

The Church of Scotland



A Guide to the Presbytery of Gordon

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INTRODUCTION

Help! I'm now a member of Presbytery!

For most people, the thought of going along to Presbytery can be a bit daunting. On a cold winter's night you might prefer to be cosy and warm at home. Hopefully your experience of Gordon Presbytery will be a warm one and you'll enjoy meeting up with others and getting involved with some of the committees.

The aim of **A Guide to Gordon Presbytery** along with the **Presbytery Year Book** and the **Standing Orders**, is to help folk understand what Presbytery is all about and so make Presbytery meetings an enjoyable and informative time for everyone.

PRESBYTERY

A Presbytery in the Church of Scotland is a group of churches which are represented by ministers, deacons and elders. Along with the General Assembly and the Kirk Session it is a Court of the Church where church business is discussed and decisions are made.

Gordon Presbytery represents 25 charges, so it is the ideal size to get to know folk.

Here is how Presbyteries began:

'.....there are some institutions that start life on the drawing board, while others come into being more or less by chance to meet an ad hoc situation. It is in this 'accidental' class that the Presbytery belongs — which may seem odd considering the very central place the Presbytery has come to fill within the Presbyterian form of Church government. Originally a forum where ministers and people could meet for studying the Scriptures, these weekly gatherings were known as 'The Exercises' or 'The Weekly Exercises'. Even after they had been converted into 'Presbyteries', with the added responsibilities, they continued to open the proceedings with a Sermon and a discussion of Scripture. Gradually the 'exercise' of the day was reduced as the business of Presbytery increased.' (A Guide to the Presbytery by Andrew Herron)

Today the opening devotions led by the Moderator are a reminder of our Presbyterian roots.

COURTS

In Presbyterianism Christ is the head of the Church, not a person. The Church is ordered by a series of courts under the ultimate authority of Christ. The Kirk Session, the Presbytery and the General Assembly are the three courts of the Church of Scotland. The Kirk Session is the 'lowest' court and the General Assembly is the 'highest' or 'superior' court. Lower courts are represented on higher ones, so that ultimately the Kirk Session is represented at the General Assembly through the Presbytery. Lower courts are subject to higher courts, and generally, the power belonging to lower courts is also included in the power of a higher court, too. In other words, as an example, the General Assembly can appoint elders to serve in a Kirk Session. So, too, can the Presbytery. All Church courts are public meetings. Anyone may attend, but only a member of the court may speak, unless invited to do so by the Moderator of the court. Sometimes Presbytery business is 'taken in private'. This means that the matters of

business cannot be discussed with anyone outwith the court and it cannot be reported by the Press. The Moderator will indicate when this takes place, and when the meeting is again in 'open court'. If the private matter is very confidential the Moderator can ask everyone who is not a member of the court to leave the room while the matter is discussed behind closed doors.

TIMES AND DATES

Gordon Presbytery normally meets on the first Tuesday of each month, except in June when it is the last Tuesday of the month. There are no meetings in January, July or August. If Presbytery falls during Holy Week, another date is decided by Business Committee.

September, February and March Presbytery meets at Inverurie West Church.

In October, November, December, April, May and June Presbytery meets in other churches, with teas served afterwards.

Meetings are normally at 7.30pm

The June Presbytery is at the Moderator's Church and begins at 7pm with Communion. This meeting marks the end of the annual session.

PRESBYTERY ELDERS

An elder from each Kirk Session is chosen every year before June, but earlier if possible, to serve as a Presbytery Elder. Kirk Sessions may appoint the same person to be Presbytery Elder for two or three years running because it takes about a year to get into the way of being a Presbytery Elder.



Now who is going to be Presbytery Elder this year?

There are an equal number of elders and ministers in the Presbytery. This means that additional elders are appointed by the Presbytery to match in number the ministers with a charge, retired ministers and other ministers without a charge. The Business Committee nominates the additional elders and they are then elected by Presbytery. They are chosen from past Representative Elders of congregations.

REPRESENTATION

Congregations, and even Kirk Sessions, can see the Presbytery as some big, remote organisation, quite separated from the real nitty-gritty of church life. The Presbytery Elder has the opportunity to make sure this is not the case.

The Presbytery Elder is part of the Presbytery. That may sound obvious, but it means that the elder represents his or her congregation and Kirk Session at Presbytery level and represents the Presbytery to the Kirk Session and congregation. If elders enter into the business of the Presbytery and speak up in debates they ensure that the Presbytery is representing their Kirk Session and congregation. Equally, if they discuss with the Kirk Session how and why decisions were made, whether agreeing with them or not, they have properly represented the Presbytery to their Kirk Session. The gulf that can sometimes appear between Presbytery and Kirk Session is thus bridged.

