

Is Your Church a Millstone or a Springboard?

Take this **Health Check**

to test how well your

Church Building

is fitted to your

Vision

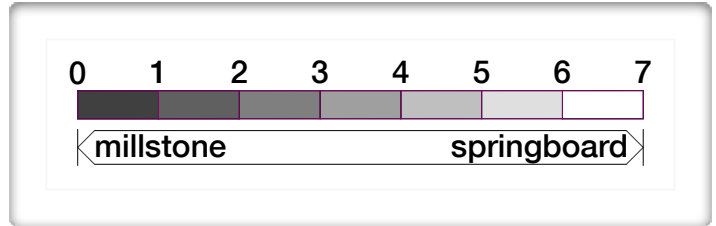
and your **Ministry...**



Church is all about people, yet your building has a huge impact on your ministry, for better or worse. Is your building a **springboard** that supports and enables that ministry, or a **millstone** that weighs you down and holds you back? Whether your church is ancient or modern, this test will help you to be clearer on those areas that present the greatest problems, and those that already work well.

We suggest that you rattle through it; first time you should be able to do this in **5-10 minutes**. Think in terms of how a new visitor would relate to your church building, and grade each of the 10 questions from **0** (millstone) to **7** (springboard).

This is intended to be fun - treat it lightheartedly - and then if it has provoked any thoughts come back to those and reflect on them.



afterwards our buildings shape us
'We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us.' Winston Churchill

1 Open For Business?

Does your building appear to be open? As you approach it or pass by it, is it obvious that something (interesting) is going on? Can you see into the building?

0 might be a building with no visible doors ('Round the back!'), or with 3 doors visible but all closed. For **7** think of a well-designed retail frontage which succeeds in firstly whetting your appetite, and secondly in drawing you in.

0-7



2 Accessible?

We think of this in terms of disabled ramps and powered doors, and these are important. But in a wider sense accessibility is about having a low 'threshold of engagement', both physical and figurative. Does the building feel easy to come into (and also to leave); do I feel as though I will be trapped if I go through those doors? Is there enough that is familiar?

What is the 'body language' of your building? - **0** would be a tight-lipped frown, with crossed arms; **7** would be a warm smiling face, an open stance, interest in the other person. Who would you rather talk to?

0-7

3 Welcoming?

Once inside the front door is there enough space to manage the process of generous welcome, whether that is shaking hands or giving out books (or both)? A building without space for welcome suggests a church without space for the visitor...

0-7



4 Navigable?

If we do not know where to go we feel stupid. Navigable buildings make it obvious where to go, without lots of signage, and without forcing people to ask. Is it clear where the toilets are, or where to take children for Sunday school?

For **0** think of a badly designed sprawling hospital, all signage and no direction; for **7** think of a building that you don't have to think about, that just unfolds.

0-7



5 Comfortable?

If I spend an hour in your church will I come out frozen? Will my bottom be numb? Will my back ache? If so, then you are asking a great deal of the first time visitor, who is likely therefore to be the one-time visitor. This is not about making churches into oversized domestic living rooms, but a high level of discomfort creates a barrier that will usually prevent newcomers from engaging with your ministry.

At **0** the discomfort that I feel means the building prevents me engaging with you; at **7** the building doesn't get in the way, and I will be more ready to be open to what is on offer.

0-7

Note that there is no single ideal for what a church should look like, or how it should function - each will be different to reflect your priorities in ministry in your particular place. On some issues there may be little that you can do, but we have never found a church where it is impossible to make alterations for the better. Often small incremental changes will have a significant impact on the life of your church.

6 Visible?

Can I see what is going on? Are the sightlines clear - how many seats are unable to see the speaker or reader? Is the space light enough, both in terms of natural light and artificial light? Is there too much light - do we have a problem with glare? Can we adjust the levels of light to create different moods?

0: 'What's going on?' - I've lost interest; **7:** I can see all that I need to.

0-7

7 Audible?

Can we hear what is going on? What about those who are hard of hearing - do you have a hearing loop that works? If you use a traditional organ, where is it located? If you have a sound system, is this optimised for your various needs - there are very different requirements for the spoken word, for singing, for a band.

0: 'What was that?' **7:** Loud and clear!

0-7

8 Serviceable?

Is there adequate provision of WCs & would you want to use them? Is the kitchen up to the tasks you expect of it - this could be catering for 150 hot meals on a weekday, or more modestly providing teas and coffees after a Sunday service. Do you have enough storage, is it usable, and is it in right places? Like it or not, inadequate provision of services will limit the usefulness of your building, and thus the life within it.

0: unserviced; **7:** ample provision.

0-7



9 Quality?

Is the quality of the building appropriate for your setting. Is it in good decorative order? Lots of Christians see a hair-shirted virtue in down-at-heel buildings that are poorly maintained, but bluntly this is usually an excuse for a lack of care. And those who come to us in need will see that lack of care and draw conclusions from it...

