

# Putting Together your Church Profile

These notes have been prepared to assist churches in pastoral vacancy. An important task in preparing to consider candidates for future ministry is the production of a church profile. This will be an important document as it serves as an initial introduction to prospective ministers, but is also a helpful way of focussing the church community on its key priorities, character and aspirations for the future.

## Some Important points to remember:

This is a CHURCH profile that describes who you are to any prospective ministry candidate; it is not a profile of your ideal minister. It is important that you keep the process focussed on "What kind of church are we seeking to be?" and not "What kind of minister are we seeking to find?"

It needs to be something that the entire church community accept and approve – ideally the whole church should be involved in putting it together, but if deacons, leaders or any other specialist team compile it, significant discussion and opportunity to refine the document needs to take place at a suitable Church Meeting.

Your profile will not be sent to anyone unless you do it. This is the means by which you will introduce yourself to any prospective minister – remember that not only the text, but the layout, graphics and choice of pictures will say a lot about your priorities and ethos as a church.

## Putting it together

It may be useful to begin by identifying which parts of the profile are a matter of INFORMATION and which are a matter of DECISION. For example the year the church was founded hardly needs to be debated and agreed by a church meeting, whereas the church's vision for outreach over the next few years probably does!

Much of this will be reasonably straightforward, but some will not. For example while you may be able to describe the present worship style, you may also need to consider the degree to which this has become dependant on the current minister (who may for example be a key musician) and how it is likely to change over the coming months

The Key elements of the profile will be:

- History, membership and general information
- Overview of the local community
- Church life as it is now
- Activities and organisations
- Church vision for the future
- Practical ministry matters

The BUGB publication "Facing a pastoral vacancy" contains an appendix with a number of questions that may be useful in collecting much of this information. The focus of this document is more how you interpret, discuss and present this information.

## History Membership and General Information

The history of your church will be useful in giving a potential candidate a context for your work and witness. However, you should avoid making this too long or detailed, but focus on anything which you feel has particular relevance to how the church functions today.

Try to avoid general comments about the size of membership; "We are a large church" might mean two quite different things to two different people. Present actual figures e.g. "We are a church of 150 members". You should also include appropriate comments if any other figures are unusually out of proportion with this. For example "We are a church of 150 members but attract a morning congregation of around 300" (In this case "normal" should be considered to be when the number of regular worshippers is of a similar magnitude to the membership.) You should also give some indication of the age profile of the members and any other notable factors – there is no need to give a full numerical breakdown, but again try to avoid generalisations "many of whom are elderly" is better expressed "approximately 2/3 of whom are over 70". In the next section you will also be giving some information about the local community – it is helpful to include either here or in that section the proportion of members who live in the immediate neighbourhood and how typical the congregation is of the local community.

It is also helpful to include some details about the church buildings, in particular:

- Their age, size and general condition

- Any particular issues that have emerged (e.g. size, poor condition, upkeep costs)

- Any particular purposes for which the buildings are used or issues which have influence their design/layout etc. (e.g. a playgroup may use the premises)

## **The Community**

A number of elements are included in the BUGB booklet. You may also want to add some specific information e.g. whether a particular employer or industry has a strong presence in the community; if you are in a town/city centre whether it is a predominantly residential, industrial or retail area; any historic events which have influenced the town (e.g. post-war rebuild, decline of cotton industry etc.)

It is important too, to express something of the church's relationship with the local community, for example many town centre churches will attract quite a widespread congregation and have relatively little engagement with the immediate neighbourhood, churches on housing estates may well be far more involved in local residents' groups etc.

This may be one part of the profile that you wish to make the subject of wider discussion. Suitable questions might be:

- What are the key needs and issues that face people in our community?

- How has the nature of our local community shaped and influenced the mission of the church?

- What impact does the church have on the life of our local community?

- How do we see our ministry within the community developing and what role or influence do we imagine a future minister might have in that?

## **Church life as it is now**

This should include a brief overview of worship style, general ethos, attitude to Scripture, ecumenical involvement, charismatic renewal and community activity.

You should also include information on how the church is structured and run, particularly in relation to deacons, elders, leadership team, other office holders, employed/voluntary staff.

You might also reflect on how many people have joined the church in the last 5 years or so and what this might say about the church. For example, if the majority of newcomers are established Christians, this might be because of a strong emphasis on worship and teaching, if the majority are newly baptised young parents from the immediate community, it may indicate a particular strength in the church's outreach programme. In other words don't just consider what you do but also the tangible impact of what you have done.

We have already noted that church life can often change during a pastoral vacancy. While we cannot always fully predict this, a useful indication can often be gleaned by asking members about their own priorities. You might do this through the following questions:

- What aspects of the church's life do you consider to be the most important?
- Are there things which at present you consider to be less important or that you find unhelpful?
- What do you think are the key strengths of our church?
- Is there anything in your view that makes our church unique or special?
- If you had the chance, what would you change in the church?

## **Activities and Organisations**

You should also list the various activities which the church runs, giving some indication of the group's general relationship with the church (some uniformed groups for example operate largely as tenants, in other situations they are very much part of church-life); its purpose and role within the wider vision of the church and any expectations that they may have on a future minister. This might usefully be done by distributing brief questionnaires to each group – there may also be a need to discuss the realism of any emergent expectations in relation to the minister! Suitable questions might be:

- When do you meet and how many people does your activity attract?
- In a couple of sentences, describe the key focus and nature of your organisation?
- How does the organisation relate to the overall mission vision of the church?
- What role would you see any future minister having in your activities?