The members of Presbytery are detailed in **Standing Orders A pg.1-2**

THE MODERATOR

Like other organisations, the Presbytery has office-bearers. The Moderator holds office for one year and acts as the impartial chairman of the Presbytery. When asked to speak on certain issues outside the Presbytery, the Moderator can only speak authoritatively about what Presbytery has decided. Anything else is the Moderator's own opinion and this should be made clear, especially to the Press.

The Moderator of any court of the Church can be a minister, a deacon or an elder. Gordon Presbytery was the first Presbytery to elect an elder to be Moderator. He was Algy Watson who was elected in 1996. Since then we have had two more elders and one deacon serve as Moderator. The Moderator is responsible for the conduct of worship at Presbytery. He/she is free to bring their own style and involve others if necessary. The Presbytery meeting is always constituted by prayer. All stand for the adjournment and closing Benediction.

The Presbytery stands when the Moderator enters. The Moderator's entry is announced by the cry of "Moderator", usually from the Presbytery Clerk. The Moderator may bow to the Presbytery, as the magistrate in civil courts and at the Westminster Parliament. The members of the Presbytery acknowledge this respectful greeting by returning the bow. This procedure has been a tradition in courts but is dying out now and will depend on the Moderator. Anyone leaving the Presbytery before the meeting is adjourned should, strictly, catch the eye of the Moderator and bow as leaving. (You see that happening at the General Assembly.)

THE CLERK

The Presbytery Clerk acts as secretary to the Presbytery and, as any other clerk, holds office 'at the pleasure of the court'. The Clerk of any of the courts of the Church facilitates the proper functioning of the court and supports the Moderator. Communication with and by the Presbytery is the Presbytery Clerk's responsibility, as with other clerks for their courts.

THE TREASURER

The Presbytery has a Treasurer who looks after the Presbytery's money. Claims for expenses should be submitted to the Treasurer. Travel claim forms are issued at the September meeting and may be submitted at any time.

The Presbytery has no source of income apart from that given by congregations. Each congregation in the Presbytery pays an annual assessment to cover Presbytery costs and also the cost of professional building survey fees.

COMMITTEES

Courts often appoint committees to do specific work. They then report to the whole court. Committees do not decide for the court, but make recommendations. Gordon Presbytery remits to its committees powers to deal with routine matters and to carry out the general wish of the Presbytery without making repeated requests to the Presbytery. However, every decision has to be brought to the notice of the Presbytery.

Gordon Presbytery has seven Standing Committees (See the **Year Book**). These committees continue from year to year. The Nomination Committee, which is an ad hoc committee, nominates the members of the Standing Committees and the Moderator. Other ad hoc committees are appointed from time to time, usually to carry out special and specific functions.

CONVENERS

Each committee has a Convener. The Convener acts as chairman of the committee (even though the Moderator may be present), but can also make decisions and is not impartial. The Convener reports to Presbytery the findings and recommendations of the particular committee. Conveners usually serve for a four year period (See **Standing Orders H.3 pg.13**).

The Convener produces the committee's report and gets it into the hands of the Clerk for distribution before the Presbytery meets.

SUB-COMMITTEES

The Standing Committees may have any number of sub-committees. Sub-committees can also deal with business that is routine or carrying out the general wishes of the Presbytery. Normally the sub-committees only report to their respective Standing Committee, through their Convener. In some circumstances the sub-committee Conveners may report to the Presbytery, as part of their Standing Committee's report, where matters are complex and detailed.

The members of committees are detailed in **Standing Orders H pg.13ff** and the **Presbytery Year Book**.

Committee members are informed of the date, time and venue when a meeting is to take place. The Moderator, Clerk, and Business Committee Convener are members of all Standing Committees by virtue of their office, but they rarely attend committee meetings.

The debating procedure of committees is less formal than it is at a Presbytery meeting. However, the Convener's ruling is to be observed at any time the committee is meeting.

SEDERUNT

The Sederunt is simply a record taken of those members of the Presbytery who are present. Members of Presbytery indicate their attendance by signing the Sederunt sheet which is found on the table at the entrance to Presbytery.

It is only good manners to present an apology for absence, either in a letter, by a phone call or e-mail to the Clerk or by asking someone to enter the apology under the absent person's name on the Sederunt sheet.

