

CHURCH OF IRELAND MARRIAGE COUNCIL

REPORT 2022

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 Ian Linton
Ms Dianne Morris

Rev Emma Rutherford
Rev James Boyd
Mrs Patsy Devoy

In Attendance

Ms Aisling Sheridan (Administrative
Secretary)

New Initiatives

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been increased need for couples counselling and an awareness that it is not just married couples who need counselling services. In discussion with *Túsla*, it was agreed in 2021 that their funding allocation be expanded to cover all couples and also marriage preparation.

In 2022, the Council plans to prepare a short video on its counselling and marriage preparation services, featuring some of the counsellors on its panel and couples who have benefitted from its services.

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. Five new counsellors have joined the Marriage Council panel of counsellors, representing a much better coverage of the island. 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 Council is planning to meet with all counsellors to provide support for

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them to meet with couples. In addition to marriage support, counsellors in ROI are available to lead couples through marriage preparation.

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 *Tús* 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 facilitated a webinar on 29th April 2021 for all clergy and church leaders on the Marriage Course (<https://themarriagecourse.org/>). This webinar was a great success and provided a ready-made resource for leaders who are involved in marriage preparation.

In January & February 2022, the Council hosted a 7 week long online Marriage Enrichment Course in conjunction with Alpha Ireland. A total of 13 couples attended.

Vision Day

The Council have met to consider the vision of the Marriage Council for the next 3 years.

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New Members

Following the resignations of several long standing members, we now welcome Rev Emma Rutherford, Rev James Boyd and Mrs Patsy Devoy as members. We look forward to working with them in the coming year.