## **Church Vision for the future**

An important part of determining the ideal skills in a new minister is a sense of where the church wants to go in the next 5-10 years. While we firmly believe in the call of God, we also believe that God equips those he calls, so we should expect that a future minister will confirm their suitability by demonstrating a range of relevant skills and experience.

This is usually the key element in the church's deliberations, and if appropriately handled can play an important role in maintaining vision and motivation during the vacancy period. There are a number of ways in which this might be put together, and some questions are suggested below.

- Do we sense that God is particularly challenging us about a particular need or opportunity in our community? This may be through a general sense of compassion and concern, a growing awareness of a particular community issue, individuals joining the church with specific skills and experience. If so, how should we be seeking to respond to this in the future?

What do we believe this church should be like in 5 years time?

- What shortcomings or concerns within the life of our church do we need to address?
- How might we do this?

What particular strengths and features of our church do we want to see developed in the next few years?

## **Practical Ministry Matters**

You should also include a section which outlines the provision that is available to the minister. Consider first those things which the church or wider Baptist family are able to offer. The most significant of these is probably housing. If you have a manse, give a brief description of it and also some indication of your flexibility if a prospective minister already owns a home or for other reasons feels the house is unsuitable. If you do not have a manse, outline the plans you have to provide housing. Try to research these as thoroughly as possible – for example if you intend to rent a property, check that a reasonable stock of suitable housing is available for rent and also current market prices. You may also want to include details of proximity to Baptist or other ecumenical colleges or libraries, relationships between ministers of other denominations etc.

Try also to think about the practical needs of the minister and her or his family. This may include the proximity of local primary and secondary schools, shopping and public transport facilities etc. Given that many minister's spouses seek employment, it may also be useful to indicate if there are any particularly prevalent employment opportunities (e.g. a large hospital nearby may offer particular opportunities for someone employed in the health sector.)

## **Developing a process of Consultation**

As already stated, it is important that the church is properly engaged in developing the profile and an important task of leaders is to facilitate this. There are two basic approaches, either develop a process of consultation in which the whole church can participate (preferred) or produce a draft which the church can then make comments on (less preferred).

In the case of the former, decide first which matters are INFORMATION and which are DECISION. Appoint an individual or small group to compile the INFORMATION and agree its basic content as a leadership group. It may be useful to then circulate this prior to any consultation meetings with a suitable explanatory note that the DECISION aspects of the profile will be subject to discussion. Hopefully this can then be quickly approved at the outset of any meeting and the concentration of the church community given to the rest of the task.

Depending on the size and nature of the church, many of the questions above could be used in home groups, small groups at a church meeting or a plenary gathering. You may also use them to create individual questionnaires, but while this can at times be helpful try also to include a strong element of consensus and shared discussion in the process.

It is quite likely that there will be significant diversity of view, so it is important not simply to include every opinion and idea that is expressed, but to tease out those which are broadly shared. This is often done in two ways – firstly by looking for resonance or repetition – if a particular issue or answer repeatedly occurs then this is a strong indicator. The other is by “testing” – this is simply putting some of the less popular ideas to a meeting and seeking some form of response – for example a facilitator might say “We have a comment here that we should focus more on young children – is that a priority that a lot of us share?”

Another key challenge at this stage is to test the realism of participants. For example it is unlikely that many will disagree that they would like to see more young families in the church, yet often the same group of people will complain if toddlers disturb the services. This can create a number of difficulties when the church seeks to implement its plans. We can try and address this by once we have highlighted the key elements in the church's vision asking questions like:

What do we need to do differently in order for this to happen?  
How will our church life be impacted if we achieve this objective?  
Are we willing to embrace those changes?

It is also important to be realistic about what a future minister might or might not be able to do. Our plans for the future are the responsibility of the WHOLE CHURCH and it is important to not simply expect a new minister to come along who can single-handedly “deliver the goods”. Another important question might therefore be:

What are we doing now to work towards these things becoming a reality?

Once ideas and needs have been collected, a working group then needs to collate these into a document that can be put to a later meeting.

## **Developing a drafting process**

If you are seeking to present the church with a drafted document it is important to ensure:

That people are aware it can be changed (particularly highlight to those who may not be computer literate how easily it can be done.)

People are given sufficient time and access to digest the document before being asked to comment on it.

That an environment is created where people can express contrary opinions without feeling intimidated or being depicted as difficult or confrontational.

Any matters which are particularly important or a significant departure from current practice should be clearly highlighted and supported by some explanation of the reasoning behind them.

Try to “layer” the decision making. For example, present the church with perhaps 8-10 key summary statements. These may either be the key strengths ethos of the church, or the overall aims for the next 5 years. Do not introduce (or ideally even develop) the detail of these until the headline statements have been agreed.

Bring a fuller document to the next meeting, presenting key information under the previously approved headlines. It is important to stress that the headlines have already been agreed and the task of the meeting is to engage with the detail. Again it is important to test for consensus and realism and the questions suggested above may be of help.

## **And Finally . . .**

It is vital to stress to every church member that they have a part to play in this process. Some may need more encouragement than others. An important element is to encourage people to be prayerful throughout.