

GENERAL SYNOD 2018

Marriage Council Report Proposer: The Revd John Ardis

**Embargoed Against Delivery
Check Against Delivery**

I would like to draw your attention to the Marriage Council report, at the back of the book of reports page 368. In proposing the report I would like to thank those members of Marriage Council who have contributed over the year. I would also like to thank Bishop Pat Storey for becoming part of the Marriage Council. I would also like to welcome Bishop Alan Abernethy in his role as observer to the council. Bishops are a bit like busses, you wait for one for years, and then two come together!

As well as incoming members, we have had outgoings. After eighteen years of service, we bid farewell to Sandra Massey. And I would like to take this opportunity to thank her for all that she has contributed over the years. We welcomed (briefly) Ian Ridpath who temporarily took on the role, and now we welcome Aisling Sheridan who we look forward to working with.

I would like to draw attention to our Marriage Council away day. This was something we felt very strongly that we should undertake to actually reevaluate and to refocus the work of the committee.

As a council we met on Thursday, 30th November, where we enjoyed the hospitality of the Bishop of Meath and Kildare at the See House where we were expertly facilitated by Ms. Lydia Monds. Over the course of the day, we reflected on where the council had come from since it was formed, what the council presently performed, and what we should focus on in the future.

As there are a quite a few new members, it was helpful to remind ourselves why we were originally established and what the marriage council was mandated to do. Originally the council was set up to provide marriage preparation courses, marriage enrichment and marriage breakdown counselling and also to assist with clergy training.

We reflected on what the council offers today: directing local parishes towards resources that may better equip clergy and couples for marriage preparation and to provide support for

marriage crisis. We also reflected on how we can assist and support clergy through resources and training. Another important aspect which the council promotes is marriage enrichment, such as offering 'clergy couples retreats'.

We looked at ways we can improve our communication, particularly in directing or signposting clergy towards the necessary resources that are available, such as the *Towards Marriage* pack (available on the committee website); Alpha marriage course; material from Care for the Family; Mothers' Union parenting courses and gender-based violence resources; Barnardo's (child counselling); Onus (NI) and Christian Guidelines.

As a council, we decided that we should focus primarily on clergy training and resourcing, couples counselling and marriage preparation as well as supporting clergy with their own marriages. It was generally felt that the day brought greater clarity about the role of the council, and also helped us to reevaluate and focus our priorities for the future.

As well as our excellent facilitator, I would like to thank clergy who took the time to take our survey last year which greatly helped inform our planning and discussion. We feel that it was a real benefit to have a full day's meeting in the year where we do all our strategic planning and reflection, and cut down on the number of shorter meetings held throughout the year. It would also be most cost-effective too.

In thanking those involved in the work of the Marriage Council, I would also to thank all those who offer support both to those preparing for marriage and those may be experiencing strain on their relationships. I'm sure I'm not unique in that many people who approach me to conduct a wedding may not exactly be regular communicants. For many people getting married in a church may be the first experience they have had of church for years, and it can be a great occasion to demonstrate Christian hospitality and welcome.