0: we do not care about our physical environment; **7:** quality that speaks of engaged compassion.

0-7

10 Flexible?

Can the building accommodate more than one activity? How easy is it to move from one format to another? Can you the building change to accommodate different numbers of people? Can you create intimacy? If you need to, can you clear part of the space of seating; if so, do your seats stack - 2 high, 10 high, 40 high?

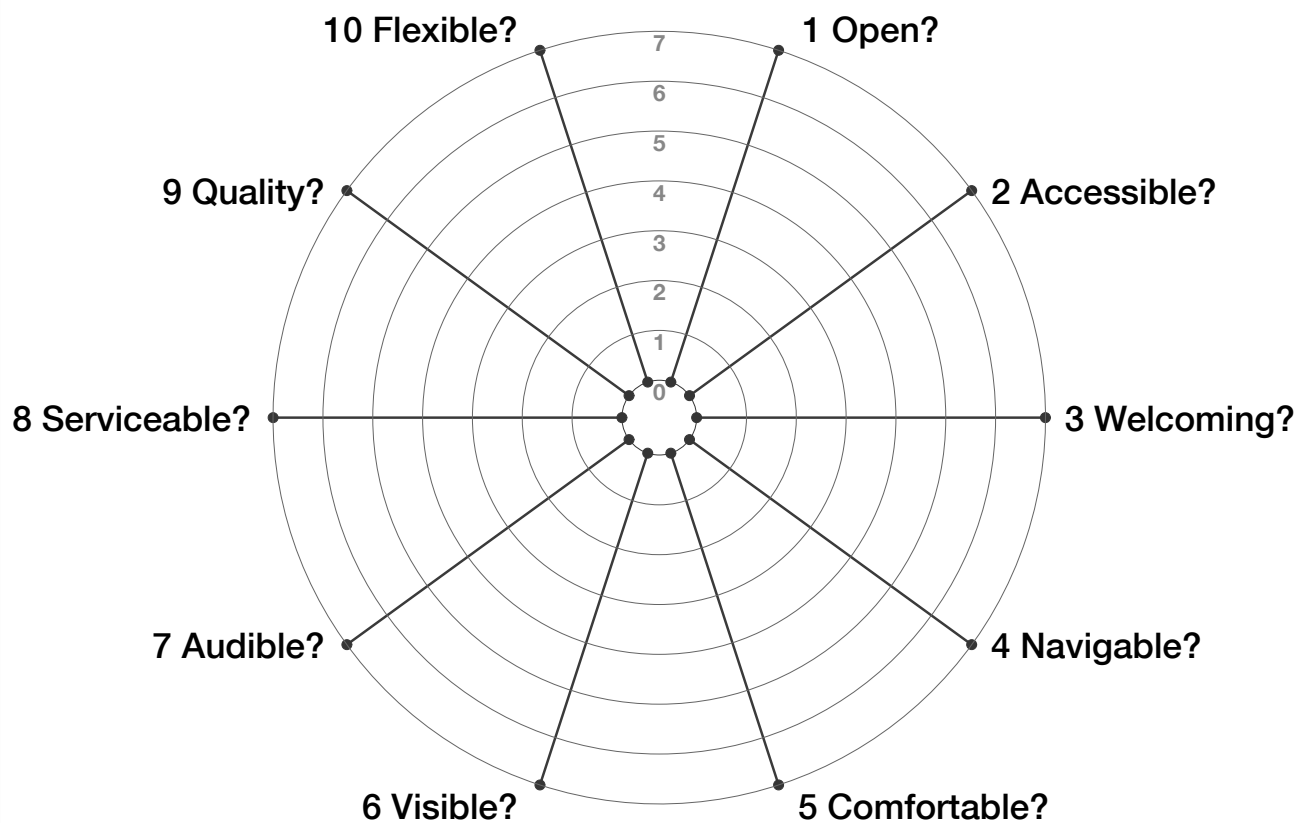
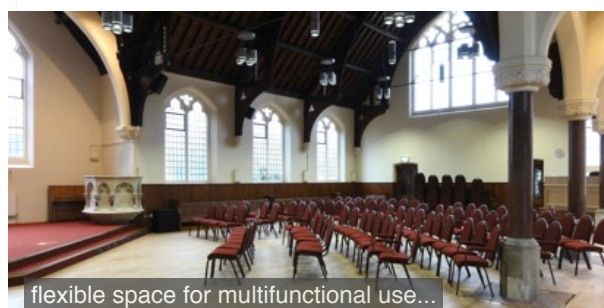
0: one rigid predetermined layout, but we have a need for more; **7:** we have all the flexibility we need.

0-7

Millstone or Springboard?

So How Did You Do?

