ADGL GUIDE FOR WRITING

A PARISH PROFILE



(October 2, 2023)

*You are probably reading this document because your congregation has or will become vacant and in need of a new priest, which will necessitate you 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 parish, community, and the Gospel.*

*The parish profile is the document on which a prospective applicant will base their decision to take the application further in the process. If you are to attract the right person, then it needs to be an appealing document supported by much prayer. 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 a parish family. As we seek to know, love, and follow Jesus, we are looking for clergy who will assist our local congregations to grow both spiritually and numerically. It is not the calling of a priest to manage decline, or even to hold the ship steady.*

*If you in your Parish 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 the needs of your parish.*

*The Bishop is responsible for the appointment process, working with the Diocesan Canons and Archdeacons, as well as the elected congregational representatives.*

*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 your parish.*

*Anglican Diocese of the Great Lakes*

**The Aim of the Profile:**

To convince the person that God is calling to apply for the position. Extensive prayer and the parish profile are the best ways to facilitate this process for the congregation. It is imperative that the Search Committee have an intercessory prayer team covering them constantly with prayer (Separate from the Vestry’s intercessory prayer team). There is a shortage of good clergy nationwide, so making the profile as attractive as possible will be helpful to having a successful process. The Parish Profile is often the first insight a new priest will have of the parish.

**Preparation:**

It is the responsibility of the local congregation’s Search Committee to prepare the parish profile with the help of the Vestry. Preparation and communication are key elements to the process. The following considerations may be helpful:

• At the beginning of this process a canon or archdeacon of the Anglican Diocese of the Great Lakes (ADGL) is assigned as diocesan representative/liaison by the Bishop. The assigned canon or archdeacon is always delighted to meet with the congregations’ Search Committee, wardens and/or the Vestry to discuss your vacancy and will advise and support you on the content of your parish profile.

• Agree with the assigned diocesan liaison when they should see a draft version of your profile and the date the Vestry needs to sign off the final version of the profile. A timeline is a good way to achieve the completion of this portion of the process.

• Identify who has the skills and time needed to oversee the production of your profile within the agreed timeline (they do not necessarily need to be a member of the Vestry– e.g., if you know somebody who has good IT skills there is no reason why you cannot ask for their assistance in the process).

• Recognize that completing the first draft is a key milestone – this will allow you to recognize any gaps in the content, or issues that need to be resolved in order to present your key messages in an attractive manner.

• Agree and share the timeline with the whole congregation - They need to know what is expected of them as a member of the parish family.

• The completion dates for each step should be placed in the calendar of the Search Committee and/or Vestry. It is important that the Vestry members know that they have been involved in the process – in the end they Vestry has final approval of the Parish Profile.

• Once the Vestry has agreed and signed off on the profile communicate this to the wider congregation and make a copy of the profile available to the parish members.

• Praying for your new Priest is extremely important and part of the prayer life of your congregational worship/home groups/bible study/ and whenever the parish community gathers. Also, to pray and thank God for those that serve you during the interim (ordained and lay).

**Things to Avoid:**

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 is all a bit hard to read and not overly exciting. Lots of information about times of services and the beautiful church building, but not very much on mission opportunities. Not a story to inspire someone to make your parish their home.

**No Problems here:** It reads like a description of the perfect parish where everyone is always incredibly happy and there are no financial problems, and the buildings are all perfect. Who would want to come and spoil all of that?

**No Change Thankyou:** We are happy just as we are, have been and always will be. This is hardly an invitation to someone to bring their gifts, personality, and ideas to the parish.

**It is all too Difficult:** The profile is so full of struggles and negatives that the reader gets too depressed to finish reading the document. 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 from the process. People want to read something that is 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’.



**Preparation**

**A Suggested Layout:**

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

**Section one:** Summary of the profile

**Section two:** The broader context

**Section three:** The priest that we need.

**Section four:** About the parish

**Section five:** About the parish

The parish as a worshipping people.

The parish and the community it serves.

The church building and resources.

**Section One: Summary of the Profile**

Do not 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 the place they should consider to be their parish home.

**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 may be at this time.

**A suggested layout**

**Be Honest:** Do not pretend that things are different from what they are in the congregation. If you have been through a tough time or there are major problems to overcome, share them in the profile. However, also try to show that you are up for a challenge and want things to be better in the future, even if you do not quite know what that future looks like currently.

**Keep it Simple:** Write in short, uncomplicated sentences wherever you can in the document. Use short paragraphs and sub-headings to break things up in the profile. Do not pack it so full of facts and figures that only an expert in statistical analysis could understand the document.

