



A GUIDE FOR WRITING A SUCCESSFUL PARISH PROFILE



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You are probably reading this document because your parish has become vacant and you need to produce a parish profile. The parish profile is a key part of the process of attracting a new priest to work with you as you seek to serve the needs of your church, community and the Gospel. The parish profile is the document on which a prospective applicant will base their decision to take the application further. If you are to attract the right person, then it needs to be an appealing document.

This guide is designed to help you in that process. Clergy are looking for as complete a picture as possible, for honesty about your strengths and weaknesses, and for a sense that you have a vision and know where you are going.

As we seek to know, love and follow Jesus, we are looking for clergy who will help our churches to grow. We are not in the business of managing decline, or even of holding the ship steady. If you in your Profile can honestly say that you are open to the leadership and to the changes that can make growth more likely, you are much more likely to attract a good priest to serve your needs.

The Bishop is responsible for the appointment process, working with the Archdeacons, the Patron in parishes where the Bishop is not himself the Patron and the elected parish representatives. The Rural Dean and the Deanery Lay Chair are also there to assist you.

I trust that this guide will help you produce an honest and attractive profile, and result in the appointment of the right priest to serve your needs and those of the church.

Bishop of Chichester
+Martin



The Aim of the profile

To convince the right person to apply for the post. The parish profile is the best way to achieve this.

There is a shortage of clergy nationwide, so making the profile as attractive as possible will go some way to encouraging a priest to apply.

Its aims are twofold: -

1. It is the first insight a new priest will get of the parish.
2. It is the PCC's guidance note for the parish representatives, Bishop, Patron and Archdeacon in considering a possible candidate.

You will send the profile to the Bishop, Patron and Archdeacon to help them as they look for a new priest for your parish and to anyone who expresses an interest in applying for the post. It's worth spending some time getting it right.

Preparation

It is the responsibility of the Parochial Church Council to prepare the parish profile. As with most things – preparation and communication are key. The PCC may decide to task a smaller group to prepare the profile. The following considerations may be helpful: -

- At the beginning of this process your Archdeacon is always delighted to meet with the Churchwardens and/or the PCC to discuss in detail the legal processes and timescale applies to your vacancy and will advise and support you on the content of your parish profile.
- Agree with your Archdeacon/Rural Dean when they should see a draft version of your profile and the date the PCC needs to sign off the final version. A time-line is a good way to achieve this.
- Identify who has the skills and time needed to oversee the production of your profile within the agreed timescale (they don't necessarily need to be a member of the PCC – e.g. if you know somebody who has good IT skills there is no reason why you can't ask for their help).
- Recognise that getting the first draft produced is a key milestone – this will allow you to see any gaps in the content, or issues that need to be resolved to present your key messages in a attractive manner.
- Agree and share the time-line with the whole benefice - this is important where there may be more than one PCC/DCC. They need to know what is expected of them and when.
- Get the dates in the diary, once the time-line has been agreed. It is important that committee members feel that they have been involved in the process – after all they will need to approve it.

- Once the PCC has agreed and signed off the profile communicate this to the wider congregation and make a copy of the profile available to them.
- Praying for your new Priest is extremely important and part of the prayer life of your church worship/home groups/bible study/ and whenever the church community gathers. Also you need to pray and thank God for those that serve you during the interregnum (ordained and lay).

Things to avoid: -

It must be said that parish profiles are easy to get wrong. The poorer ones tend to fall into the following categories:

Worthy but dull: Everything is in there but it's all a bit hard to read and not very exciting. Lots of information about times of services and the beautiful church building, but not very much on mission opportunities. Not the kind of thing to inspire someone to come.

No problems here: It reads like a description of the perfect church where everyone is always very happy and there are no financial problems and the buildings are all just right and always will be. Who would want to come and spoil all of that?

No change thank you: We're happy just as we are, have been and always will be. This is hardly an invitation to someone to bring their own gifts, personality and ideas.

It's all too difficult: The profile is so full of struggles and negatives that the reader gets too depressed to finish it. Would you want to be part of such a downbeat place?

Meanwhile on planet earth: The profile is so full of dreams, visions, plans and aspirations that the reader just thinks 'I can't do all of that' and shies away. People want to read something that's straightforward, upbeat and honest, enough to make them think 'That sounds like a good place to be' but not so over the top that they start to wonder 'No, it can't really be that good'.



Holy Trinity, Hurstpierpoint

A suggested layout

It is recommended that your profile has five sections in this order. You can adapt this to the style you prefer but this approach is probably the most helpful for the reader.

