

The Kirkin' o' The Tartans

A Presbyterian Tradition

By : Julie Fowler

On April 30th, we are celebrating our denominational roots in John Knox's Scotland with our second annual Kirkin' o' The Tartans service, with a procession of Tartans representing the heritage of our members and friends. The tradition originated in the US during World War II, when it was introduced by Pastor Peter Marshall at the National Cathedral in Washington D.C.

Kirkin'

"Kirking" is from the Scottish Gaelic word, "Kirk", meaning church, and in this usage means "blessing". A Kirkin represents the gathering of families to enter the House of the Lord to worship and praise. The colorful woven tartans that are displayed during the service are symbols of the love and togetherness of family. Worshippers are encouraged to reflect with thanksgiving on their own family and cultural heritage, whatever it may be.

Tartan

A Tartan is a woolen cloth woven in one of several patterns of plaid, especially of a design associated with a particular Scottish clan. They're better known as the patterned cloth used for kilts. Specific tartans for different families or established brotherhoods developed simply because each area liked to weave a certain design using local herb dyes. This is why there are many types of tartans in many varying colors and plaids.

Scottish History

The ceremony of the Kirkin' o' the Tartans is American in origin, though based on Scottish history and legend. After Bonnie Prince Charlie's Scottish forces were defeated by the English in 1746, Scotland again came under British rule. An Act was passed that forbade carrying arms and the wearing of kilts or tartans which represented Scottish heritage.

This Act prompted the Scots to secretly carry a piece of their tartan as they went to the Kirk. The minister then slipped a blessing, or Kirkin', into the service for the tartans. The prohibition against tartans lasted for nearly 50 years. When at last repealed, the Church of Scotland celebrated with a Service of Family Covenant, at which time the tartan of each family was offered as a covenant expression for the Lord's blessing.





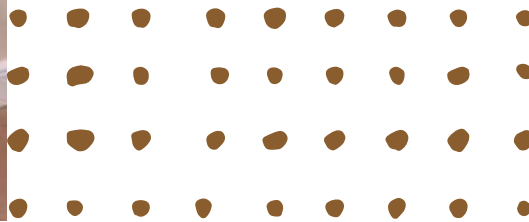
The Origin

The late Dr. Peter Marshall, an eloquent Scot, pastor, and then Chaplain of the US Senate, led a service in D.C. choosing “Kirkin’ o’ the Tartan” for the title of his sermon. He had preached many sermons in support of the British War Relief and the Scottish Clans Evacuation Plan. As the war continued, the D.C. St. Andrew’s Society continued to hold prayer services for the British subjects. These became known as Kirkin’s.



The Service

A traditional Kirkin o’ The Tartans service has no set liturgy, but rather incorporates various elements of the Church of Scotland. Central to its theme is the presentation of various tartans, through flags and the wearing of kilts, for a blessing. The Kirkin’ is intended to encourage participants to reflect with thanksgiving on their own family and heritage and to celebrate God’s grace poured out for all generations. ■



Sunday, April 30th, we will wave Tartans and flags representing the heritage of our members and friends. And no Scottish celebration would be complete without a bagpipe! Service will be followed by a traditional Gaelic social gathering called a “ceilidh”, pronounced kālē, with Scottish treats and fellowship.
Le gach dea-ghuí!