

THE PRESBYTERY OF AYR 1581 - 1981

The Presbytery Today (1981)

The years have brought changes in circumstances and in methods but the Presbytery continues to exercise its traditional functions in the care of the Parishes within the Bounds, ensures that the Gospel is faithfully preached, exercises oversight of the work of the Congregations, encourages thorough education in the faith and tempers justice with mercy in cases where discipline is required.

As a Presbytery of the Church of Scotland— of the Holy Catholic or Universal Church, worshipping one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit" — the Court re-affirms at each Ordination or Induction of a Minister its belief in "the Gospel of the sovereign grace and love of God, wherein through Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord, incarnate, crucified and risen, He freely offers to all men, upon repentance and faith, the forgiveness of sins, renewal by the Holy Spirit and eternal life". Each Minister is Ordained by the laying on of hands of those to whom it doth belong and each Ordinand or Inductee is required to acknowledge the Presbyterian form of government of this Church to be "agreeable to the word of God". Elders, subscribing to the same formula as to faith and government, are Ordained or Admitted to the Eldership by their own Kirk Sessions and serve in Presbytery when commissioned thereto by the Kirk Session or by the Court itself.

The Bounds of the Presbytery extend from Troon and Dundonald in the North to Ballantrae and Barrhill in the South, and to New Cumnock and Muirkirk in the East. In 1981 statistics are recorded as follows:— "Number of Congregations, 48; Communicant Membership 37,841; Elders 1,755; Sunday School scholars 4,815; Bible Class scholars, 1,242; Senior Youth Fellowship members, 133; Uniformed Organisations, girls 2,538, boys, 2,343.

Christian Liberty, £875,548; Mission and Service, Allocated £94,210, Received £91,025; Average Giving per member, £22.95 per annum".

The Statutory meetings of Presbytery are held each month with the exceptions of January, July and August. The Moderator (*primus inter pares*) presides and the regular business is discussed under Committee Reports. The detailed work is done by ten Standing Committees and two ad hoc Committees — Doctrine and Students for the Ministry. Relationship with the General Assembly and its Committees are maintained by about one quarter of the Court's membership being commissioned to Assembly each year by each Convenor being a member of the appropriate Assembly Committee. Each Convenor reports to Presbytery on the work of his Committee and thus members share in making decisions as to policy and action.

The Presbytery meets annually for Holy Communion and for Conference on matters affecting the life and work of the Church. Recent subjects have been, the Pastoral care of the Ministry and Publicity for the Church's message.

The Presbytery, subject itself to Synod and General Assembly, exercises oversight upon the Kirk Sessions and Congregations within the bounds. Such oversight normally takes the form of two Quinquennial visitations to each Church and Parish; one by the Benefice and Fabric Committee to inspect and make recommendations or give instructions as to the maintenance of the Church and Manse buildings; the other by the Oversight Committee or its nominees to meet with the Minister, Kirk Session and Financial Board and to share worship with the Congregation. The purpose of these

visits is not inquisitorial but rather to share successes and discuss difficulties. Matters which require further examination are normally referred to the Moderator's Committee for more confidential discussion.

At this time the Presbytery, in common with other Presbyteries through-out the Church, has two particular problems in the life and witness of the Church — a serious decline in membership with a shortage of students studying for the Ministry— and a decline in the number of scholars in Sunday School with the added difficulty of recruiting adequately trained staff.

The decline in Church membership, for various reasons, has involved the Presbytery in long and serious talks with many Congregations about the future and has resulted in a number of Unions and Linkages. Such re-adjustments are not entered into lightly and it is with deep regret that Church buildings, which have nurtured many in the faith and have housed the prayers and praises of generations of faithful souls, become disused. However, it is noted with thanksgiving that the re-adjustment results in a new identity of corporate worship which is stronger for having as its heritage the woven strands of the rich traditions of each of its integral parts; and, in Charges where Linkages are involved, a village may well regret that the Minister is no longer 'resident' but the new relationship with a neighbouring Church and Parish in the form of a shared Minister can be of mutual assistance and lead to further possibilities.

The problem of recruitment and training of staff has been undertaken by the Education Committee of Presbytery and, with the help of the General Assembly's Department of Education, it has been possible to set up a resource centre where ideas can be shared and advice given. The Presbytery are fortunate in having the services of part-time Advisers who each take responsibility for their own part of the work, Adult Education, Youth Work and Sunday School.

Other aspects of the work of Presbytery are reflected in the use of a number of speakers on the varied work of the Church at Statutory Meetings of the Court throughout the year and in the activities of all the Committees. The detail of the Church's Foreign Mission work is brought to each Congregation by the personal relationship of the Partner Plan; the Home Mission Committee is continually vigilant for opportunities of evangelism and service; The Social Responsibility Committee has its immediate concern in the Church's Homes within the bounds and is alert to influences on the well-being of the people; the Church and Nation Committee is diligent in presenting national issues for debate from a thoroughly researched background; the Students Committee continues its efforts to present to Congregations and schools the claims of the Ministry as a life-work of service and fulfilment and exercises a careful assessment of possible candidates. The Committees on Maintenance of the Ministry and Stewardship and Budget have functions which differ in many ways but they each deal with matters spiritual and financial which involve national vision, congregational understanding and individual commitment.

The Presbytery of Ayr has a history of concern for the people and for the propagation of the Gospel in their midst. That history continues to be made and whereas there are indications that the Church's word is ignored in these times, it is to be noted that when the Presbytery communicates its opinion on any matter the authorities concerned invariably reply with interest and courtesy.

As a Court of the Church in place of a Bishop, the Presbytery of Ayr continues to show its concern for all within the bounds and performs its tasks with due regard to that human understanding which comes only from the heart of the Eternal.