

Your ministry with us

# Writing a successful Parish Profile



Diocese of  
Liverpool

# Why do you need a parish profile?

We all know the reality. At present there are not enough clergy for the parishes in the country. So parishes cannot assume there is someone just waiting to come to them. We have to convince the right person as to why they should consider coming to us. The parish profile is the best way to achieve this.

## **The profile is a key document which has two aims**

1. It is the first picture a possible new priest will get of the parish.
2. It is the PCC's guidance note for the parish representatives considering a candidate.

Writing a good, honest, attractive profile should make it easier to get the right person for your parish. So spend the time to get it right. It is worth it.

The profile goes to the Bishops and Archdeacons to help them look for the right vicar for your parish. It will also be read by anyone interested in applying for the role.

# Helping you with your profile

The diocese wants to help you to write a successful profile and these notes are part of that support. The Communications Team at St James House can give you plenty of practical support with this important document. From training and advice and support with editing copy and design we are here to help. Simply contact Stuart Haynes Media Manager on 0151 705 2150.

This guide gives you some hints and tips on how to write a successful profile. It explains what should be included and gives you a structure to help you when you get started.

# Thinking about the content

If you are looking to give a balanced profile you may want to spend some time thinking about the parish as a whole. It may be helpful to do a simple exercise thinking about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This will give a good idea about what you want.

## Strengths

What are you good at – what works well? What would you not like to change? What makes you proud to be in your parish?

## Weaknesses

What doesn't work or you would like someone to help you do better? It might be a service that isn't working as well as it might or a group that has seen falling numbers over the years?

## Opportunities

Where are the possibilities for mission and growth that a new person might be able to help with? What don't you do that you would like to?

## Threats

What could bring the whole thing crashing down? Is it a problem with a building? Is it a project that is going wrong? Are there any serious issues to tackle?

**Have this grid with you as you think through the writing of the profile.**

# The top ten tips for writing a successful profile

## 1. **Be upbeat and positive**

You are trying to attract someone so you want to tell them why your parish is a good place to be. There are always good things happening, good stories to tell no matter how tough it may feel.

## 2. **Be honest**

There is no point hiding the truth. If you have been through a tough time or there are major problems then state them. But you can also show that you are willing to work with the right person to overcome any problems and work to the future.

## 3. **Keep it simple**

If it is difficult to read people won't bother. Write short sentences and paragraphs. Use headings and lists to break the text up. Use plain English not jargon. You will need facts and figures but don't make them too detailed or complicated.

## 4. **Make it look nice**

Design matters. It does not have to be designed by a professional but making a page look attractive will help the reader. Use photographs to illustrate what you are saying. They will help the reader visualize your parish. But don't just photograph buildings. The profile will come to life with photos of the different people connected to your Church.

## 5. **Make it web and email friendly**

The Diocese is trying to put so much more information on our website and email it to interested people. So we will look for an electronic version. But don't panic, the Communications Team will help with this.

## 6. **Keep it human**

Candidates will want to know about the kind of people they are likely to be working with. So include quotes from the different people in the congregation about the different aspects of your Church. You can use their quotes (and pictures) to add colour and flavour to the text.

## **7. Don't try and put everything in**

Candidates are often put off by having too much information. You want to inspire them to want to know more. You can't fit it all in and leaving some gaps will help you work out who is interested enough to ask for more.

## **8. Remember who you are writing this for**

The best profile assumes that you are writing for someone who knows nothing about you and may want to know more. You want to try and introduce yourself and help them get a handle on who you are and what you are like.

## **9. Be inspiring and challenging**

Profiles can often be worthy with lots of information but no sense of what is important. It can be tempting to present a picture of a perfect Church or one that is beset with problems. You need to show all sides, point out where the challenges are, what may need changing and where they can make a difference. The profile needs to show what the parish is like when they arrive and you can see the potential for it to be a changed place before they leave.

## **10. Check it with others**

A fresh pair of eyes will see what you have missed and be able to tell you what they don't understand about what you have written. There is plenty of support you can get to help make your profile a real success.

And Remember. People want to read something, straightforward, upbeat and honest. Enough to make them think "that's sounds like the place I want to be". But not too over the top they wonder "that can't be true".

# Section by section: an attractive profile

We recommend your profile has five sections in this order. You can adapt this to the style you may prefer but we find that this makes it most helpful for the reader. But although this is the order the profile should be presented in, it may not be helpful to write in this order.

- Section one: Summary of the profile
- Section two: The vicar you want
- Section three: About the parish
- Section four: About the Church
  - The Church and its people*
  - The Church and the community*
  - The Church and its buildings*
- Section five: About the wider context

You need to get the balance between writing too little and going on too long. We recommend about eight pages of A4 to be a good size. This guide explains the purpose of each section with ideas for its content.



## Section one: Summary of the profile

This is the section to grab the attention. Get it right and the person for your parish will want to read the whole profile and pursue things further. Get it wrong and they will be put off. Or worse still you will attract the attention of someone not right for your parish.

