

## HOW TO READ A CHURCH PROFILE

“...discern what is the will of God...” Romans 12:1-13

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**Reading a Church Profile** is only the beginning of your discernment process. It is, just as your Ministerial Profile is, a snapshot, a verbal portrait of how a congregation views its past, its present and its future. It provides a glimpse of the gifts and skills and experience they are seeking in their next pastor.

You have prepared your Ministerial Profile as a snapshot of who you are, your understanding of ministry and a glimpse of the gifts and skills and experience you bring to ministry.

The prayer of discernment and trust is that God will bring together the right pastor and the right church to share together in the ministry and mission of God’s people in a particular time and place.

How does that coming together begin to happen? It begins to happen when a Search Committee reads a Ministerial profile in light of what their Church Profile reveals about what they are looking for in their next pastor. And it begins to happen when a Candidate reads a Church Profile in light of what kind of church they are looking forward to serving.

## PREPARE A CHURCH RATING WORKSHEET

1. With your heart and mind and soul – and with your pastoral profile before you –
  - a. Identify the essentials you require in a church setting which will guide you in looking through Employment Opportunities and deciding where to have your profile sent:
    - General geographical location?
    - Urban, rural, suburban?
    - Economic, racial, cultural, social contexts?
  - b. Identify the essentials you seek in a congregation’s heart mind and soul as you read through a church profile:
    - Open and Affirming?
    - Hands on Mission?
    - Emphasis on Adult Ed?
    - Worship style?
    - Size?
    - Part time/full time?
    - Support staff?
    - Denominational/ecumenical connections?
  - c. Identify the needs a church may desire that you have passion and giftedness for:
    - Openness to new experiences in worship?
    - Love of youth?
    - Community outreach/social justice?
  - d. Identify the strengths a church must have because they are your Weaknesses:

- Music savvy because you are tone deaf?
- Someone else who works with the youth group?
- e. Identify other factors that may influence your decision making:
  - Spouse/partner employment opportunities?
  - Childrens' needs?
  - Where will you find your social circle and/or places to be anonymous?
  - What hobbies/interests need to be fed?

## MEETING THE CONGREGATION ON PAPER

1. **For your first reading of the profile**, meet the congregation's context and ethos. That would be the way you would meet a congregation if you had vacationed in that community and worshipped on Sunday morning. You would know nothing of the statistics, the budget, the committee structure or the pastor's salary! You would be meeting the spirit of the a congregation.

So, begin reading the profile with PAGE 8 "What is God Calling us to Become?" This is the heart of the profile if the church has done its work. This section should give you a glimpse into the church's sense of its vocation; its calling for the next chapter. It should provide enough specificity for you to understand how the church will uniquely carry out the Will of God. Following this go back to PAGE 7. This will be where the church imagines the kind of pastor they need to partner with them towards that vision. Make notes that would be helpful in filling out your rating worksheet. Underline, circle, put question marks and explanation marks which you will want to come back to as you read additional portions of the profile, want clarification, additional information, etc.

### **Set the profile aside for a time.**

Pray for the congregation in general or in particular.

Pray for your discernment in decision making

"Listen for stirrings in your heart and excitement in your mind regarding this church." (1)

2. **Next, spend some time** with the section that describes the church ("Who Are We Now?" beginning on PAGE 9. Pay particular attention to the "Congregational Reflections" section) How does the Congregation describe itself. What are the core values of the church? How does the church understand and describe its fundamental identity?

Take a look at the section on "Congregational Demographics" beginning on PAGE 11.

What does it tell you about the church's history and its trajectory? Read the churches answer to the Reflection question that follows their description of staff.

Take a look at the section on "Church Finances" Take a look at their clarity and transparency around finances. What does this tell you about potential assets and resources available for ministry? What does it indicate about future trajectories? Is the balance of income (pledging, endowments, fundraisers, rentals), is this comfortable? How about the balance of expenses (staffing, programs, mission, administration, property upkeep), is this comfortable?

Take a look at the "Historical Information" section. What does this say about the churches patterns in their history? What does it say about the church's resilience, particularly around change and conflict?

### **Set the profile aside for a time.**

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Pray for your discernment in decision making  
“Listen for stirrings in your heart and excitement in your mind regarding this church.” (1)

3. **Take a look at the “Who is Our Neighbor” section**

What does this tell you about the congregation’s connections to its community?  
What does the Mission Insight material tell you about the community?  
What insights does the congregation identify for itself about its community?  
What social justice concerns (such as ONA) has the congregation adopted?  
What does the profile say about the expectations of the pastors time spent ministering with and in the community?

**Set the profile aside for a time.**

Pray for the congregation in general or in particular.  
Pray for your discernment in decision making  
“Listen for stirrings in your heart and excitement in your mind regarding this church.” (1)

4. **Consider the Compensation Package:** Is this package sufficient for your needs? The church has spent some time looking at what they can afford and what they need to offer. They may have limited ability to modify this package. Be sure you are comfortable with it.

5. **Fill out your Church Rating Worksheet.** Churches will fall into one of at least three categories:

- a. You know you are not interested (and can let the church know)
- b. You aren’t quite sure and want to come back and look at the profile with fresh eyes – or want to ask questions of the Conference Minister – or seek the advice of family and friends.
- c. You pray that this Search Committee will seek further conversation with you!

In the cases of b & c take careful notes around areas you are asking questions – and questions you will want to ask in an interview.

Be honest with yourself, with God and with the church. Do not lead a church along if you are not really interested.

**May God bless you in your prayers, your discernment, your willingness to listen for God’s calling upon your life as God guides you to the right congregation at the right time in their life and yours.**

*With thanks to The Rev. Karen Elizabeth King, Associate Conference Minister, Penn Central Conference – United Church of Christ for her work on “How to Read a Pastoral Profile” which this document seeks to compliment and her direct quote (1)*