

## HOW TO SPEAK PRESBYTERIAN

What is all this Presbyterian lingo?

It has been estimated that the majority of the members of the Presbyterian Church in most countries where you find folk who “speak Presbyterian”, did not grow up in the denomination. For readers in that category, here is a short rundown of the lingo you are likely to hear in a Presbyterian church that you may not have heard somewhere else.

This lingo is used by Presby’s - whether they live in Scotland, the Americas , somewhere in Africa, Asia or any other continent (or island).

### **The Lord's Table or “The Holy Table” or just “The Table”.**

This is the table at the front of the sanctuary that holds the bread and the wine for the Lord’s Supper. Sometimes other items are placed on this table, such as the Bible, a cross, or candles.

The reason this is called a Lord's Table rather than an altar, is that on the night in which he was betrayed, when Jesus was eating the Passover meal with his disciples, they were sitting at a table (*Luke 22:14*).

An altar is a place for making sacrifices. In the Reformed tradition we believe that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was sufficient once for all. This sacrifice does not have to be repeated with a Mass or other Communion tradition on an altar.

### **The Lord's Supper**

This is the meal we share from the Lord's Table. Some churches call this meal Communion, or the Eucharist.

Eucharist is from the Greek word for "thanksgiving," which is what Jesus did before he gave the bread and wine to his disciples.

### **Manse**

This is a house owned by a congregation that they let the minister live in. In some denominations this is called the "parsonage" or “rectory”. The word manse comes from the Latin word mansio, which means "dwelling."

### **Session**

The group of people, elected by the congregation, who make the decisions for the running of the local church, is called Session. In Scotland they say: Kirksession. In some other churches that do not speak Presbyterian, this group of people may be called the "church council."

### **Elders**

The session is composed of elders. This doesn't have to do with age so much, as those who are considered competent and wise enough to make good decisions. There are two kinds of elders - "ruling elders" and "teaching elders." The ruling elders come from the congregation. The teaching elder is the congregational pastor. This person is called a teaching elder because they have to go to a lot of school to get the education to preach and teach properly. After an elder - ruling or teaching - is elected or called, he or she will be “ordained and inducted an elder” of the church.

The teaching elder is often also called the Minister, or the "Minister of the Word and Sacrament." This is no “title” but rather a “job description” or “office”.

Often the church may refer to the Minister as “the reverent So and So”, which aims to respect the “office of preaching and teaching” he or she holds in the church. A minister should not be addressed as “Reverent” as it is an adjective and not a title, but rather on his or her first name - if you know them that well - or as “Mr or Mrs or Ms So and So, if you prefer to be formal. A minister is also never called “a reverent” because it does not make linguistic sense and does not describe his or her office at all.

Neither our ruling nor teaching elders have “titles” which is a secular or “worldly” concept with no precedent in Scripture. They “hold an office” in the church, we would say, as the “office of elder” or “presbyter” is found in

the New Testament. The office of the teaching elder entails to be a Servant (Latin: Minister) of the Word and Sacrament.

### **Presbytery**

The Presbytery is made up of a group of churches - usually in a certain geographical area.

The Presbytery meeting includes "presbyters," both ruling and teaching elders, who gather to make decisions affecting the Presbytery. By having their representatives gather together as a group, congregations both support each other and are held accountable to each other. It is also said that both the congregations and the elders - ruling and teaching - are under the "care and discipline" of Presbytery.

### **Moderator**

This is the person who runs a Session of elders, a Presbytery or a General Assembly meeting. In a club or other gathering he or she would be called the "chairperson" or perhaps "president."

While the moderator of a board of management in the church is usually one of the managers, the moderator of Session is a teaching elder. The moderator of a Presbytery or General Assembly may be either a teaching elder or a ruling elder.

### **Manual of Law and Procedures**

This is the rulebook for the Presbyterian Church. It contains the guidelines for church life, including structure, worship and collective action. It not only tells us how to do things but also explains why. It was developed and can be modified by the General Assembly, with the ratification of a majority of the Presbyteries.

### **Order of Service**

This describes the way in which a certain service is conducted. You may also find an order for The Lord's Supper, Baptism, Confirmation etc. It may also be called a "liturgy".

### **Call to Worship**

The meeting of God's people is constituted by reading from Holy Scripture at the beginning of the Order of service. This reading is also called the "Call to Worship". Other churches may "open" the service with a prayer, but Presbyterians, believing that God calls or invites us to worship Him, wants "God to speak first", calling on us to worship Him, before we address Him.