The summary is just that. A short, no more than one side of A4, digest of your profile. It should highlight the main points, the areas that make you unique. That will make someone say "I could see myself there"

You may want to think of up to 3 points that answers each of the following questions and put them as your summary

- Who we are?
- What do we do (and in particular what do we do that is different)?
- How do we go about doing it?
- What do we want from our vicar?

If you have a parish vision or mission statement you can include it here.

**While this is the first page of the profile it is best to write it last. Then you can make sure it reflects what the parish is.**

This will also be a good place to report on whether your PCC passed any resolutions under the Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure in 1993.

If your Church has a website put its address here. For many people the first thing they will do is try to find you on the internet so make sure your site is up to date and reflects the life of your Church.

## Section two: The vicar you want

Here you are defining the qualities and values that you want from your new vicar. It is tempting to be unrealistic and ask for the impossible. You need to think about who will truly help your Church's mission and ministry move forward.

You need to think what is essential for the new vicar to have and what would be desirable. What are the qualities that you need to help the Church grow and develop? If you have a good clear picture of the life and ministry of your Church it should be equally clear what kind of person you want.



The best approach is to write a list of all the essential and desirable characteristics. Ask yourselves candidly and honestly what are the absolute bottom line, non negotiable, definitely must have qualities? These will be the essentials. The ones that if you don't see them in a candidate you probably won't see an effective ministry from them.

Beyond that you need a shorter list of qualities you would really like to see. Remember you can't have everything so try not to list more than 10 - 12 characteristics. Focus on what is most important to you.

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.



## Section three: About the parish

This section gives an overview about the parish it is helpful to include details about:

- Where the parish is
- How many people live there
- How you would describe it – urban, suburban, rural, new town, small town, village, high income, low income etc.
- What kind of people – age/social/ethnic mix, is the population mobile or static, is it rising or falling?
- What schools are in your parish
- Any particular features – particular problems, landmarks, famous people (now or in the past) – anything to give a bit of a flavour of what the place is like.

You could include a list of the best three things about the parish. You may want to include a map to show the area.

You want to attract someone to come and live in your parish. The profile needs to show what makes it a good place to live.





## Section four: About the Church

This section aims to give as full a picture as possible about your Church.

### The Church and its people

This aims to give a flavour of Church life. Using a mixture of facts, figures and narrative you can describe what is going on at the moment as well as future challenges. You need to balance the negatives with the positives. It is easy to see all the things you want to be fixed and things you have always wanted doing but you need to also think of all the activities you are good at and rightly proud of.

#### **In this section include**

- A list of services
- A brief description of the variety of worship patterns
- The overall Churchmanship of the Church
- The kinds of people involved in worship – age groups, social/ economic/ethnic mix, number from outside the parish
- The involvement (or not) of children and young people – do you have or are you working towards Child Friendly Church?
- The different expressions of Church, from formal Sunday and mid-week services to Bible-study groups and prayer meetings, from youth clubs and fellowship groups to Café Churches and Network Churches
- The numbers of people involved

Remember to talk about the people. Look at your strengths and weaknesses. Think about where you are growing. What are your hopes and aspirations? You are trying to encourage someone to join you so give them good reasons to do so.

And as the Church is about people then include some quotes and pictures about people doing the activities you describe.



## The Church and the community

Here we aim to look at the part the Church plays in the life of the community. You may want to list:

- The weddings, baptisms and funerals that you do, plus the support you offer (if any) to people as part of that
- The kinds of groups and activities taking place in Church buildings
- The different services you offer to the community from home communion to befriending services, from film clubs to toddler groups, from lunch clubs to quiz nights
- How you relate to the Church school in your parish – do you have or are you working towards the Church School Partnership Award?
- Any special relationships with local organizations and institutions (e.g. hospitals, residential homes for the elderly, homeless organisations, prisons)
- Any special links with the local authority or particular civic responsibilities on the part of the priest
- The different ways Church members are involved in the community
- How you work with and relate to other Churches and denominations
- Your support for home and overseas mission and charities

There may well be overlap in these two sections but don't worry or spend too much time debating the subtle differences between the two.

Remember things change. Some activities may have folded during the interregnum and they might not get back up and running. That is fine. Be honest about it but don't make the potential vicar think s/he has to pick up the things left over by the previous vicar.

This could get to be a long and unrealistic section which mixes actual activity with what you may wish to do. Be honest. The vicar needs to know what s/he will be dealing with not some details about a fantasy Church of your dreams.



## The Church and its buildings

Buildings are blessings and curses. Some are in an excellent state of repair and right for the use they are being put. Most are not.

The clergy are not called to be building managers but they see the importance of having the right buildings for worship, mission and ministry. You need to give a realistic appraisal of what you have and any plans for change.

Try not to describe every last detail of your beautiful or not so beautiful Church. Rather give an honest idea about

- What kind of condition are the buildings in? 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 show that the buildings are OK for what you need now.
- Are there people around who are prepared to take at least some of the responsibility for looking after them.
- How often buildings are used? And by whom?
- The scope for new mission and ministry activity within the buildings.
- The routine and foreseeable cost of buildings maintenance. Buildings can be a huge element of the PCC's/DCCs budget. If there is major repair work on the organ or to the roof then this can completely skew parish finances.