CONDUCT OF BUSINESS

See **Standing Orders B. pg 2-3**

The Presbytery approves its own agenda or order of business. Strictly, no other matters can be added once the Presbytery has approved the order. When notice of the meeting is sent it will include an initial agenda. Sometimes this will be modified at the actual meeting, usually by additions.

REPORTS

See **Standing Orders D. pg. 3-4**

The Standing Committees report to the Presbytery. A report should be headed with the name and date of the Presbytery for which it is intended and the name of the committee from which it comes. Reports should be submitted in e-format whenever possible.

Reports are taken as read. Conveners do not read out the report at the meeting of the Presbytery. The Convener can add information that is more up-to-date than the report or outline matters in the report that need attention. Occasionally it may be necessary for a report, or part of a report, to be submitted for the first time at the Presbytery meeting. Preferably any late submission should also be in written form, but sometimes only a verbal report can be given.

Committee reports to Presbytery include a Deliverance, even if only as a motion that the Presbytery receives the report. A Deliverance can include any number of items that a committee wants the Presbytery to adopt. Motions in a Deliverance should be framed in such a way that when agreed by the Presbytery they read as coming from the Presbytery, even if it is the committee that is putting it forward. All decisions are made by the Presbytery. Deliverance items, or any other motions, should also contain sufficient information to be meaningful when recorded in the Minutes and read by total strangers to the meeting. The text of the report is not recorded in the Minute. However, copies of reports are filed by the Presbytery Clerk.

Rules of Debate are detailed in **Standing Orders G. pg 9ff**

If any motion calls for action, the motion should make clear who is intended to act. To instruct certain action makes it a *must*. If the court wants the Clerk to do something, for example, write a letter, then the Clerk, as a servant of the court, should be instructed to write the letter. It is not impolite to do this and it gives the Clerk the power to say that any action was an instruction. *Urging* action expresses a strong desire and expectation that action is to be taken without going so far as to *instruct* it. A lesser expectation of action is to *call* for action. If the Presbytery decides to do something, the motion should express that the Presbytery *resolved* to do such and such. If the Presbytery is to agree with an action or give approval of something that is already resolved (usually by another court) the Presbytery is said to *concur*.

The report that accompanies the Deliverance should give the members of Presbytery more information so as to help them to arrive at a decision. The usual aim is to make the committee's Deliverance the decision of the Presbytery. Members of Presbytery may move amendments, additions (addenda) or counter-motions to any motion in the committee's Deliverance. These must be seconded by another member of Presbytery. Additional motions may be added to the Deliverance. Presbytery cannot alter the committee's report, although it may reject the whole or part of a report. The first motion of a Deliverance should indicate that the Presbytery receives the report. The Presbytery can decide not to receive a report but this would come as a counter-motion.

Although Conveners do not read out their written reports at the Presbytery, they may when presenting a committee's report, orally give new information or emphasise specific matters given in the written report already circulated. The whole of the Convener's oral report should be given before the Presbytery comes to the Deliverance. After the report has been given the Moderator will first invite questions and comments then take the Presbytery through the motions of the Deliverance in order. Addenda, motions and counter-motions will be taken at this point. There may be a debate. Anyone speaking in the debate may only speak once. The Convener has the right to reply and close the debate. If the Convener agrees to any amendment or motion the Presbytery will be asked for agreement. This will be taken as a unanimous agreement with the Convener if no voiced dissent is made. Otherwise a vote will be taken with Presbyters standing to register their vote. Occasionally there is a secret ballot.

ORDER OF THE DAY

Occasionally the Presbytery may set an Order of the Day. This will be some specific matter of business that must come before the Presbytery at a specific time, no matter what other business is before the Presbytery at that time. An order of the day is usually made when other people have to appear before the Presbytery.

(See **Standing Orders G.1 pg.9**)

ADJOURNMENT

If business goes on for a long time the meeting may adjourn to another time. When the end of the business of a regular meeting of the Presbytery is reached, the Presbytery also adjourns (not closes) to meet at the next regular meeting called.

INSPECTION OF CONGREGATIONAL RECORDS

Every year Presbytery inspects the Records of all congregations to ensure that they are being kept properly. The Presbytery minute book is also inspected.

The Support & Services Committee organises this inspection at 6pm before the March meeting of Presbytery. The Property Committee inspects Property Registers.

Prior to the March meeting, a 'check list' is sent out to all members of Presbytery as a reminder of which books to bring.

PROPERTY

Presbytery, through the Property Committee has overall responsibility for the fabric of church-related buildings within its bounds. However, fabric matters may also involve: the General Trustees of the Church; the Committee on Church Art and Architecture; or the Church Law Department; coming under the authority of the General Assembly.