### **Intimations**

Presbyterians for an unknown reason prefer to refer to the announcements made in church to be called "Intimations". They would therefore also "intimate" that this or that would be happening in the church.

### **Edict**

This is an official or very formal intimation, for example that someone was called (elected) to be the elder or the minister of the church, or that a new congregation will be constituted, etc.

### **Call a Minister**

When a congregation elected someone to be their Minister, they "called" him or her. The minister must accept the call and after the call was approved by Presbytery, he or she will be "inducted" as the congregation's pastor and as the moderator of their Session and member of the Presbytery. If it is his or her first congregation, the minister will be "ordained and inducted".

### **Stipend**

The "salary" paid to a minister, is called a stipend. We also refer to the "emoluments" of a minister, which would include arrangements about his/her stipend, housing, transport costs, leave, retirement's premiums etc.

### **Constituted Congregation**

This is a congregation that has the right to call a minister after it has subscribed to the Law and Procedures of the church. A congregation not quite ready for such a responsibility may be a "transitional church" and may have a minister appointed by Presbytery to be moderator of their Session and the congregational pastor.

## **General Assembly**

Every second year all the Presbyteries in a country or countries in a region, elect “commissioners” or representatives to a meeting of the General Assembly. The General Assembly makes decisions for the church as a whole. This is where Presbyterians become a national or regional rather than a local church.

## **Commissioners**

These are the folks, a proportionate number of ministers and elders, elected by Session or the Presbyteries to go to either Presbytery or to General Assembly.

Rather than being instructed in how to vote at the Presbytery or Assembly by their Session or Presbytery, the commissioners as a body seek to discern the will of the Holy Spirit.

## **Election**

No, this doesn't refer to how commissioners are selected to go to the General Assembly. It is a theological term that means God makes the first move in acting to redeem sinners. People within the covenant of faith are called "the elect." Reformed (or Presbyterian) theology teaches that we are incapable of saving ourselves from our sins, and that God "elects" or "chooses" to save us.

## **Predestination**

This word, similar to election, means that our election by God occurred not only before we were born, but so far back in time that it happened "before the creation of the world" (see *Ephesians 1:4*).

## **Calvin and Knox**

In the Presbyterian Church you may hear "Calvin this-and-that," as well as "Knox this-and-the-other." John Calvin was a French Reformer who followed in the footsteps of Martin Luther in the 1500s. He gave us the theological foundations for our church, so we have named a lot of things after him. John Knox was a Scottish preacher who brought the teachings of John Calvin to Scotland and got the Presbyterian Church going in that country, so we have named a lot of things after him too. The Church of Scotland was the first church to be called a Presbyterian Church, because it was run by "Presbyters" or elders, rather than by bishops and archbishops.

Most "Reformed" or "Calvinistic" churches, not having the word "Presbyterian" in their Church's name, would also refer to their form of Church governance as a "Presbyterian form of Church governance".

This is a start to understanding Presbyterian lingo. If you hear a word that is new to you and want to know what it means, ask your teaching elder (pastor or minister) to explain it to you. And don't let him or her off the hook until you have an answer!

## **HOW TO SPEAK AFRIKAANS PRESBYTERIAN!**

The Lord's Table - Die Tafel van die Here

The Lord's Supper - Die Nagmaal (of Avondmaal) van die Here

Manse - Pastorie

Session - Sessie (Vergadering van Ouderlinge)

Session Clerk - Sessieklerk of Skriba

Presbytery - Presbiterium (Klassis of Classis)

General Assembly - Algemene Kerkvergadering

Elder - Ouderling

Ruling Elder - Regerende ouderling

Teaching elder - Lerende ouderling of kortweg "leraar"

Minister of the Word - Bedienaar van die Woord

The Reverent So-and-So - (Die) Eerwaarde So-en-So

Moderator - Moderator

Intimations - Afkondigings

Edict - Edik

Order of service - Erediensorde of Diensorde (Liturgie of formulier)

Manual of Law and Procedure - Handleiding by die Kerkorde en Prosedures

Polity - Kerkorde

Constituted Church - Gekonstitueerde Kerk (of Gemeente)

Call to Worship - Oproep tot aanbidding

Call a Minister - Beroep 'n leraar / dienaar van die Woord en Sakrament

Call an Elder - Beroep 'n ouderling

Ordination and Induction - Ordening en bevestiging

Stipend - traktement

Commissioners - Afgevaardigdes

Election - Uitverkiesing

Predestination - Predestinasie

**John Calvin - Johannes Calvyn**