

Creating a Parish Profile

A parish profile may include pictures, but its main content is the description of the parish community (inside and outside the parish walls), the way it gathers to worship, and its education, fellowship and outreach programs. It is usually between 6 and 10 pages long when complete with pictures and formatting.

It is usually best to have a small group suggest content for the profile and then have one writer put the words together. It may be that another person is better skilled at formatting, adding pictures and layout elements around the words. The people putting together the profile may or may not be the same people who will be on the search committee. Writing and formatting the profile requires a different set of skills than interviewing prospective candidates.

While it is best to put your best foot forward, a parish profile should be an accurate depiction of what your parish truly is, as opposed to what you would wish it to be. This is not a visioning exercise; you hope a prospective candidate will understand who you are today and see a match with her or his skills, experience, style and approach.

A clear statement of the vision of the parish- how it sees itself is a good basis for the profile. The most effective profiles are the ones that are a coherent story rather than a jumble of separate, unrelated ideas.

Pictures of the congregation are helpful in describing your parish community. The most effective pictures show the faces of parishioners rather than the backs of people's heads sitting in the pews. To show their faces, you will need permission of the people whose identities are being shown, but this can be simply by asking the subjects and noting their response unless the subjects are children. If you have pictures of children, you will need to have in your files written permission from the caregiver of each child. This permission can be simply a statement such as "I give permission to show picture(s) of my child, Name, in the parish profile."

Although a picture of some group of the congregation standing, looking at the camera are sometimes appropriate, action pictures are better than static ones: showing people cooking and serving at a dinner or digging in the church garden or holding up a puppy for the blessing of the animals, etc. Also, a close-up picture of one, two or three people is usually far more effective than most large pictures that show a room full of folks.

In the profile, it is helpful to identify the missions, ministries and programs that show the ways the parish is active and engaged inside the church and in the wider world. It is also useful to explain the usual services offered, the style of music often employed, and the liturgies used on Sundays and at other points in the week.

It is also very important in the profile to explain the geography and outside community in which the parish is located. What makes it unique? Why would a prospective candidate want to live and work there? The profile is, after all, a selling brochure. And keep in mind as you prepare the profile that a candidate wants to know why your parish is different than other parishes, why she or he would want to become a part of it.

No two parish profiles are the same, nor should they be. You are telling the world about your unique, special, desirable parish. Once the draft of the profile is put together, you may choose to have the executive archdeacon take a look to offer any suggestions for additions or amendments, but this is not required. When the profile is complete it can be sent in electronic PDF form to the synod office for sharing with prospective candidates once the position is posted.