



Accessing Central Support

What do you think of when you hear the words 'one two one'? Does your heart lift? Do you immediately conjure up a vision of friendly knowledgeable people, offering information, advice and support and keen to solve your problem for you? Or do you have a more negative reaction? The Church of Scotland national offices at 121 George Street, Edinburgh and at Charis House (and a few other places in Scotland too) don't always get the best press in our own church communities, but we're on a mission to change that.



The staff - about 200 in the national offices and another sixty or so in CrossReach at Charis House - are employed to support and serve congregations and presbyteries in the wider Church. If office bearers have a Church question, they can get an answer from the staff at the national offices.

From data protection to food hygiene, from voting rules for Kirk Sessions to pensions for organists, from hall lets to accounts preparation: where on earth do you start to get the information you need? And how do you get it simply and quickly when you have other things to do in your congregational life as well as in your life and service in the wider world?

The answer is, usually, to look first at the published sources of information. The most up-to-date and comprehensive is the Church of Scotland website (address given below). It is worth your while to spend time browsing the site and bookmarking the pages that cover topics which are particularly relevant for you, whether that be safeguarding, ecumenical resources, dealing with the media or paying your Ministries and Mission contributions. Don't forget to share that information with new office bearers when they come on board.

You may also find relevant information in the Church of Scotland Yearbook, published annually (ask your minister for a look at her or his copy); it contains useful information on the vacancy process, for example. If you cannot easily find the information you need from these sources, then call the national offices on 0131 225 5722 during normal office hours. It would help the switchboard operator if you were able to describe the problem quite accurately - without breaching any confidences - so we can cut down on any frustration you may feel as you are passed around a number of officials. It helps, for example, if you can say you need information on fees for organists (you'll be correctly directed to the Worship Development Worker in Mission and Discipleship) rather than asking more vaguely about 'payments' (which might see you put through to an understandably



baffled Accounts Assistant in the Stewardship and Finance Department). You can use the contact form (address given below), if it is after hours or you want to take time to frame your question carefully.

Remember CrossReach too. They are very keen to offer advice and support to congregational office bearers engaged in the direct provision of care. So, if you are running a lunch club or a dementia project, then get in touch on 0131 657 2000 or email info@crossreach.org.uk.

And then there are, regrettably, the times of difficulty in local congregations when, for example, relationships break down. How do office bearers get, not just information, but reassurance and support to carry them through such challenges? The first source of such support is obviously your minister and perhaps your Presbytery would also be able to offer assistance. Your Session Clerk should be able to put you in touch with the right person at Presbytery. But, if that's not possible for a whole range of reasons, then get in touch with either Secretary to the Council of Assembly or the Principal Clerk at the national offices. We should be able to put you in touch with the right person to help. Your congregation may also be able to access Place for Hope, a Church-supported charity that helps congregations navigate conflict and manage difficult conversations.

Further reading and resources

www.churchofscotland.org.uk/contact_us/contact_form

www.crossreach.org.uk