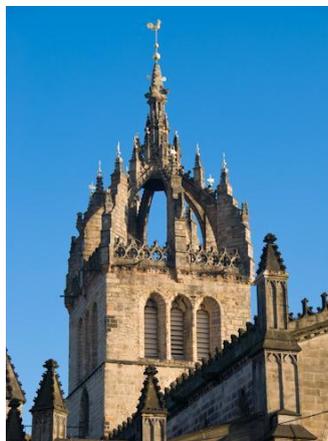


St Giles' Cathedral: The High Kirk of Edinburgh

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A brief introduction

St Giles' is the historic town church of the city of Edinburgh. Christian worship has been offered on the site of St Giles' for at least 900 years and the church holds a unique position in the development of Christianity in Scotland. The colourful history of St Giles' includes aspects of catholic and reformed styles of worship and governance, reflecting different stages of the church's life over the centuries – as Cathedral, as High Kirk of the town and now as a city centre church with a gathered congregation, and a unique role to play in the life of the city and the nation.

St Giles' is often regarded as the “mother church of Presbyterianism”. In keeping with successive editions of the Church of Scotland *Book of Common Order*, its worship is both catholic and reformed, with resonance for Christian people of many different denominations. The liturgy employed in worship at St Giles' is widely valued not only by regular worshippers but by many from all over the world, of different faiths and none. The people of St Giles' hold especially important: -

- Broad theological thinking within a traditional catholic or universal liturgy
- Challenging and thought-provoking preaching
- A tradition of Holy Communion celebrated every Sunday as well as during the week
- A rich tradition of inspiring music from across the centuries
- A worshipping environment which encourages all to feel at home, irrespective of belief
- The number and variety of services which take place every week
- An openness to all, every day of the year
- A beautiful and historic church building
- The church's central and valued role in the life of the city and the nation
- A concern for world issues and a commitment to ecumenism

The people of St Giles'

St Giles' is a gathered city centre congregation.

The parish boundary marks out a small area of the city centre, roughly from the Grassmarket and the Cowgate in the south, to the platforms of Waverley railway station in the north, and from Castlehill in the west to the Netherbow in the east. Within that small square boundary are 918 households and a population of 1,856 (*Presbytery of Edinburgh figures*).



The congregational roll on the other hand contains around 450 members, almost all of whom live outside the parish boundary, but who come to St Giles' to participate in its life and worship for many and varied reasons. Nevertheless, the congregational roll does not provide a strong indicator of the composition of the congregation on any given Sunday. Members sit alongside many other regular worshippers, students, tourists and regular and occasional visitors.

The people of St Giles' also include more than the worshipping community. Well over a million people come into St Giles' every year, many of whom come as tourists, but all of whom are free to experience as much or as little as they wish. All are welcomed by a team of over 100 volunteer guides – many of whom have no other active connection with St Giles', but all of whom are committed to promoting its life and history.

Worship



At the heart of the worship of God at St Giles' is the value attached to thought-provoking prayer and challenging preaching, within the context of a broad theological outlook, and grounded in a traditional catholic or universal liturgy. Services are greatly enhanced by a strong tradition of high quality, inspiring music as part of two of the Sunday morning services. A distinctive element of worship at St Giles' is the custom of celebrating Communion with the people gathering in a circle around the Holy Table.

Every week at St Giles' there are routinely eleven acts of worship: -

On Sundays

08.00 – Service of Holy Communion with short sermon, but without music.

10.00 – Holy Communion service, with sermon, congregational hymns and choir. The choir usually sings the *Kyrie*, *Gloria in excelsis* and *Agnus Dei* from a wide range of settings.

11.30 – Morning service, with sermon, congregational hymns and choir.

20.00 – Sunday evening prayers.

On Weekdays

08.00 - Friday – A short service of Holy Communion, normally said in one of the smaller side-chapels.

12.00 – (Noon) Monday to Saturday – Daily Service: a short time of readings, reflection and prayer, for all who may be in St Giles' at that time.



Specific services

In addition to these regular acts of worship, services for specific organisations or events, some of which are of civic or national importance, take place at St Giles' on Sundays and on weekdays. These currently include, amongst others: Kirkings of the City of Edinburgh Council and the Scottish Parliament, academic services, special services for the Edinburgh International Festival and the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Remembrance Day observances, St Andrewstide, major commemorations and celebrations, and Installations of Knights of the Order of the Thistle.

Her Majesty the Queen, other members of the Royal Family and distinguished dignitaries are received and participate at a number of special services.

Stewards

A team of around 80 volunteer stewards, drawn from the congregation and serving on a five-weekly rota, help to ensure that Sunday services run smoothly.

Cathedral Choir

Worship is greatly enhanced and enriched by the Cathedral Choir, providing a strong tradition of high quality, inspiring music. As well as singing at the two morning services every Sunday, the choir also sings at many other services during the year, including Holy Week and Watchnight services. In addition to its liturgical duties, the choir also gives a number of concerts in St Giles' each year, and has toured across Europe, the USA and Canada.

Other music

In our weekly "St Giles' at Six" Sunday evening concert series, we provide a platform for a wide variety of performers, both from the local community and further afield. These concerts are free of charge and have a large and loyal following. In addition to this, there are many informal concerts, hosting choirs and other performers from around the world. And of course, the world famous Rieger organ of 1992 features in organ recitals throughout the year. Invaluable support for the musical activities of St Giles' is provided by The Friends of the Music of St Giles' Cathedral, a registered charity founded in 2007.



Church organisation and activities

St Giles' has a unitary constitution (*quoad omnia*). The Kirk Session currently comprises 31 Elders and operates through committees. The congregation is divided into seven districts, each of which is the responsibility of a group of Elders under a district convener. The organisation of annual social events within each district helps to create a sense of community amongst our gathered congregation.

Community

The Neighbourhood Group was established in 2006, involving a small band of members who have a keen interest in supporting less fortunate people in the city, especially those who are homeless. The Group tries to serve both practically and financially by becoming actively involved in raising money, supplying goods and immediate support, through charity concerts, can collections, an Advent appeal in support of the local foodbanks, refugee welcoming, and support for Homelessness Sunday. Additionally, the Group provides a Night Kitchen team for Bethany Christian Trust on several occasions each winter - this involves working in various church halls throughout the city together with funding and providing an evening meal & breakfast for homeless people.

The Group's members and others are also actively involved with Christian Aid, FreshStart, The Grassmarket Mission, 6 Victoria Terrace, The Welcoming, Grassmarket Community Project, local Foodbanks and the Edinburgh Clothing Store. Annual street can collections, typically raising some £3,000, are organised at Christmas time in aid of the homeless with Cunningham House (CrossReach), situated in the Cowgate, being one of the principal benefactors.

Additionally, the Poor of the Parish Fund, which is a restricted fund managed by the Kirk Session, supplies very much needed funding, which, based upon the recommendations of the Neighbourhood Group, is distributed to local organisation who work hard to improve the lives of those within the community faced with a range of social challenges.

Otherwise, members of the congregation together with the wider 'St Giles' family' meet as often as is practically possible to enjoy social and other organised events including book-reading, Lenten discussions musical concerts, organ recitals and so on.

Communications

This website - www.stgilescathedral.org.uk – provides extensive information about the life and operation of the Cathedral. However, if you would like further information please get in touch. See the 'Contact' tab. We also have a noticeboard in the Cathedral displaying information on forthcoming events and services.



We are greatly indebted to Peter Backhouse for his permission to use the photographs displayed within this article