



How to prepare a church profile

TN114 Training Notes series: Planning

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A church profile is a document that provides an accurate overview of your church: its membership, culture, vision and activities. But, as this is often prepared when there is a vacancy for a new Minister, it usually includes a section on the person profile for its new pastor or priest.

Anglican churches will know the document as a 'parish profile' whose preparation is a key part of the patronage process for seeking a new Minister. Other denominations use something similar. A well-written profile will provide an accurate and perceptive picture of your church as it is and as it might be.

The profile may just as easily be used for other staffing vacancies, perhaps with the person profile now linked to the relevant job description.

In what follows a single church is assumed but this will not be the case for many. If you are a Methodist circuit, an Anglican multi-parish benefice, or a multi-site independent church you will need sections on the whole (whenever you can) and sections on the individual churches or congregations. All churches may also need a role description for the Minister post, not included here.

Think of the profile having six sections.

- 1 The HEART of the church: an overview of the congregation/membership, present priorities, tradition and doctrinal stance. This should give an accurate feel of the church's people and values.
- 2 INFORMATION about the church's life: Sunday services, staffing, statistical trends, buildings, and more. This will probably be the longest section.
- 3 THE AREA: its key features, schooling and how it is served by other local churches.

- 4 A fair ASSESSMENT of the church at present: its strengths and its weaknesses. This is more subjective but should offer a leadership view. This flows into...
- 5 The FUTURE you are praying for and seeking plus any statement of vision.
- 6 Finally, the PERSON PROFILE for a new Minister (if applicable): giving the main priorities for features such as their experience, gifting and godliness. You are aiming for a few definite priorities on which to base the interviews, not a picture of the perfect leader.

Be aware that the process of writing a church profile may open up issues that the church normally hides. The danger is of producing a spineless document that achieves little because it only includes the bits that everyone can agree on.

General guidelines

Here are four desirable aims for your profile.

Aim to be interesting

Pages of information can come across as dull, so you might like to consider ways to create interest. Short sentences and paragraphs with plenty of sub-headings and bullet points will help. Adding in some human interest stories can be valuable.

But try to get people to write in an interesting way with some amusing angles on your activities. It is a good idea to get an editor to pull the whole document together and ensure it all comes across in one style. The editor can also cut the words down to a manageable length.

Ensure the whole document is right up-to-date. Simply adding recent events to the profile of some years before may not give an accurate impression of today.

Aim to be honest

A profile is no place to impress candidates with how wonderful your church is. You are seeking to be scrupulously honest, warts and all. Many draft profiles I have read present far too rosy a picture of what church life is like. So:

- If your church is declining in numbers, say so with the statistics to prove it.
- If your children's work is negligible, don't try to create an impression of health.
- If the home groups resist any attempt to reform them, admit it.
- If you are living off financial reserves, provide the figures.

You might like to read about the OFSTED-style inspection in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 to gain a spot of realism.

Aim to be visual

Most profiles now are presented as PDF files, but if in hard-copy print they need to look good with quality presentation and binding. To make the church come alive the profile needs to be full of photographs.

Some of these will need to be of the buildings but most should be of people:

- each member of the staff or ministry team;
- the congregation – perhaps in an informal group photo all together;
- different activities taking place.

Remember to keep to your safeguarding policy, especially where children are concerned. You can also add maps where relevant, structure diagrams, your logo and more.

The typescript needs to look professional. If you have a graphic designer in the congregation give them this task. If not, you may need external advice. Aim for large headings, plenty of sub-heads to break the text up, quote boxes and other design features.

Aim to be definite

It is the person profile which is often weak. Many churches have little idea of exactly what they are looking for in a new Minister. Others seem to be seeking a saviour who will, single-handedly, double the congregation size in a year without changing anything that is precious to existing members. Profiles often include vague phrases that any candidate would sign up to, such as someone who prays, or has a sense of humour. Here are some better ideas.

- 1 Work out what are your five or six key priorities within the listings shown in the section 6 checklist below, then state these in uncompromising form. One might be an issue of theology and doctrine, one a clear gifting (leadership, preaching, etc.), one an experience or skill (such as teamwork, or working in a rural setting), one a style of leadership (such as enabling a gifted workforce under one clear vision).
- 2 For each of these state what you need with clarity and conviction using strong rather than bland phrases. Here are some examples.
 - Instead of saying you need 'someone who believes in mission', explain you are seeking 'a Minister with evidence of turning an inward-looking congregation round who will lead us out to witness to those who live on our estate'.
 - Instead of asking for 'someone who can preach', use phrases such as 'a well-respected and clearly gifted Bible teacher who can inspire a mixed congregation who have a variety of learning styles'.
 - Instead of saying you need 'a leader', state, if appropriate for example, that you are looking for 'a gifted and energetic leader prepared to take risks and to enable people to flourish in ministry, rather than wanting to control everything themselves'.
 - Instead of asking for a 'pastor' say you need 'someone who can heal deep divisions and unresolved conflicts which fester within the congregation' if that is where you are at.
- 3 These priorities will provide your criteria to select a short-list and then at interview. If you believe you need someone with particular experience (eg. of leading a growing church) say so but don't rule out anyone who is still developing into leadership.

The team you require

Have your profile ready at all times, updating it each year so that when it is needed you are not starting from scratch. Omit the person profile until you need it. The team to put it all together might include:

- one person with overall responsibility;
- an editor to ensure it is all in a common style;
- a wide body of contributors so the profile is owned by the whole church;
- a designer to sort the pictures and graphic style;
- an authorising body who together take ultimate responsibility.

