

Church of Ireland Marriage Council – Report 2021

CHURCH OF IRELAND MARRIAGE COUNCIL

REPORT 2021

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
Rev John Ardis	Rev Canon Lynda Peilow (Honorary Secretary) (Resigned January 2021)
Rev Ian Linton	
Ms Jennifer O'Regan (Resigned Sept 2020)	
Ms Dianne Morris	

In attendance

Ms Aisling Sheridan (Administrative
Secretary)

Proposed Membership for 2021 – 2023

Rev Jonathan Campbell-Smyth (Chairperson)	Rev Nicola Halford
Rev Ian Linton	Ms Dianne Morris
Ms Kay Clarke	Rev Emma Rutherford
Mrs Patsy Devoy	Rev John Godfrey
	Rev William Steacy

New Initiatives

The Marriage Council has produced new posters promoting its work. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all dioceses were issued with a digital version of the poster.

The Council's website has been moved to the main Church of Ireland website and the direct link is 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.

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

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get in touch with the Council to access these funds. Five new counsellors have joined the Marriage Council panel of counsellors, representing a much better coverage of the island, with 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.

Most counsellors have been making their services available online throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

The current group of counsellors used is:

- Ms Nadine Brooker (Dublin)
- Mr Brian Griffin (Dublin)
- Ms Dianne Morris (Dublin)
- Ms Shona Rusk (Dublin)
- Ms Fiona Burke (Midlands)
- Mr Ray Clarke (Galway)
- Ms Sylvia Helen (Cork)
- Mr Shawn Jamieson (South West)
- Ms Lynne Heber (Belfast)
- Ms Ali Knight (Coleraine)
- Care In Crisis (Armagh)
- Christian Guidelines (Down, Fermanagh & Tyrone)

Whilst these counselling services are available, the Council is very much dependent on clergy and those who support couples to refer them to counsellors. The Council therefore encourages General Synod to promote the use of marriage counsellors in their local parish contexts.

Marriage Council External 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.

Resourcing Clergy and Church Leaders

In partnership with Alpha Ireland and Alpha UK, the Marriage Council is facilitating a webinar on 29th April 2021 for all clergy and church leaders on the Marriage Course

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(<https://themarriagecourse.org/>). This webinar will provide a ready-made resource for leaders who are involved in marriage preparation.

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 wrote to the House of Bishops in September 2020, asking them to consider supporting their clergy in taking family time away from work. The Council plan to further develop ideas as to how this can be encouraged and achieved in 2021.

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, and met with representatives of both CASC and the LAC in November 2020 and January 2021 to share views. The meetings were very successful, with members agreeing to pass their recommendations to the House of Bishops.

Resignations

After several years' service on the Marriage Council, Mrs Jennifer O'Regan stepped down in September 2020. We extend our appreciation and thanks for her service to the Council, and wish her well in the future.

Also in the coming year, it being the start of a new triennium, two of our longest serving members will be stepping down. We extend our appreciation to Rev Canon Lynda Peilow and Rev John Ardis for their service to the Council, and wish them well in the future. We also welcome our new members, subject to their approval at General Synod.