Section one: Summary of the profile

Section two: The broader context

Section three: The vicar we need

Section four: About the parish

Section five: About the church

The church as a worshipping people

The church and the community it serves

The church building and resources



Church family at St Peter's
West Blatchington, Hove

Guide for each section

Section one: Summary of the profile

Don't forget that the fundamental point of a parish profile is to attract a new priest. As you are writing and editing it, keep asking yourself, 'Is this going to interest and excite someone enough to want to come to our parish?' Assume that the person you are trying to attract knows nothing about your parish.

The parish profile needs to offer them an understanding of: -

- Who /where you are
- What you can offer them
- What you expect of them
- What you hope to become – your vision for the future

Be positive: You are trying to attract someone to come, so you need to tell them why your parish is a good place to be.

Be upbeat: There are always good things going on and good stories to tell. There are also always positive things to say about the future, however tough the present is.

Be honest: Don't pretend that things are different from what they are.

If you've been through a tough time or there are major problems to overcome, say so. However, also try to show that you are up for a challenge and want things to be better in the future, even if you don't quite know what that future looks like.

Keep it simple: Write in short, uncomplicated sentences wherever you can. Use short paragraphs and sub-headings to break things up. Don't pack it so full of facts and figures that only an expert in statistical analysis could understand it.

Make it look nice: You don't need to have a professional design but you do need to try and make it as attractive as possible. Good photographs (especially of people), if they photocopy well, can brighten the whole thing up.

You can't tell them everything: You haven't got space and they won't read it. Just keep to the main points. They can always ask more detailed questions when they come and see you.

Keep it human: Try to bring in a few quotes from different people in the congregation about what they like about church, what they think about the future, how they got involved, what was the best thing that ever happened. Just drop the quotes into the profile every now and then to break it up and give a human feel to it.

Think in terms of lists: Try and think in terms of the best 5 things about our church, the top 3 challenges for the future, and the 5 key qualities of our new parish priest.

Put yourself in the reader's position: S/he may well never have heard of your parish or know very little about it. At best, they may have a sketchy view of what the parish and the church is like. You should try and help them get a real handle on who you are and what's going on.

Check it with others: A fresh pair of eyes will see what you have missed and can tell you what they don't understand about what you have written.

Section two: The broader context

As you begin to write this section ask yourself what is going on within the deanery and at diocesan level?

This is quite a wide-ranging section looking at the things happening at different levels in the church and the kinds of help and support the potential priest may receive.

In this section, you should give a brief indication (there will be time for more later) of the demographic context of the parish: what is it like as an area in which to live and minister. Give a brief introduction to the church or churches. Say something about the diocese and the deanery, and the ways in which the parish relates to these.

Your church involvement in Diocesan initiatives within your parish (e.g. your one new thing, your initiatives for the year of the Bible).

You need to report on whether your PCC has made any special arrangements with the Bishop on the grounds of theological conviction regarding the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood and the Episcopate in accordance with the House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests.

You could include:

- Any themes of the deanery that the church is particularly connected with
- Any diocesan initiative e.g. the year of the Bible, and how you and your church are responding to this
- Any pastoral reorganisation currently taking place or in the pipeline
- Any informal (clustering) relationships with others whether you have a formally commissioned Shared Ministry Team or other leadership team. Any paid or voluntary staff members, e.g., assistant curate, lay workers, lay readers, SSMs or retired clergy
- The church's financial situation and, if it's not particularly good, the steps you have taken recently to improve things
- Any pastoral reorganisation currently taking place or envisaged for the future, whether as part of your parish mission plan or another document, then explain these priorities and the steps you are taking to implement them and the importance of growing your church numerically and spiritually

Once again in this section be honest and straightforward.

Don't worry about what you haven't got; talk positively about what you have.



Section three: The vicar we need

It is worth mentioning at the outset that parishes can be unrealistic when it comes to stating the type of vicar they want saying in effect “we want an outstanding preacher and service leader, who has a real concern for young people, old people, single people and the family, has a real heart for ministering to people at the margins of our community, who is a visionary leader but is also extremely collaborative, gets on marvellously with every age group, listens beautifully, loves every form of service going and will visit us all at least once a week unless we are in hospital in which case s/he will visit us more regularly. Oh, and s/he must be brilliant at getting in money too...” This leads to the standard joke about the Angel Gabriel not being available.

There is an enormous difference between the must haves and the things that would be helpful but are not essential. Most profiles mix up the two things. If you have given a good, clear and honest picture of the life and ministry of the church then it should be equally clear what kind of person you want.