What to include

Here now is a series of (overlapping) checklists for what to consider for your profile. This follows the six-section structure suggested above.

Section 1: The heart of the church

This should be an overview, not a detailed analysis.

- Reason for the vacancy and prayer for the process (if appropriate)
- Summary history of the church
- Membership: brief overview
- Church tradition: purpose statement, impact on worship/church life, how well embedded, diversity of church members
- Denominational issues: background of congregation, adherence to norms, denominational involvement
- Doctrinal: attitude to the Bible, positions on current issues, associations with national events, membership of external bodies, policy on baptism, divorce, etc.
- Leadership: style, level of authorisations, shared leadership, ministry decisions
- Church style: traditional/contemporary, controlled/with freedom, charismatic/reformed
- Values: statement, application, vision
- The post (if appropriate): title, salary/stipend, expenses, housing, hours
- Church contact information

Section 2: Church information

This may well be the longest section but keep it as short as you can.

- Membership: size, trends, age profile, turnover, how far they travel, newcomers
- Services: times, styles, congregational statistics, music details, teaching, prayer, tech, online details
- Specials: baptisms, marriages, funerals (all with statistics), events
- Children/teens: groups, sizes, Sunday/midweek activities, all-age, safeguarding
- Small groups: home groups, daytime/other groups, seniors, pastoral care
- Mid-week activities: outreach, community, teaching, prayer, social
- Annual/termly activities: weekends, annual meetings, special events
- Staff team: payroll, names and roles, how long on staff, meetings, line management
- Ministry team: Assistant Ministers, retired clergy, licensed lay ministers, bereavement support, mentoring
- Congregational involvement: use of gifts, leadership, external responsibilities, levels of volunteering, teams, training
- Leadership structure: trustees/PCC/elders/deacons/leadership team, roles, meetings, sub-groups
- Outreach: church planting, Messy Church, Alpha-type activities, CAP/foodbank
- Global mission: those supported, congregational involvement

- Church plant: main buildings, age, state of repair, trading (such as a coffee shop), community use, grounds, graveyard, staff housing, major equipment
- Minister accommodation (in detail)
- Financial giving: summary accounts, stewardship, major projects funded, generosity
- Church office: role, administrative systems, IT/software, Minister support
- Communication: print, email, social media, texting, website

Section 3: The area

- The town/city/rural area: population, (un)employment, social/ethnic mix, age profile
- The area served / parish: population, community feel, public transport, land use (retail, hospitals, industrial, etc.)
- Local community: civic duties, chaplaincies, social agencies, care homes, clubs
- Schools/colleges: church schools, assemblies, use of church buildings, governorships
- Local denominational and inter-church groupings: involvement
- Other local churches: links

Section 4: Strengths and weaknesses

This is more subjective, but an agreed understanding of the health of the church.

- Health: overall assessment, national assessment schemes, growth or decline, finances
- Trends: changes, significant developments, new housing
- Contentious issues: disagreements, divisions
- Strengths: aspects for praise, actions carried out well, ideas of success
- Weaknesses: a full and honest listing, ministry gaps, inability to grow, entrenched positions held, financial problems

Section 5: The future

These should be what you are passionate about and praying for, not nice ideas thought up for the profile.

- Key needs: future scenarios, necessary priorities, changes desired
- Future vision: vision statement, strategic plan, monitoring the plan, prayer priorities
- Place of prayer: prayer gatherings, printed prayer news, special times of prayer
- Recent issues: significant doctrinal/practical matters impacting future life

Section 6: Person profile

The important point is to identify a few clear priorities rather than listing everything, and to use definite not weak wording as already explained. This is the section that you will assess candidates against for both short-listing and at interview. Sections 1-5 will feed into this.

Not to be covered: spouse (unless a joint appointment), family, marital status, age, etc. Gender may be a doctrinal issue with strict denominational procedures to follow.

- **Priority list** (your essentials)

Select a total of five or six key issues from what you might include in the lists that follows, and highlight these as the factors you will assess candidates against. See advice on being definite, above, and the kind of wording used there.

Now choose up to two desired points from each of the following headings, not already covered in the priority list. These ideas are only examples and assume a Minister appointment.

- **Theological / church position**

eg. Christian tradition, doctrinal stance, place of Scripture, worship styles, acceptance of certain spiritual gifts, baptism policy, position held on current issues

- **Leadership style**

eg. team-working, collaborative, visionary, emotional intelligence, formality/fun, inspiring others, challenge v care

- **Discipleship issues**

eg. Christian character, calling, maturity, personal evangelism, styles of prayer, reading/study, role model

- **Giftings**

eg. teaching/application, proclamation, leading worship, training, care/listening, organising, evangelism, planting, change-making, healing, prophecy, discernment

- **Experience / skills**

eg. leading teams, managing staff, working with a diverse congregation, spear-heading a major change, rural or inner-city ministry, small or large church, self-organisation

- **Special issues**

eg. external involvements, health/energy, car driver

For an alternative approach, read Training Notes TN87, 'What to look for in your leaders' on this website. For Baptist Union guidelines on church profiles see https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/606138/Baptists_Together_Guide.aspx Church of England churches will find guidance from their patrons and/or diocese.

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN114. See also Article A35, *Mapping your church*, and A49, *The patronage process as drama*, plus Training Notes TN28, *No two leaders are the same*, TN78, *The role of a church leader*, TN87, *What to look for in your leaders*, and TN132, *What you look for in your Minister*.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN114 under Planning (with a link to Communication).

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