

CHURCH OF IRELAND MARRIAGE COUNCIL

REPORT 2023

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 Emma Rutherford
Rev Canon Nicola Halford	Rev James Boyd
Rev Ian Linton	Mrs Patsy Devoy
Ms Dianne Morris	

In Attendance

Ms Aisling Sheridan (Administrative Secretary)

Proposed New Member

Ms Kay Clarke

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 2023, the Council plans to roll out a new communications strategy designed to increase awareness of the subsidised counselling services which the Council operates in conjunction with TUSLA. This will include the preparation of 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, which will be shown at diocesan Synods and at General Synod 2023. The Council will also be producing a new leaflet which will also be available at Synods and widely available in parishes.

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.** If these funds are not accessed, then there is a danger that external funds may not be available in the future.

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 since 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, some counsellors are available to lead couples through marriage preparation in collaboration with clergy.

The current group of counsellors used is:

- Mr Brian Griffin (Dublin)
- Ms Dianne Morris (Dublin)
- Ms Shona Rusk (Dublin)
- Ms Heather James (South East)
- 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. Copies of the Council's new leaflet on marriage counselling are available at Reception and from aisling.sheridan@rcbdub.org.

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.

Ordinands Evenings in Conjunction with CITI

In February and March, the Marriage Council led two evenings on the work of the Council and supporting couples in their relationships. Rev James Boyd and Rev Emma Rutherford facilitated the evening in NI and Ms Dianne Morris facilitated the event in RoI. Both evenings were very successful and provided excellent insights for both the Marriage Council and ordinands.

Resourcing Clergy and Church Leaders

In April 2023 the Marriage Council began a 7-week marriage support online course, facilitated by Rev Jonathan Campbell-Smyth and his wife Alison.

New Member

We propose Ms Kay Clarke as a new member of the Marriage Council.