**Make it Look Nice:** You do not 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 up the document.

**You Cannot Tell Them Everything:** You have not got space and they will not read the document if you put everything in the document (Some parishes have a separate document describing the history of the parish in more detail). Just keep to the main points. They can always ask more detailed questions when they come and visit.

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

**Think in Terms of Lists:** Try and think in terms of the best five (5) things about our parish, the top three (3) challenges for the future, and the five (5) key qualities of our new parish priest.

**Put Yourself in the Reader’s Position:** They may have never heard of your parish or know little about the congregation. At best, they may have a sketchy view of how the parish members and the congregation are perceived by others in the community. You should try and help them get a handle on who you are and what is going on in your parish family.

**Check it with Others:** A fresh pair of eyes will see what you have missed and can tell you what is not clear in the draft profile.

**Section Two: The Broader Context**

As you begin to write this section ask yourself what is going on within the community of Anglican congregations and at Diocesan level. This is quite a wide-ranging section looking at the things happening at different levels in the parish and the kinds of help and support the potential priest may receive from various organizations. In this section, you should give a brief indication (there will be time for more later) of the demographic context of the parish: what the area is like in which you live and minister. Give a brief introduction concerning the parish or churches in the community. Address the diocese, other local Anglican churches and the ways in which the parish relates to these two groups.

**You Could Include**:

• Any themes of the churches in the community that the congregation is or has participated in over the past few years.

• Any diocesan initiatives and how you are responding to these initiatives (church planting, church revitalization, mission work,).

• Any pastoral reorganization 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 teams. Any paid or voluntary staff members, assisting clergy, lay workers, lay readers, or retired clergy.

• The parishes financial situation and, if it is not particularly good, the steps you have taken recently to improve the position of the parish.

• Any pastoral reorganization currently taking place or envisioned 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 parish numerically and spiritually

In this section be honest and straightforward. Do not worry about what you do not have; share positively about what you have as a parish family.

**id e for each section**

**Section Three: The Priest We Need:**

It is worth mentioning that parishes can be unrealistic when it comes to stating the type of priest they want by stating 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 marvelously 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 they will visit us more regularly. Oh, and they must be brilliant at understanding finances 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 in the search process. Most profiles mix up the two things which causes the document to be very unattractive to the reader. If you have given a good, clear, and honest picture of the life and ministry of the congregation then it should be equally clear what kind of person you desire as your priest.

It is worth addressing how you describe the essential and the characteristics of the person you desire 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 should not appoint them to the position. The most productive way of regarding this is to make a list of essential and desirable characteristics and then discuss 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 not compromise with in the search for a new priest.

Additionally, you need to describe the other characteristics that you would like in your priest. Make sure that your list of desirables is not so long as to be meaningless. All the qualities will be good and important, but very seldom can you have everything. Try not to list more than 10/12 characteristics to cover your whole list, both essential and desirable.

**Section Four: About the Parish**

As you begin to address this section ask yourself the question: What is it like to live here? An introductory section with 2 to 3 paragraphs stating 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 most recent census data which provides recent statistical information concerning your community. Are there any features, e.g., problems, landmarks, famous people (now or in the past) anything to give flavor to your community? Importantly make sure you finish the section on a positive and upbeat note. For example: ‘We think St Anne’s is a great place to live. Yes, there are lots of challenges, especially young people leaving the area. Nevertheless, there is also a lot going on and the Parish is at the center of some of these endeavors. We want to become more and more a part of our community so that people see the parish as

being at the heart of things rather than just an old building that they used to go to in the past.’ You should include a list of the best three (3) things about living here and perhaps additional quotes from people.

**Section Five: About the Parish**

Begin by asking yourself the question: What is the parish like, and would I want to worship here? Any potential new priest needs to understand what kind of support they can expect. For example, administrative support; whether clergy in the area cover each other’s services; readers, retired clergy who are active in the parish; lay leadership, youth and family leaders, home group or Sunday School leaders. Basically, is it the priest on his or her own, with a committed few or with a wider leadership support base?

**The Parish- A Worshipping People**

In this section, you are trying to give a flavor of parish 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 addressed by the next priest. Try and make sure there are plenty of positives.

**You could include:**

• A list of services

• A brief description of the worship patterns

• Types 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 services, from formal Sunday and mid-week services

• Bible- study groups, small groups (aka life groups) and prayer meetings, from youth clubs and fellowship groups to café churches and messy church etc.



• 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, 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 be a part of your family.

• The overall churchmanship of the parish - It might be worth including some pictures and quotes from people doing the activities you describe in this section.

**The Parish - The Community We Serve.**

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

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

• The weddings, baptisms, and funerals that have taken place, plus the support you offer (if any) to people

• The kinds of groups and activities taking place in parish buildings other than ones described in other sections.

