

PRESBYTERY OF EDINBURGH

CHURCH WITHOUT WALLS

Starting with relationships

The presbytery appointed a special committee in September 2001 to "establish a process for consideration of the Church without Walls report"

The committee took some time to allow members to get to know one another, read and reflect upon the content of the Church without Walls report, and reflect upon his/her own experience of and impression of the current structures and working practices of presbytery. Over several months, individual committee members prepared and submitted papers for the group to use as a basis for continuing discussion and reflection.

The committee understands the current responsibility of presbytery in relation to Church without Walls to be two-fold:

1. to facilitate, encourage, oversee consideration and response to Church without Walls by congregations within the bounds,
2. to consider and act upon the implications of Church without Walls for the structure and working practices of presbytery itself.

To date, the committee has

- Published a resource leaflet. This is a preliminary attempt to encourage the sharing of useful resources and experience to assist congregations in responding to the Church without Walls initiative.
- Organised a day conference to enable presbytery members and others to consider the possible implications of the Church without Walls initiative for the structures and working practices of presbytery itself.

Reforming structures

The committee reached widespread agreement that the current structures and working practices of presbytery are unsatisfactory, and that the Church without Walls initiative offers a challenge and an opportunity to address these deficiencies.

Reflecting upon the day conference we were disappointed by the relatively poor response from presbytery members [total attendance 40] but were greatly encouraged by the enthusiastic way in which those attending engaged with the issues.

The conference heard two excellent presentations from Peter Neilson and David Cormack. These stimulated much thought and discussion in the group sessions. Each group provided written feedback to the committee and this was supplemented by some written submissions from individuals who had attended.

The feedback shows that there is recognition of the strengths to be found in the current structures and working practices but that there is also a clear sense of the need for improvement and development through change, both short term and long term. Analysis of the feedback has led us to identify certain areas where change is commonly seen as desirable. As a consequence the committee brought the following proposals for change, all but one of which were accepted:

- Music/worship: Use should be made of musical instruments to support and lead singing at presbytery meetings.
- Written reports to presbytery: There is a strong feeling that much time is wasted and frustration caused by the needless oral repetition of reports and deliverances which are

already printed. There is a need for much greater discipline [enforced by the Moderator] to ensure that those presenting reports simply refer to the report in print, speak to any last minute variations thereto and then move the deliverance, without reading it out.

Presbyters, in turn need to ensure that they have read the papers properly beforehand and have prepared questions etc.

- Obituaries: Obituaries should be printed in the papers and not presented orally at presbytery meetings. Those deceased could be remembered in the opening prayers. (This proposal was defeated).
- Roving microphone: Use should be made of a roving microphone to allow members to speak from their place in debates and discussions while still being audible.
- Maiden speeches: Consideration should be given to the possibility of new members introducing themselves to presbytery in the course of their first year. This might help some people to overcome the difficulty of speaking at meetings.
- Superintendence: Members of some congregations might be invited to give a short presentation to presbytery [of no more than 5 minutes] regarding one aspect of the life of their congregation.
- Committee remits: The Business Committee should be instructed to ensure that committee remits are clearly expressed in writing and published annually for all members of presbytery, that committee remits are reviewed annually, and that there is a regular review of the number and size of committees of presbytery.
- Induction of new members: There should be an annual induction course for new members of presbytery [initiated by the Clerk], explaining the structures and practices.
- Communication: The Business Committee should be instructed annually to prepare and publish an up to date directory of email addresses for presbytery members, congregations, session clerks etc, to establish, as a matter of urgency, a website which is properly resourced and managed, and to encourage and facilitate greater use of modern communication techniques at meetings.
- Agenda priorities: The Business Committee should consider ways in which business might be arranged to allow presbyters to be engaged, at an earlier point in meetings, in debate and discussion of spiritual and practical issues concerning the future mission of the Church within the bounds.

Several other issues were raised at the conference and in the feedback. The Church without Walls Committee needs further time for reflection and discussion before bringing other recommendations. Examples of issues raised are:

Area groupings: The need to give a much more established place to the area groupings within the structure of presbytery. If we are committed to them then they need to be given greater power and responsibility, including perhaps an allocation of funds. They should be required to present their own plans to presbytery engaging with issues of vision, strategy, outreach, resourcing, ministry etc. Communication links between area groups and presbytery need to be improved.

Business / Issues: The need to change the culture away from the current dominance of "business items" to focus much more on "issues". Issues of contemporary and future importance to the life and work of the Church might be introduced in a number of ways, including through area groupings, and then discussed in conference or "courtyard" sessions within meetings.

The role and function of presbytery: The need for thought to be given to establishing ways in which the role and function of presbytery itself can be kept under regular review.

Contact: [Michael A. J. Gossip](#)

Updated May 2003