



## Congregational Office Bearers

As Philippians 2 sets the tone, being an office bearer in a local congregation:

- is a call to service not promotion
- is a privilege not a prize
- confers responsibility not power
- is a task for a season not a right for life.



### Session Clerk

Every congregation has a Kirk Session and every Kirk Session must appoint a session clerk. The session clerk need not be an elder - but it is quite unusual if they are not, and it also can be awkward if the Session needs to discuss confidential matters. It is quite common practice for there to be 'Joint' session clerks where two people share the work. Sometimes the split is functional - one does the minutes and admin, while the other tends to the fuzzier tasks of relating to the wider congregation. Sometimes, the two people simply take 'turn about' so that all the work is covered.

Whenever a session clerk is appointed by a Kirk Session, the first thing the new clerk has to do is to take the oath, *de fidei* - they promise to be faithful to the duties of session clerk. If the 'regular' session clerk is not present at a meeting, then, a temporary appointment needs to be made and the oath taken. The formal part of this office is focussed on the Kirk Session meeting - assisting the minister (or interim moderator) in drawing up the agenda, ensuring that the meeting is called properly, taking the minute of the meeting and following up any correspondence required.

However, at the heart of being a good session clerk are healthy relationships. This is one of the most pivotal - and potentially most helpful - volunteer roles in the life of a parish church. It can also be a very fulfilling piece of service engaging across the life of the congregation. It needs someone who:

- can form a good relationship with the minister
- is trusted and respected not only by the Session but also by the congregation
- can make time for the work
- can keep confidences
- attend worship most Sundays



## Congregational Treasurer

Every congregation needs to appoint a treasurer. This is done by the financial court - which under the Unitary Constitution or in parishes *quoad omnia* is the Kirk Session and under the Model Constitution is the Congregational Board. The treasurer looks after the congregation's money by ensuring that:

- offerings are recorded and banked
- bills and dues are paid
- annual accounts are prepared
- the appropriate court is kept informed about the financial situation of the congregation
- tax is recovered from HMRC under Gift Aid provisions.

Sometimes, there is both a treasurer, who does the book keeping, and a finance convener, who works with a team looking at more strategic issues, such as, budgeting. It is also customary to have a Gift Aid convener who ensures that this method of giving is promoted and properly recorded and that claims for tax recovery are made regularly.

The treasurer is asked to be as careful with the congregation's funds as he or she would be with their own money. The trick is to do so without becoming a hoarder who resents every pound spent or assuming that, because they have the cheque book, the Treasurer is the final arbiter on financial policy. For example, the Congregational Board or Kirk Session and their appointees who incur expenses - e.g. the Property Convener, the Sunday School Leader, the Minister or other staff member - need to know the budget within which they operate, but they also require that bills properly incurred will be met.

## Clerk to the Congregational Board

Where a congregation operates under the Model Constitution, there is a Congregational Board which is responsible for the financial and property interests of the congregation. The Board needs to appoint a clerk. The appointee need not be a member of the Board, but must be a member of the congregation. On appointment, they also take the oath, *de fidei*, 'I promise to carry out faithfully the duties of clerk to the Board.'

This office is to make preparations for Board meetings, work with the chairperson (not necessarily the Minister) on the agenda, ensure that a minute is taken and follow up with appropriate communications. While the formal task is that of minute clerk and record keeper, the person appointed should keep up to date with good practice in terms of caring for church buildings and accounting for church monies. They can, thus, be a good support to those who take particular responsibility for these matters as well as helping the Board to realise its responsibilities as custodians of the property and as charity trustees.



## **If you are invited to hold office ...**

If you are invited to hold office, ask the questions:

- Can you spare the time?
- Will you enjoy the work?
- Can you relate well to the Minister and others with whom you will be engaged?

If you can answer 'yes' to these questions, but feel that you would initially need support, then why not ask if Presbytery could provide someone as a mentor? The Mission & Discipleship Council regularly offer training events.

## **Further reading and resources**

Congregational office bearers guidance -

[www.churchofscotland.org.uk/resources/subjects/law\\_circulars/temp/docs/general/law\\_congregational\\_officebearers.pdf](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/resources/subjects/law_circulars/temp/docs/general/law_congregational_officebearers.pdf)

Session Clerk –

[www.churchofscotland.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/3133/session\\_clerk.pdf](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/3133/session_clerk.pdf)

Clerk Board –

[www.churchofscotland.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/3134/clerk\\_board.pdf](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/3134/clerk_board.pdf)

The Church of Scotland Law Department Circular –

[www.churchofscotland.org.uk/resources/subjects/law\\_circulars](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/resources/subjects/law_circulars)

The Scottish Charity Regulator - [www.oscr.org.uk](http://www.oscr.org.uk)