It is worth then thinking through how you describe the essential and desirable characteristics of the person you want as a priest. It can be hard distinguishing between these two categories. However, in theory if the potential priest lacks any one of the essential qualities then you shouldn't appoint them.

So, the best way of looking at this is to get a list of essential and desirable characteristics together and asking yourselves very candidly and honestly: 'Which characteristics on this list must our next priest have?' What are the non-negotiable, must have qualities? The answer to that question forms your essentials list, the qualities that you will stick out for.

Beyond that you need to describe the other characteristics that you would like to see. Make sure that your list of desirables is not so long as to be meaningless. All the qualities will be good and important things, but you can't have everything. So, go for the most important to you.

Try not to list more than 10/12 characteristics to cover your whole list, essential and desirable.

Section four: About the Parish

As you begin to write this section ask yourself the question: What's it like to live here? An introductory section with 2/3 paragraphs saying what the parish is like. This can include:

- Location
- Population

How you would describe it, e.g. urban, suburban, rural, new town, small town, village, high income, low income etc.

What kind of people, e.g. age/social/ethnic mix, is the population mobile or static, is it rising or falling?

It may be useful to consult the Church of England spotlight data which provides recent statistical information from several sources, concerning your parish. Are there any features, e.g. particular problems, landmarks, famous people (now or in the past) anything to give a bit of a flavour of what the place is like?

Importantly make sure you finish the section on a positive and upbeat note. For example: 'We think St Ethel's is a great place to be. Yes, there are lots of challenges, especially young people leaving the area. Nevertheless, there's also a lot going on and the church is at the centre of some of them. We want to become more and more a part of our community so that people see the church as being at the heart of things rather than just an old building that they used to go to.' You could also include a list such as the best 3 things about living here and perhaps some quotes from people.

Section five: About the church

Begin by asking yourself the question: What's the church like and would I want to worship here?

Any potential new priest needs to understand what kind of support s/he can expect, whether in a parish context or through the team the parish is in. For example, administrative support; whether clergy cover each other's services; readers, SSMS, retired clergy who are active in the parish; lay leadership teams, youth and family leaders, house group or Sunday School leaders. Basically, is it the priest on his or her own, with a committed few or with a wider support and leadership base?

The church - as a worshipping people

In this section, you are trying to give a flavour of church life. You will want to mix it with some facts and figures as well as a description of what you think is going on now and the challenges for the future. Try to keep to the main issues and remain upbeat. There is a danger that you write a long list of problems or things that need doing. Try and make sure there are plenty of positives.

You could include:

- A list of services
- A brief description of the worship patterns
- The kinds of people involved in worship, age group social /economic/ ethnic mix, number from outside the parish
- The involvement (or not) of children and young people
- The different expressions of church, from formal Sunday and mid-week services
- Bible- study groups and prayer meetings, from youth clubs and fellowship groups to café churches and messy church etc.



School leaver services take place in our churches across the diocese

- The numbers of people involved: size is not the whole issue. Big can be beautiful and small can be depressing; equally small can be vibrant and active and big can be passive and complacent. Try to get behind the numbers to the people, your strengths and weaknesses, your hopes and aspirations. In addition, remember you are trying to encourage someone to join you; give them some good reasons to do so.
- The overall churchmanship of the church

It might be worth including some pictures and quotes from people doing the activities you describe.

The church - and the community it serves

As you prepare to write this section ask yourself the question: Are we just an inward-looking holy huddle or is the church part of this Community?

In this section you are trying to show how the church plays a part, or not, in parish life. There are several ways in which you can do this:

- The weddings, baptisms and funerals that you do, plus the support you offer (if any) to people
- The kinds of groups and activities taking place in church buildings other than ones described already
- The different services you offer to the community from home communion services, from film clubs to toddler groups, from lunch clubs to quiz nights
- The church/community school in your parish and how you relate to it
- Any special relationships with local organisations and institutions (e.g. hospitals, hospices, residential homes for the elderly, homeless organisations, prisons)
- Any special links with the local authority or civic responsibilities on the part of the priest
- The different ways church members are involved in the community on behalf of the church
- How you work with and relate to other churches and denominations in your parish
- Your support for home and overseas mission and charities

Remember that there are huge areas of overlap between what you might describe as worship and outreach, and community involvement in this section. Don't get too bogged down in debating the subtle differences between each. You're just trying to show what lies beyond Sunday and mid-week worship. In addition, these kinds of things can go in waves. It may be that during the vacancy you've had to let certain things drop, and they might not get back up and running. Once again, be honest and straightforward. Don't worry about what you haven't got; talk positively about what you have. Just be straight that some things are going well, some things used to go well but don't any more, some things have folded through nobody's fault and you may or may not try to get them going again, and by implication certain things have never been done at all. Again, quotes can be helpful from people on the receiving end of these kinds of activities, even though they may not be church members.

