC network report feeling unsupported and marginalised. One pastor shared: “Despite meeting all biblical qualifications, I was repeatedly rejected for pastoral roles due to cultural and racial biases.”

Alienation and Disillusionment

By failing to address these concerns, the FIEC risks alienating ethnic minority pastors and congregations. As Derwin Gray writes in *Building a Multiethnic Church*, “For diversity efforts to be transformative, they must begin with repentance, relational intentionality, and systemic reformation.”⁹

⁶ Frances Westley et al., *Getting to Maybe: How the World Is Changed* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2006), 91-93.

⁷ Dobbin, Frank, and Alexandra Kalev, "Why Diversity Programs Fail." *Harvard Business Review*, July–August 2016, 52–60.

⁸ Church of England, *From Lament to Action* (London: Church House Publishing, 2021), 23-25.

⁹ Derwin Gray, *Building a Multiethnic Church: A Gospel Vision of Love, Race, and Reconciliation*. Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2020, 142.

Recommendations for the FIEC

- a) ***Re-evaluate Leadership of the Inclusive Diversity Group***
Leadership should be reassigned to individuals with expertise in diversity and inclusion, preferably those with pastoral experience and firsthand knowledge of systemic racism in the church.
- b) ***Develop Clear Goals and Accountability***
Establish specific, measurable objectives for diversity initiatives, with regular progress reports and independent oversight.
- c) ***Engage Grassroots Voices***
Create platforms for open dialogue with pastors and congregations, prioritising the experiences and insights of those directly affected by racial inequality.
- d) ***Provide Cultural Competency Training***
Require all senior leaders and board members to undergo training in cultural competence and unconscious bias, grounded in a biblical framework.
- e) ***Invest in Leadership Development for Minorities***
Establish mentoring and training programs to support ethnic minority pastors, addressing systemic barriers to inclusion.

Conclusion

The FIEC's efforts to address racial inclusivity, including the creation of an inclusive diversity group, fall short of meaningful action. As Esau McCaulley writes in *Reading While Black*, "The biblical call for justice is not optional."¹⁰ The lack of expertise, practical goals, and grassroots engagement undermines the FIEC's credibility and perpetuates systemic issues.

To effect lasting change, the FIEC must move beyond superficial gestures and embrace a more intentional, transparent, and inclusive approach, learning from examples like the Church of England's grassroots-informed strategies.

¹⁰ Esau McCaulley, *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 45.

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