

# Counting Down “Top Ten Reasons Why Presbyterian Government Works”

### 10. Something old

- a) First Book of Discipline—1560: Calvin’s four offices of pastor/bishop, teacher/doctor, elder and deacon were instituted.
- b) Second Book of Discipline—1578: The titles of ‘bishop’, ‘pastor’, and ‘presbyter’ all referred to the same office. The offices of “teaching” and “ruling” elders were accepted. Elders are elected for life.
- c) The Form of Presbyterial Church Government—1945: The role of the presbytery in examining candidates and the “call” process were developed with greater congregational participation.

All these historical documents have shaped our church government.

### 9. Something new

A **remit** is a proposal for something new to happen to the law or doctrine of the church. It is sent to presbyteries for their approval or disapproval. Remits usually result from overtures [proposals for change from a lower court to a higher court]. This is how the law of our church grows and develops into something new.

### 8. Something borrowed

The roots of Presbyterianism lie in the European Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

### 7. Something blue

- a) The Book of Forms: The constitution of our denomination (royal blue cover).
- b) The Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly: The Annual Report of the highest court of our denomination (pale blue cover).

### 6. Reformed and reforming

*“The church is Christ together with his people, called both to worship and serve him in all of life” (Living Faith, 7.1.1).*

*“The church is in constant need of reform because of the failure and sin which mark its life in every age” (Living Faith, 7.1.6).*

We are “Protest-ants.” This branch of the Body of Christ was a re-formation of the church based on new interpretations of Holy Scripture, with greater emphasis on the love and grace of God and the role of the laity in church life. We understand that the Body of Christ is not static, but a growing, evolving institution, guided by the Holy Spirit.

### 5. We are what we are

*Presbuteros* is the Greek word for “elder.” This is the root word for “Presbyterian.” Ours is an elder-based system of church government. Ruling elders and teaching elders are ordained using the same vows and are set apart—not above or below—for ministry and service within our denomination.

## Elders' Toolbox

### 4. **Lean and mean**

Lean indicates we are cautious with the resources at our disposal, choosing carefully and prayerfully those things that require our attention and input. We strive to be good stewards of God's gifts.

Mean can be defined as "in the middle." We are a mainstream denomination. We are neither conservative nor liberal; we are "in the middle of the road." On any given issue, our church may take a stand that is perceived as more conservative leaning, or more liberal leaning.

### 3. **A house with many rooms / a coat of many colours**

Observe or participate in almost any court of our denomination, and you will see a wide variety of people—theologically, culturally and racially. This is one of the strengths of our denomination—that we are able to bring together people with a wide diversity of backgrounds and gifts, and to enable and empower them to work together.

### 2. **Not a democracy**

Although ruling elders are elected and teaching elders are chosen by congregational vote and presbytery decision, they do not vote on behalf of their congregation, session, presbytery or synod, but based on their own belief and conscience. The Presbyterian Church in Canada is not a democracy but a theocracy:

*All ministries of the Church proceed from and are sustained by the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our Prophet, Priest, and King, the Minister of the covenant of grace.... The Presbyterian Church in Canada is bound only to Jesus Christ, the Church's King and Head (from the Preamble to the Ordination of a Minister, approved 1970, revised 1992 & 1998).*

### 1. **Scriptural**

*"The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as the written Word of God, testifying to Christ the living Word, are the canon of all doctrine, by which Christ rules our faith and life" (from the Preamble to the Ordination of a Minister).*

There are 37 references to "elder" in the New Testament. From a Scriptural point of view, in the early Christian Church, the chosen elders were the ones who met, thought, and reasoned together with the apostles. Together, they lead and guided the Church.

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