

**CHURCH OF IRELAND MARRIAGE COUNCIL**  
**REPORT 2012**

**MEMBERSHIP**

*Elected By General Synod*

Rev Arthur Barrett	Mrs Leslie Sandes
Rev Brian Harper (Chairman)	Rev David Somerville
Rev Bruce Hayes (Honorary Secretary)	Mrs Deirdre Whitley
Rev Elizabeth McElhinney	Ms Rosalind Willoughby

**In attendance**

Mrs Sandra Massey

**Consultant**

Mrs Claire Missen

**Executive Summary**

The Marriage Council exists to provide a range of services in support of marriage throughout the Church of Ireland.

**Preparation, Counselling, Enrichment**

The Marriage Council continues to offer Marriage Preparation, Marriage Counselling and Marriage Enrichment advice and programmes, funded by the Family Support Agency (FSA) in the Republic of Ireland. The Marriage Council is awaiting a decision from the FSA on a recent application for funding.

At present, funding enables the provision of one counsellor to one couple for marriage preparation at a cost of €150. A couple attend a three hour session which covers areas such as expectations, communication, sexuality, conflict resolution and parenting. Marriage counselling is available at €70 per hour (or at a rate determined by the Counsellor depending on circumstances). 2011 saw a dramatic increase in the number of couples seeking marriage counselling; the number of couples seeking marriage preparation remained constant.

**Clergy Support**

While recognising that the practice of ministry is a source of enrichment and a time of daily encounters with people that often brings a feeling of warmth and satisfaction, there is also recognition that the demands of ministry can impact in ways which are often unseen and unrecognised.

There would be something wrong if clergy were not affected by their ministry, and most now have the abilities to reflect and realise when time is needed for recuperation and time apart. However, little if any studies have been done to analyse the effect that ministry has on those closest to its proponents, namely wives, husbands and children.

Surveys carried out by the Marriage Council have identified that clergy families can feel at times isolated, unappreciated and vulnerable. Why sometimes may this be the case?

## Church of Ireland Marriage Council – Report 2012

Simply put the answers are as varied as human experience itself, but at the heart is a need to feel appreciated and supported.

The Marriage Council has sought to offer a practical response by facilitating retreats for clergy couples. In 2011 a clergy and spouse retreat was successfully held in Newcastle, County Down. The cost of the retreat was shared by the diocese, the participants and the marriage council. It is hoped to hold further retreats in the future.

### **Provision of Resources**

We wish to continue providing good resources to assist clergy in preparing couples for marriage. Through our website we continue to assist couples by offering information and support. During the past year articles written by council members have been published on a range of issues pertaining to marriage and relationships. The council would like to thank editors of Diocesan Magazines and *The Church of Ireland Gazette* for their support.

### **Contemporary Couples**

The Contemporary Couples clergy training course has now been updated. The course involves a series of six seminars highlighting the sorts of issues that clergy may encounter in providing pastoral support to couples and families. The course was most recently run for clergy from the Dioceses of Kilmore, Clogher and Armagh. We would like to encourage other dioceses to make use of the newly updated course.

### **Teaching**

During the past twelve months the Marriage Council through two of its councillors, has had a modest but important input into the training of the interns in the Church of Ireland Theological Institute. Seminars have examined various aspects of working with marriage. Also the transition from student life to life in the parish has also been examined.

### **The Future**

The Marriage Council will continue to review its operating costs and endeavour to work within a smaller budget. The prevailing economic circumstances have meant more couples are seeking assistance. It is hoped the Marriage Council will continue to be well placed to offer support to couples in their relationships and to the clergy in their ministry.

### **Personalia**

The thanks of the Council are expressed to all those who have assisted with its work throughout the year, including our counsellors, consultants and secretarial support.