



PRESBYTERY



What is a Presbytery? It is a court of the Church in the various Presbyterian Churches around the world. The Church of Scotland is one of many Presbyterian Churches such as the Free Church, United Reformed Church... (To Roman Catholics a presbytery is a priest's house).

The word "presbytery" comes from New Testament Greek: "presbuteros" or "presbyteros" meaning a Church leader or elder. In the C of S. we call our leaders Elders – even ministers are really elders. Ministers are "Teaching Elders" and the others are "Ruling Elders". Since we are governed by Elders we are called the Elder or Presbyter Church...the Presbyterian Church.

Our Church government is modelled on the Trinity. God is one God, distinguishably but inseparably Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three in one. Modelled on God, we have one Church, distinguishably but inseparably local, area and national. Locally the Church of Scotland takes the form of the Parish Church governed by the Kirk Session (i.e. all the Elders chaired by the Minister as "Moderator"). Regionally there are 46 Presbyteries covering every inch of Scotland plus the Presbytery of England (consisting of 8 congregations), the Presbytery of Europe (17 congregations including amazingly Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Bermuda (!) and the Presbytery of Jerusalem (2 congregations). Nationally we have the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and its various Councils and Committees. The Church of Scotland is like a tartan cloth with the various layers cross-woven to make a rich pattern. We have local, regional and national threads all interwoven together to make up one denomination, the Church of Scotland, which is part of God's one Church.

The Presbyterian system of Church government was set up as a reaction against the hierarchical structures of other denominations of the Church. It was very democratic for its time. Instead of a Pope, Cardinal, Archbishop, Bishop, Priest, top-down system there is the Kirk Session (many elders and one minister), the Presbytery (ministers and annually appointed elders), and the General Assembly (of half ministers and half elders and different ones each year at that). The General assembly is the superior court to the Presbytery and the Presbytery superior to the Kirk Session but they try hard not to "Lord it" or "top dog it". Most of the time they further business both up through the courts and down through the courts depending on where the business is best handled. When a congregation wants a new minister they have to get the agreement of all three layers. Big changes in the Church of Scotland do not happen unless all three layers have discussed it and voted for it. This takes time but it is more consensual that way.

Let's focus here on the middle layer between the local and national, the Presbytery, and in particular on Presbytery number 12 – the Presbytery of Ardrrossan. It is made up of 30 congregations covering an area from Largs to Kilwinning, Beith to Arran. Each congregation sends its minister and a representative elder to the monthly Presbytery meetings. A Moderator, elected annually, chairs the meetings and the Presbytery Clerk, appointed indefinitely, gives the court guidance and takes minutes. The Business Committee Convener also sits at the front. The Business Committee is made up of the various Conveners and Vice Conveners of all the other committees such as World Mission, Finance, Ministries, Property, Mission and Discipleship, Church and Society and Superintendence. We have 36 Ministers including retired ones and 41 Elders.

According to "The Constitution and Laws of the C of S" edited by James Weatherhead:

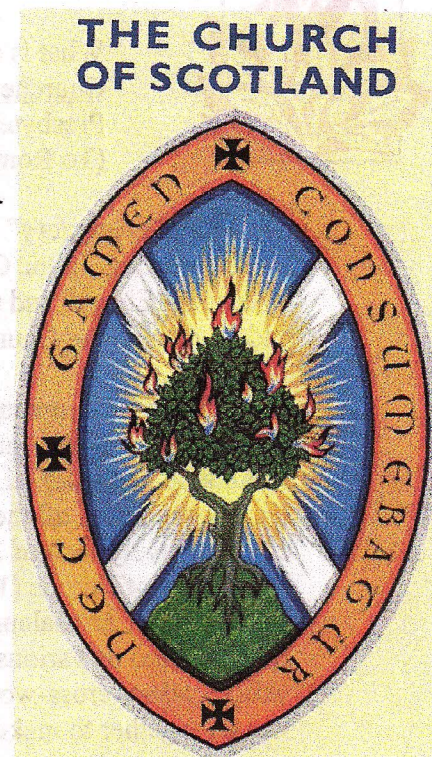
"The Presbytery's basic function is to give spiritual leadership and encouragement to the ministers, office-bearers, and congregations and apart from duties prescribed by law, or instructed by the Assembly, it should always be seeking other ways of promoting the advancement of Christ's kingdom." (p97)"