Presbytery Spending Limits

Spending limits currently stand at £5,000 for buildings under review and £15,000 for buildings currently expected to remain in use beyond the lifetime of the Presbytery Plan. Such limits were set by Presbytery at the October 2010 meeting following consultation by the Property Committee with General Trustees.

Repairs to Pipe Organs

In May 2001 it was agreed that any congregation which wanted to refurbish its pipe organ at a cost of over £7000 had to get Presbytery permission to proceed and had first to examine the feasibility of a digital organ replacement.

Property Inspections

Church property is inspected every 5 years. Every 10 years a professional surveyor must carry out this inspection. Work classified as urgent has to be attended to within a year, essential work within five years and desirable work attended to within ten years. A levy is paid each year by congregations to fund the 10 year professional surveys .

VACANCIES

When the minister of a charge dies or leaves, or is absent for more than six weeks, an Interim Moderator is appointed by Presbytery to take responsibility for that minister's charge. The Interim Moderator acts as the minister of that charge.

The Presbytery Vacancy Procedure Committee meets initially with the Kirk Session of the Vacant Charge. Subsequently the Vacancy Advisory Committee (three members of the Vacancy Procedure Committee) will meet with the Nomination Committee of the Congregation and help them to plan for the future.

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Each year in May, ministers, elders and deacons attend the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in Edinburgh. About one quarter of the Presbytery's charges are represented on a rotational basis.

The General Assembly passes Acts which have to be adhered to by the Church. These may be remitted to Presbyteries or Kirk Sessions for their consideration and views. If there are significant changes being proposed they are remitted to Presbyteries under the Barrier Act. Then the Presbyteries must decide about the change by a recorded vote of 'for' or 'against'. The whole matter must then be brought to the next Assembly. If the majority of Presbyteries and the second Assembly are in favour then the change can be made.

Presbyteries can overture the Assembly if they want to ask the Assembly to decide upon a matter or to take some action. Individuals, groups or even congregations can petition the Assembly or appeal against a Presbytery decision, for the judgement of the Assembly. There are other various judicial commissions to which these matters may come.

If you do not understand at any time ask for clarification. You should definitely do this before you vote at a meeting. The Clerk is always available to help you.

GLOSSARY TERMS

Ad hoc committee	A committee set up for one particular purpose and no other.
Addendum	A form of amendment that adds something to a motion or counter-motion.
Adherent	A person who has an active connection with a congregation in that he/she is involved in its life and worship, but who is not on the Communion roll.
Ad vitam aut culpam	Holding office for life unless removed because of some immoral action or professional malpractice. This Act was changed in 1972 and all ministers to whom it applied have now retired.
Amendment	Proposes some alteration that does not run counter to the main thrust of a motion or counter-motion.
Anent	About, concerning.
Articles Declaratory	State the Constitution of the Church of Scotland in spiritual matters.
Assistant Minister	An ordained minister who is an assistant to the minister of the parish.
Associate Minister	An ordained minister appointed for a fixed tenure to share the workload of the parish minister.
Attestation	The authenticating of a document by the signature of officials.
Auxiliary Minister	A person ordained for life to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament exercisable under supervision on a part-time and non-stipendiary basis.
Barrier Act	Enacted in 1697, to guard against a General Assembly agreeing to legislation without adequate consideration of a proposal. If a proposal would affect some change in the Church's doctrine, worship, discipline or government it must be sent down to Presbyteries for their consideration.
Chaplains	Ministers or deacons who serve in places such as schools, hospitals, armed forces and the workplace.
Charge	A parish or group of parishes served by a minister.
Corresponding member	A person elected by Presbytery who has the right to attend all meetings and speak on any matter, but does not have the right to vote.
Linkage	A group of parishes that share a minister but have separate Kirk Sessions and Congregational Boards.
Union	A group of parishes that share a minister and have a joint Kirk Session and Congregational Board.
Commission of Assembly	Each General Assembly appoints this body. It numbers 10% of the membership of the General Assembly, including at least one minister and one elder from each Presbytery. It deals with: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• matters too urgent to wait until the next General Assembly• all Appeals, Dissents and Complaints, except those referred to the Judicial Commission• all References in cases of readjustments• any other Cases referred to it.
Congregational Board	Under the Model Constitution it deals with the temporal affairs of the congregation.
Counter-motion	It proposes a course of action very different from that of the original proposal.
Courts	These are bodies that exercise government in the Church of Scotland: General Assembly, Presbytery, Kirk Session.

