

The Church of Scotland - Article 4

Structure

The Church of Scotland is Presbyterian in its structure, governed by a system of local, regional and national 'courts' or councils.

'Presbyterian' government refers to the sharing of authority in the church by an equal number of 'elders' (elected from the membership of the church) and ministers. Both are ordained for their special tasks.

The local council is the Kirk Session, consisting of elders and the minister.

The regional council is the Presbytery, which looks after all the churches in the area.

The national council is known as the *General Assembly* and convenes each year in Edinburgh. This meeting establishes the laws which govern the church and the priorities for the coming year.

The Assembly represents all presbyteries. In between meetings its work is carried out by several councils covering such areas as mission, education, social services, worship, doctrine and finance.

The most public position in the Church of Scotland is that of Moderator who chairs the *General Assembly*. It is an honorary (which means unpaid) and elected role held for a year.

The Moderator makes local and international visits during the ensuing year, encouraging the church and representing the church to wider society.

Church and State

The *General Assembly* used to be known as the 'nearest thing to a Scottish parliament'. Now that the Scottish Parliament is re-established, the Church, along with other churches, keeps in close touch with parliamentarians and contributes to the discussion on the issues of the day.

Unlike the Church of England, the Church of Scotland does not have to take orders from Parliament. Following the Church of Scotland Act of 1921, the Church was given freedom from interference in spiritual matters.

The same Act acknowledged the Church as 'a national church' with a responsibility for providing a parochial ministry to the people throughout the whole country.

The reigning monarch is not seen as head of the Church as in England. Nevertheless, she is given a special place in that she attends or is represented at each *General Assembly*.

This is the fourth part of a series of articles sourced from the BBC on the Church of Scotland that will appear in The Parishioner over the coming months.