The Presbytery is responsible for all spiritual matters within its bounds including:

- conducting ordinations and inductions, unions and linkings, funerals of parish ministers etc.
- supervising Congregations, Ministers and other Church officials. (Supervision means pastoral care)
- ensuring that all congregational records and their own records are properly kept
- training all office-bearers in terms of the protection of vulnerable groups
- coming up with creative ideas for the advancement of Christ's Kingdom in its area

James Weatherhead in "The Constitution and Laws of the C of S." (p101) quotes the following slightly modified list from Rev Gordon McGillivray's book "An Introduction to Practice and Procedure in the C of S":

- (a) determine the number of charges
- (b) set parish boundaries
- (c) dispose of calls of ministers to and from congregations
- (d) consider levels of parish assistance
- (e) accept demissions and resignations
- (f) record tributes to deceased members
- (g) deal with commissions from Kirk Sessions
- (h) admit to membership of the Presbytery..and to the ministry of the C of S.
- (i) nominate, supervise and recruit candidates for the ministry
- (j) help candidates through their training
- (k) arrange and conduct services of ordination, induction, commissioning, setting apart, union or linking, and dedication
- (l) determine ministerial stipends with the national Ministries Council
- (m) set Mission and Ministry allocations with the national Finance Comm.
- (n) arrange and carry out Congregational Reviews
- (o) arrange for the Regular Inspection of church property
- (p) process applications for work on property
- (q) examine congregational records and accounts
- (r) attest Presbytery records
- (s) appoint commissioners to the Assembly
- (t) consider Assembly remits
- (u) consider matters of public interest locally, nationally and internationally
- (v) deal with petitions and overtures
- (w) discharge its disciplinary functions
- (x) act as a court of appeal
- (y) ensure that the laws and accepted practices of the Church are observed."



Most of the on-going work of Presbytery is done through various committees which are appointed annually. Our Presbytery's Standing Orders booklet explains their work like this:

BUSINESS COMMITTEE – arrangements for dealing with all Presbytery business; nominations, unions and readjustments; law and property cases; territorial areas, and acts as the Vacancy Procedure Committee.

CHURCH AND SOCIETY COMMITTEE – matters relating to national and community interests, including state education, social welfare, family concerns and ecumenical matters.

MINISTRIES COMMITTEE – all matters coming from the General Assembly's Ministries Council.

MISSION + DISCIPLESHIP COMMITTEE – communication, matters from the Gen.Ass. M+D Committee.

WORLD MISSION COMMITTEE – overseas work and Christian Aid.

PRESBYTERIAL SUPERINTENDENCE COMMITTEE – arrangements for visiting congregations and examining congregational records.

PROPERTY COMMITTEE – the maintenance and inspection of church and manse buildings and the inspection of congregational property registers.

FINANCE COMMITTEE – matters regarding stewardship, the Mission and Renewal Fund, the collation of financial statistics and the presbytery's financial affairs.

Any Presbytery is best seen in action rather than talked about in abstract, so everyone who is interested is most welcome to attend Presbytery meetings. The Presbytery of Ardrrossan meets in Ardrrossan and Saltcoats Kirkgate Parish Church (beside Saltcoats Railway Station) on Tuesday evenings at 7.30pm on the first Tuesday of February, March, April, May, September, October, November and December; and on the second Tuesday of June (which is a Communion Service in the church of the Moderator of that year). The September meeting is in the church of the new Moderator for the next year. You are most welcome any time!



THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND
PRESBYTERY OF ARDROSSAN