De Fidele Administratione	An oath taken on appointment to an office eg. Session Clerk (“I promise to carry out faithfully the duties of Session Clerk.”)
Deacon	This is a person ordained by Presbytery to diaconal ministry ie. one of service and enabling; bridge building between Church & Community; encouraging ecumenical and World Church involvement. Many Deacons work in teams alongside a Parish Minister, sharing in worship, pastoral care etc. Some Deacons work as Hospital & Prison Chaplains, Chaplains in the Armed Forces, Workplace Chaplaincy, Professional Counselling, Crossreach and Creative Arts.
Diaconate	This is the collective name for a group of deacons. All Church of Scotland deacons become members of the diaconate of the Church of Scotland when they are ordained.
Deliverance Demission	Recommendations of a report upon which Presbytery votes. When a minister leaves his/her charge with the agreement of Presbytery.
Dissent	When a decision is reached after a vote anyone dissatisfied with the decision can ask for his/her dissent to be recorded. Others may also wish to dissent but must do so there and then. No other action follows. If more action is required the person must ‘dissent and complain’. The dissent and complaint has to be lodged with the Clerk within ten days following the judgment of the Court.
Edict	A public notice which has come from a Court of the Church and is signed by an official when it has been read.
Equalising Elder Formula	Elders elected by Presbytery to balance the minister/elder ratio. A set form of words, for example the Confession of Faith required of office-bearers.
General Trustees	A corporation established in 1921 to hold property and investments belonging to the Church of Scotland and the Committees of the General Assembly.
Homologate	To authorize or confirm something.
In Hunc Effectum Meeting	Deals only with a particular item or items of Presbytery business that are known in advance as requiring to be dealt with before the next meeting for ordinary business.
Induction	A service organized by Presbytery to introduce an ordained minister to a charge.
Interim Minister	An experienced minister who is appointed for a specific time during a vacancy to assist a congregation to overcome particular problems and to help them move forward.
Interim Moderator	A minister appointed by Presbytery to oversee a parish during a vacancy or prolonged illness, maternity leave etc. of the parish minister.
Lay Person	Anyone who is not ordained as a minister or deacon. This term is used in common parlance but is not used in any Act of the General Assembly.
Laying on the table	A document placed on the table for people to look at after the meeting.
Locum Minister	An ordained minister appointed by Presbytery to work part-time in a parish during a vacancy.
Ministries and Mission Allocation	Money from parishes to the central fund to cover Ministers’ stipends and the wider work of the church.

Model Deed	The constitution of a church with a Kirk Session and Congregational Board.
Ordained Local Ministry	A new form of non-stipendiary ministry. An Ordained Local Minister is a person who has been ordained for life, to a Ministry of Word and Sacrament exercisable on a non-stipendiary and normally a part-time basis, supporting the Ordained National Ministry of the Church.
Order of the Day	An item of business that is to be taken at a certain time on the Agenda. When the time arrives the Court may continue with the business it is dealing with up until 15 minutes after the time for the Order of the Day. At that point that item of business must be adjourned until after the Order of the Day has been completed.
Ordination	A service which sets apart a person to a public Church office. Presbytery ordains new ministers and deacons. The minister and Kirk Session ordain new elders.
Overture	A call for legislation brought before a superior court of the Church.
	Practicing Certificate A certificate issued by Presbytery to Ministers or Deacons who are not in a charge or an appointment to authorize them to carry out the functions of their ministry in the Church of Scotland. These certificates are valid for one year and must then be renewed by the Presbytery.
Presbyterianism	The form of government in the Church of Scotland.
Presbytery Elder	An elder elected by their Kirk Session to represent them at Presbytery.
	Pro Re Nata Meeting A meeting held to deal only with particular business that has arisen unexpectedly in the interval between meetings for ordinary business and that requires to be dealt with before the next ordinary business meeting.
Quod Omnia	In regard to all matters, both sacred and civil.
Quod Sacra	In respect of sacred (ie. church) matters.
	Quorum The minimum number of people who need to be present to constitute a meeting.
Reader	A lay person who has been set apart by a Presbytery to an office which qualifies him/her to carry out duties within the Church of Scotland which are principally concerned with leading public worship.
Sacraments	Services of communion and baptism.
Sist	To interrupt a procedure temporarily.
Standing Orders	Describe and legislate how business is conducted at Presbytery and the General Assembly.
Stipend	The annual income of an ordained minister.
Temporary Minister	A minister appointed to a parish for a limited period of time.
Translation	Movement of ministers from one charge to another.
Unitary Constitution	The constitution of a church with a Kirk Session responsible for all church matters.