Church schools and indeed community schools should be a major focus of mission and outreach. However, if you have a church school how do you relate to it? If it is a Church School, what is its legal status: is it 'Voluntary Aided' (i.e., more distinctly a church school) or 'Voluntary Controlled' (i.e., with a church affiliation but less distinct), or is it a member of an academy chain.

Do clergy and/or lay people in the parish conduct regular assemblies? Are there special services at different times in the church's year? Are attempts made to connect parents and children from the school(s) into Sunday worship?

The church – buildings and resources

It is important that s/he understands the financial position, the financial problems and opportunities. Are the parish finances very healthy, are you just about breaking even, or are you hitting real problems? Things like the number of regular givers and the most recent stewardship campaign can also be helpful indicators. You should always enclose a set of your most recent accounts with your parish profile.

It is also worth saying that you pay in full all legitimate working clergy expenses, that you expect them to take proper holidays and days off and that you support them as they take time for training (CME), reading weeks, personal development, retreat and academic study. It shows that you have an understanding and concern for the health, well-being, personal and professional development of your priest.

As you begin to write this section ask yourself the question: What are our buildings like and do they take up all our time and resources?



As we all know, our buildings can be a blessing and a burden. Some church buildings and church halls are in an excellent state of repair, are just right for church and community use, generate lots of income and are managed by full-time caretakers. However, for most of us this simply isn't the case.

Clergy don't want to be buildings' managers, although they clearly see the importance of having the right buildings for worship, mission and ministry. Therefore, you should be clear about what buildings you have, include a picture and short description of each of them, stating what condition they're in and what plans (if any) are currently in place for changing things.

Some profiles get quite involved at this point! You are not trying to describe every detail of your beautiful or not-so-beautiful church. Rather you are trying to give an idea about:

The condition of the buildings. Be honest. There may be a lot of work to do in the first couple of years to get things right. If so, say so. Otherwise try and demonstrate that the buildings are adequate for what you need now. Include information about whether the buildings are listed, i.e., Grade 1, 2, 2* or unlisted.

Is there any help looking after them? Are there people around who are prepared to take at least some of the responsibility for looking after them?

Current levels of usage of the buildings. This gives a good idea both about the state of the buildings and the connectedness of the church to its community.

The scope for new mission and ministry activity within the buildings. The new priest will come with good ideas about how to move things on and engage with new and existing people in creative ways. Buildings can be a help or a barrier to all of this.

The routine and foreseeable cost of buildings maintenance. Buildings can be a huge element of the PCC's budget. If there is major repair work to the organ or to the roof, then this can completely skew parish finances. Any applicant has the right to see the most up-to-date Quinquennial Report.

Wherever possible try and show the positives and possibilities. Also, beware of painting a picture of a church building as a museum piece. There is a difference between having a beautiful church building that we want to keep looking great and the building becoming the thing that we worship. Avoid the latter at all costs (even if it's true!).

Finally

Checklist

Once you've written your profile, just quickly run through the following list. If the answer to any of the questions is 'no' then try to make one or two changes to correct it.

- 1. Is the profile positive and upbeat?**
- 2. Does it paint a good, rounded picture of the church and the parish?**
- 3. Have you included quotes and pictures to give it a nice human feel?**
- 4. Is the profile realistic?**
- 5. Have you made the job of priest sound challenging and rewarding?**
- 6. Have you described yourselves as positive about change?**
- 7. Have you been realistic about the church buildings?**
- 8. Have you been realistic about the skills and qualities you expect from your next priest?**
- 9. Have you been clear about the challenges s/he can expect to face in your parish?**
- 10. Have you been honest about the kind of support s/he can expect?**
- 11. Having read the profile are you excited about the future of your church?**

By now you should have covered all the key points. When you've checked it for accuracy and completeness read it through again and just ask yourself: 'Does this read like a place that someone will want to come to, worship with us, witness with us, make their home with us and lead us?' If the answer to that question is a resounding 'yes' then you know you've done a good job.

Help is at hand. If you get stuck or you're not sure, just contact your Rural Dean, Archdeacon or Suffragan Bishop. They will be delighted to help.