

CHURCH OF IRELAND MARRIAGE COUNCIL

REPORT 2020

MEMBERSHIP

Appointed by the House of Bishops

Member of the House of Bishops: Most Rev Pat Storey (Bishop of Meath & Kildare)

Elected by General Synod

Rev Jonathan Campbell-Smyth (Chairperson)	Rev Nicola Halford Ms Sylvia Helen
Rev John Ardis	
Rev Ian Linton	Rev Canon Lynda Peilow (Honorary Secretary)
Rev Stephen Farrell (Resigned November 2019)	
Ms Jennifer O'Regan	
Ms Dianne Morris	

In attendance

Ms Aisling Sheridan (Administrative
Secretary)

New Initiatives

The Marriage Council has produced new posters promoting the work of the Council, making its services more accessible. It is hoped that these posters will be placed in every parish church in the Church of Ireland during spring 2020.

The Council's website has been moved to the main Church of Ireland website (www.ireland.anglican.org), making this more accessible for people wanting to know about marriage. To help with finding the pages, the Council has also arranged a direct link through www.marriage.ireland.anglican.org. The new pages contain helpful resources for couples planning their wedding, for couples seeking support in their marriage, and also useful resources now available for clergy and church leaders.

Membership

The aim of the Marriage Council is to resource the Church as it supports marriage and family life.

Resources that are available include:

- Support for couples considering getting married, including resources to clergy for marriage preparation;

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- Providing support to married couples through marriage enrichment and signposting counselling services;
- Resourcing the wider Church through training, signposting and materials;
- Marriage support to clergy and their spouses.

Marriage Preparation & Counselling

The demand for marriage preparation and counselling has been steady over the last year. *Túsla*, the Family Support Agency, has once again given funding towards marriage counselling in the Republic of Ireland. We would encourage clergy and church leaders to get in touch with the Council to access these funds. Four new counsellors have joined the Marriage Council panel of counsellors, with a fifth to be added in summer 2020, and recruitment still ongoing. Furthermore, Christian Guidelines are now offering counselling services on behalf of the Marriage Council in Down, Fermanagh and Tyrone, with Care In Crisis offering the same cover in Armagh.

The Marriage Council is also looking into helping Northern Ireland clergy to find organisations that will assist with marriage preparation.

The current group of counsellors used is:

- Ms Nadine Brooker (Dublin)
- Mr Brian Griffin (Dublin)
- Ms Dianne Morris (Dublin)
- Ms Sylvia Helen (Cork)
- Ms Lynne Heber (Belfast)
- Ms Ali Knight (Coleraine)
- Care In Crisis (Armagh)
- Christian Guidelines (Down, Fermanagh & Tyrone)

Marriage Council Funding

Although *Túsla* have once again provided funding towards marriage counselling, and indeed have allocated an increased grant, we have seen substantial cuts over the years. Whilst this provides a great challenge, no one is ever turned away, even if they cannot afford to contribute to the cost of the counselling session.

Also, initial investigations have begun to seek funding streams in Northern Ireland to support couples through counselling who are experiencing financial difficulties.

Marriage Council Planning Day

At our Planning Day in February 2019, 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 in their own marriages. Among key goals set were to recruit more counsellors to cover a wider geographical spread and to make both clergy and couples

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more aware of the work of the Marriage Council and its services in marriage preparation and counselling services.

Website Development and Social Media

We have spent considerable time updating these pages, now relocated onto the Church of Ireland website (www.marriage.ireland.anglican.org) and enhancing the level of information we provide on the services offered.

Clergy Couples Get Away

Over a number of years the Council, with the co-operation of a number of dioceses have run a clergy couples' weekend. This was borne out of a questionnaire to clergy and spouses asking how the Council could support them. The 2018 retreat was held in the Hodson Bay Hotel in November, and the cost was covered by the Marriage Council. Due to low numbers of clergy attending, the Marriage Council discussed during 2019 the best ways in which to support clergy and their spouses. Agreement was reached that the way forward is to focus more on supporting clergy in enjoying family activities throughout the year, rather than trying to get couples together for a full weekend away, which is often very difficult to achieve. The Council will further develop these initiatives in 2020.

Solemnisation of Marriages Outside Churches

At the General Synod in 2018, during the debate on the Report of the Marriage Council, the question was raised whether the Church of Ireland ought to solemnise marriages outside of churches and chapels consecrated for public worship. This question was passed to the Marriage Council for further consideration.

The Council has given considerable thought to this issue, and due to the significant change this would make to the current practice of the Church, it was deemed beyond the Council's remit. Communication was made with the Honorary Secretaries of the Standing Committee, including some points that would require further consideration for the matter to be fully addressed.

As a result of a letter from the Archbishop of Dublin and the Bishop of Tuam, Killala & Achonry, the discussion on this issue was re-opened at the Council's November meeting, after it was brought to Standing Committee again. The Council members agreed to consider the issue, with the possibility of meeting with both CASC and the LAC in 2020 to share views.

Resignation

After several years' service on the Marriage Council, Rev Stephen Farrell stepped down in November 2019. We extend our appreciation and thanks for his service to the Council, and wish him well in the future.

Also in this past year, one of our members, Rev Nicola Halford, gave birth to a baby girl, Hayley. We wish Nicola and Ronan God's richest blessings for the future.