• The different services you offer to the community from home communion services, from life groups to toddler groups, from lunch clubs to quiz nights

• The church/community school in your parish and how you relate to it as a parish.

• Any special relationships with local organizations and institutions (e.g., hospitals, hospices, residential homes for the elderly, homeless organizations, prisons)

• Any special links with the local authority or civic responsibilities on the part of the priest

• The different ways parish members are involved in the community on behalf of the congregation.

• How you work with and relate to other churches and denominations in your parish life (local association of churches).

• Your support for home and overseas mission and charities

There are huge areas of overlap between what you might describe as worship and

outreach, and community involvement in this section. Do not get too bogged down in debating the subtle differences between each. You are 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 have had to let certain things drop, and they may or may not come back in the near future. Once again, be honest. and straightforward. Do not worry about what you do not have; speak positively about what you have together as a parish family. Be honest some things are going well, some things used to go well but do not anymore, some things have folded through no one’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 from people on the receiving end of these kinds of activities, even though they may not be parish members. Church schools and indeed community schools should be a major focus of mission and outreach. However, if you have a church school how does the parish interrelate to the school?

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 during the congregation’s year? Are attempts made to connect parents and children from the school(s) into Sunday worship?

**The Parish – Buildings and Resources**

It is important that the potential priest understands the financial position, the financial problems, and opportunities.Are the parish finances healthy, are you near breaking even, or are you experiencing realproblems? Things like the number of regular givers and the most recent stewardship campaign canalso be helpful indicators. You should always enclose a set of your most recent financial records with yourparish profile.

It is also worth noting that you will pay in full all legitimate working clergy expenses, that you expectthem to take proper holidays and days off and that you support them as they take time for training, personal development, retreat, and academic study. This will indicate that you havean understanding and concern for the health, well-being, personal and professional development ofyour priest.

As you begin to write this section ask yourself the question: What are our buildings like, and do theytake up all or most of the financial resources?Buildings can be a blessing and a burden. Some church buildings and church halls are inan excellent state of repair, are in shape for parish andcommunity use, generate lots of income and are managedby full-time caretakers. However, for most parishes this simplyis not the case.Clergy do not want to be buildings’ managers, although theyclearly see the importance of having the right buildings forworship, mission, and ministry.

Therefore, you should beclear about what buildings you have, include a picture andshort description of each of them, stating what conditionthey are in and what plans (if any) are currently in place to address future repairs (is there a sinking fund for major future outlays – roof- furnace- parking lot).

Some profiles get quite involved at this point! You are not trying to describe every detail of yourbeautiful or not-so-beautiful building. 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 coupleof years to get things in order. If so, say so. Otherwise try and demonstrate that the buildings areadequate for what you need currently.

Is there any help in taking care of the buildings? Are there people around who are prepared to take responsibility for the buildings?Current levels of usage of the buildings. This will give the potential priest a good idea both about the state of the buildingsand the connectedness of the parish to its community.

The scope for new mission and ministry activity within the buildings. The new priest will come withgood ideas about how to move things on and engage with new and existing people in creativeways. Buildings can be a help or a barrier to ministry. The routine and foreseeable cost of buildings maintenance. Buildings can become a major expense of the budget. If there is major repair work to the organ or to the roof, then this can completely the skewparish finances.

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

**Checklist**

Once you have written your profile, 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 the profile.

**1. Is the profile positive and upbeat?**

**2. Does it paint a good, well-rounded picture of the parish and the parishioners?**

**3. Have you included quotes and pictures to give it a human feel?**

**4. Is the profile realistic?**

**5. Have you made the position of priest sound both challenging and rewarding?**

**6. Have you described yourselves as positive about change?**

**7. Have you been realistic about the church buildings and properties?**

**8. Have you been realistic about the skills and qualities you expect from your next priest?**

**9. Have you been clear about the challenges they can expect to face in your parish?**

**10. Have you been honest about the kind of support they can expect?**

**11. Having read the profile and are you excited about the future of your parish?**

If the answer is yes to the aforementioned questions, then you should have covered all the key points in the document. When you have checked it for accuracy and completeness read it through again and 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 are not sure about any issue, just contact the Diocesan office or your assigned canon or archdeacon.

You can find many parish profile examples online. The best that I have found are Anglican and Episcopal. Search under “Parish Profiles Anglican” or “Parish Profiles Episcopal”

I wanted to make this available to the congregations that need some guidance in preparing a Parish Profile. This is a second DRAFT so there will be changes with any following drafts.

I hope this is helpful.

*Jeff+*

If you need additional help, please feel free to contact me at The Rev. Canon Jeff Smead at 724/422-4230 or jeffsmead@adgl.us.