Where possible show the positives and the possibilities. But 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 we worship. Avoid the latter at all costs!

## Section five: About the wider context

It is important that the potential vicar understands the wider context s/he will be coming into. We publish a Diocesan profile which will give them some information. But there are more local considerations s/he needs to be made aware of.

Deaneries are the place where the local mission context is worked out. Each deanery has a mission plan and every parish has a role to play. You need to get information from your Area Dean to show the wider context.



A potential vicar needs to understand what kind of support s/he can expect, whether in a parish context or through the group/team the parish is in.

The vicarage is another key aspect as it will be the vicar's home as well as base for ministry. What is the house like and is it in a good position? Are there any plans to improve the vicarage, or even sell it and replace it. You should talk to Clergy Housing before completing this section.

It is equally important that s/he understands your financial position. Are the parish finances very healthy, are you just about breaking even, have you or are you hitting real problems. Indicators like the number of regular givers and the most recent stewardship campaign can be helpful.

You should always enclose a set of your most recent accounts with your Parish Profile.

It's also worth saying that you pay reasonable clergy expenses, you expect them to take proper holidays and days off and you support them in their training (CME), reading and personal development – assuming all this is true! It shows an understanding and concern for their health, well-being and development.

### **Therefore you need to try to describe:**

- Any particular themes of the Deanery Mission Plan that the Church is particularly connected with
- Any pastoral reorganisation currently taking place or in the pipeline
- Any informal (clustering) relationships with other Churches and whether, practically, this means anything
- Whether you have a formally commissioned Shared Ministry Team or other leadership team
- Any paid or voluntary staff members – assistant curate, lay workers, lay readers, non-stipendiary or retired clergy helping out etc.
- The Church's financial situation and, if it's not particularly good, the steps you have taken recently to improve things
- Any resolutions around the ministry of women priests
- Most importantly if you have agreed some priorities for mission, whether as part of your parish mission plan or another document, then explain them and the steps you are taking to implement them.

# Designing and producing your profile – making it look good and read well

You don't have to be a design expert or graphics whizz to make your document look good. Here are a few tips.

## Keep it simple.

The aim is to make people want to read the content not to bamboozle them with lots of different colours, fonts and styles. A simple single or two column page layout looks best – but stick to the same one throughout.

## Don't use block capitals, underlines or fully justified text.

Research has shown that these confuse many readers.

## If your Church has a logo - use it.

Also if you have a colour scheme use it here.

## Think about the points you may want to highlight.

Some times it is good to highlight a quote or a paragraph. This draws attention to the important point you are making. You could do this by increasing the font size or changing the text colour.

## Pick a clear font.

You don't want too many fonts and they need to be readable. At most have one font for all your headings and another for the main text. Good fonts are Arial or Verdana. Choose a good text size. Usually it's best to be around 12pt in size.

## Limit the colours.

You don't need to use any other than black for the text. If you do choose a colour then stick to one for the headings.

## Write simply.

Use plain language. Short sentences and paragraphs are good. As are lists.

### Think about images.

They are not just there to make the document look pretty. They help tell the story. It is best to have ones that are relevant to your Church and show your people and buildings. Remember to get proper permissions if taking pictures of children and young people. As a rule it is better to use one big strong picture than a number of smaller ones. It may also be helpful to caption some pictures

### Make it web friendly.

We are trying to make all our profiles downloadable from our website. The best format is as an Adobe Acrobat .pdf file. The file does not need to be too large – no more than about 3mb in size. Contact the Communications Team for specific advice on achieving this.

### Don't be afraid of white space.

While we don't want to go over the top and waste space (and paper) it is not good to cram everything in.

### Proof check the profile.

Having put all the work in it will be horrible to have someone point out the typing error or spelling mistake!. Give it to someone who has not been writing it - as you won't see the errors yourself. That person could also tell you how well it reads.

### **Do ask for help.**

That's what we're here for. Contact Stuart Haynes 0151 705 2150 or email [stuart.haynes@liverpool.anglican.org](mailto:stuart.haynes@liverpool.anglican.org).

Also see what other parishes have produced by looking on the website [www.liverpool.anglican.org/clergyvacancies](http://www.liverpool.anglican.org/clergyvacancies)

# A checklist to help you

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.

- Is the profile positive and upbeat?
- Does it paint a good, rounded picture of the Church and the parish?
- Have you included quotes and pictures to give it a nice human feel?
- Is the profile realistic?
- Have you made the job of vicar sound challenging and rewarding?
- Have you described yourselves as positive about change?
- Have you been realistic about the Church buildings?
- Have you been realistic about the skills and qualities you expect from your next vicar?
- Have you been clear about the challenges s/he can expect to face in your parish?
- Have you been honest about the kind of support s/he can expect?

## **And finally ...**

- Having read the profile are you excited about the future of your Church?