Firstly plot your results on the circular graph below - by joining the dots you create a 'spider diagram'. This shows particular areas of strength and weakness, and therefore whether your building is in overall balance.



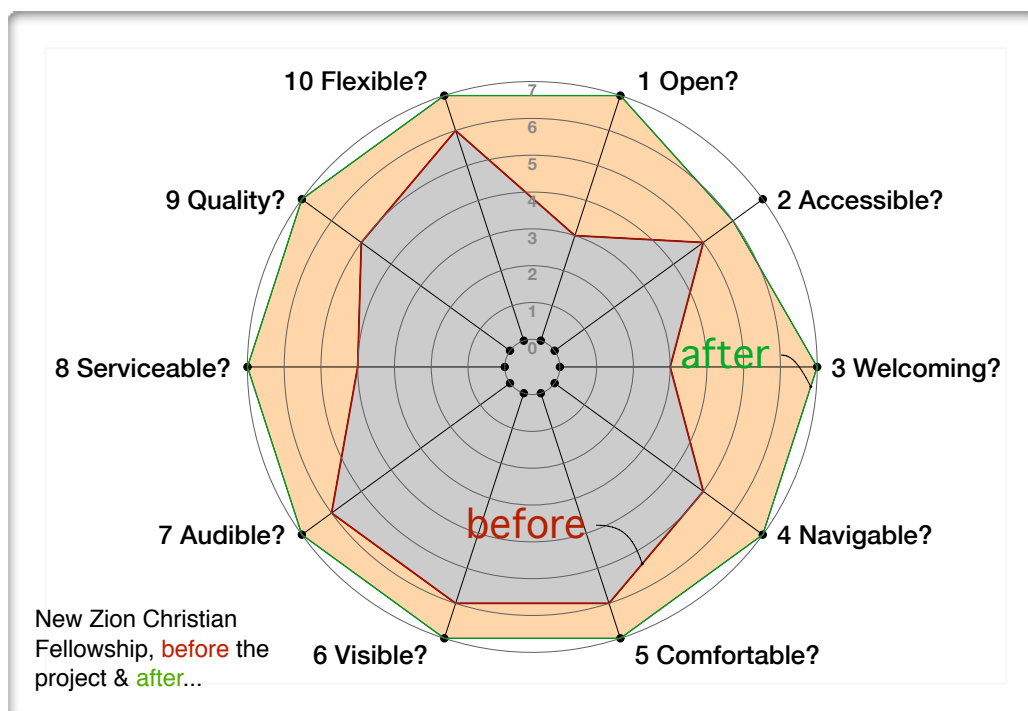
Looking at the individual areas, scores of 5-7 mean the building is already functioning well in that area; there may be room for improvement but there are probably more pressing needs. On the other hand, 0-2s mean you have significant, perhaps urgent, issues in that area.

Secondly, add the individual scores and enter the total in the box; this gives you an average for the building as a whole. Above 45 and your building will be a good fit for your ministry - you have a **Springboard**; below 25 and your building will be a significant constraint on the life of the church - you have a **Millstone**.

Total
out of 70

A Worked Example:

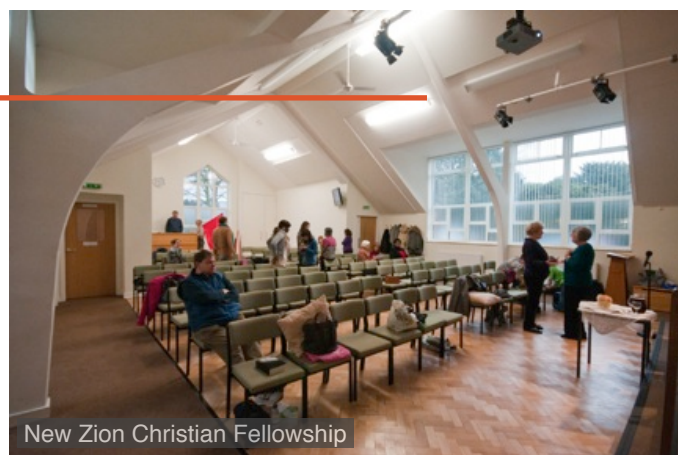
Here is a 'spider diagram' for a recently completed church project. The dark red line shows the church's assessment of their strengths and weaknesses beforehand; the green line shows their scores after the alterations. Improvements have been made in every dimension, and the church are delighted with the result.



Millstone or Springboard?

What Next?

Why not share this with others - inevitably your answers will to some extent reflect your personal views, your likes and dislikes, so it is good to get as many people as possible to complete it.



I hope you have found completing this Health Check to have been a useful exercise. If you would like further help to address any issues raised please copy and return this page to me (contact details on www.churchbuild.co.uk). I would be delighted to help you consider how you might take these issues forward.

With best wishes

Nigel Walter

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