



## Presbytery

‘So, who would like to be our Presbytery elder?’

*(Silence)*

‘It’s a very important job, and we need to make sure our congregation is represented ... anyone?’

*(More Silence)*

‘We have a legal duty to send an elder, surely someone must be interested? They only meet once a month.’

*(Even more silence, where the only sound is the uncomfortable squirm of a few elders hoping to escape the Moderator’s glare.)*

‘Now look, we can’t leave here until we have someone ... the doors are locked. Does anyone have any ideas?’

‘Ok, if there really is no-one else, I will do it *(looks around at fellow elders in expectant hope ...)* but only for this year and then you have to find someone else.’



Presbytery is the court of the Church that has the largest representation of elders. It can bring about real change in congregational life and mission, and yet, the most difficult discussion in the annual calendar of the Kirk Session meetings can revolve round the question: Who is going to be our Presbytery elder?

Our forty-six Presbyteries have representation from every congregation in the Church of Scotland. Ministers, deacons and elders gather together for fellowship, worship, discussion and decision-making on matters that affect our local parishes and communities. For many elders and members within the Kirk, the word ‘presbytery’ is synonymous with problems. The charge is often levied against Presbyteries that they are never seen except when they need to administer some justice or discipline.

**Presbytery is the court of the Church, which can bring about real change in congregational life and mission.**

Each Presbytery is charged with the task of supporting the congregations within its bounds. Far from being overly judgemental and disciplinary, this process is about reviewing the congregation with a high level of congregational involvement, supporting them in celebrating their successes and highlighting future areas of development and focus in areas such as mission and outreach, worship, pastoral care, and resource management.



Presbyteries will also seek to ensure that:

- appropriate support is in place for those exercising ministries within the area
- resources of ministers, youth workers, pastoral assistants and more are deployed appropriately around the Presbytery as a result of an agreed plan
- congregations have appropriate training and skills in a variety of different ministry areas, for example, and to name but a few, children's ministry, youth ministry, pastoral ministry and ministry amongst those who suffer from dementia
- they provide opportunities to learn from, and share with, the wider Church, nationally and internationally
- they offer support, and provide helpful checks, to those maintaining financial records of congregations
- they assist congregations working on their buildings not only to keep them wind and watertight but to ensure they meet the needs of a modern congregation serving their parish.

The Presbytery is an important part of the structure of the Church of Scotland. It is not simply a 'tick box' exercise to ensure that congregations are complying with various legal procedures and demands. Commissioned elders from a Kirk Session, along with a number of additional elders freely elected by the Presbytery, play a vital role in the ongoing mission of the Church of Scotland.

Some may hold the opinion that a Presbytery only ever does what the ministers within the Presbytery say. This could not be further from the truth. Many Presbyteries rely on the skills, wisdom and dedication of the elders to convene committees and working groups, and even to act as moderators of the Kirk Session. Each member of Presbytery, whether a minister who has been there forty years or a recently appointed elder, has the same rights, the same voice and the same influence on the Presbytery. It is the role of every member to assist in the work of Presbytery and, where appropriate, offer insight and challenge to what is being proposed. Many elders speak of their time serving in a Presbytery as having a positive influence in their faith journey. Meeting, sharing with and learning from other members of Presbytery make it a truly enriching experience for the individual, their congregation and the wider Church.

### **Further reading and resources**

The Church of Scotland Presbytery list - [www.churchofscotland.org.uk/contact\\_us/presbytery\\_list](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/contact_us/presbytery_list)