

CHURCH OF IRELAND MARRIAGE COUNCIL

REPORT 2013

MEMBERSHIP

Appointed by the House of Bishops

Vacant

Elected by General Synod

Rev Canon Arthur Barrett

Mrs Sarah Bevan

Rev Brian Harper (Chair)

Rev Bruce Hayes (Honorary Secretary)

Rev Elizabeth McElhinney (resigned March 2012)

Mrs Leslie Sandes

Rev David Somerville

Mrs Deirdre Whitley

Ms Rosalind Willoughby

Co-opted

Mrs Lynne Heber

In attendance

Mrs Sandra Massey

Consultant:

Mrs Claire Missen (retired June 2013)

Executive Summary

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

We continue on three areas:

- 1) the provision of counselling services; funded by a grant from the Family Support Agency (FSA) in the Republic of Ireland;
- 2) the provision of resources for clergy involved in marriage preparation and counselling. This may include web-based resources and a library;
- 3) continuing to examine the needs of clergy marriages and to encourage programs of enrichment and support.

Preparation, Counselling, Enrichment

The Marriage Council continues to offer Marriage Preparation, Marriage Counselling and Marriage Enrichment advice and programmes, generously funded by the Family Support Agency (FSA) in the Republic of Ireland. The original funding has now been exhausted but we applied for and been awarded further assistance from the FSA which is annually reviewed.

At present, funding enables the provision of one counsellor to one couple for marriage preparation at a cost of €10 and marriage counselling is available at €50 (or at the discretion of the Counsellor depending on circumstances) through the FSA.

Contemporary Couples

The feedback from the previous contemporary course has been carefully considered and we are looking at further revision and development. In-service training, such as this, is proving to be difficult within our current budget and will require support at a diocesan level going forward.

Clergy Support

The clergy and spouses retreat was successfully deployed and is being made widely available. It is hoped to encourage dioceses to use the retreat as an opportunity to acknowledge the marriage partnerships involved in ministry and the particular issues, positive and negative, which arise. The retreat involves a Saturday and Sunday stay at a hotel/resort and the diocese would take responsibility for Sunday cover, which would not be considered as a “weekend off”. The cost of the retreat is carried by the diocese, the participants and the Marriage Council.

Provision of resources

We are committed to providing good resources within a limited budget. We will endeavour to make much of this material available through our web-site. The web-site itself has been renewed and is regularly updated. It is hoped the website will be an important source of information for those wishing to get married in the Church of Ireland, as it brings a number of different resources together into one place. Accurate and up-to-date information is also supplied about our trained counsellors and an information base is being developed. The address of the Marriage Council’s new website, to be launched in 2013, is www.towardsmarriage.com

The Year Ahead

Along with the many other Church agencies and committees, the Marriage Council continues to work on a reduced budget. We are committed to doing so for the benefit of the whole Church and are also committed to providing the best support possible to the Church in its ministry to those who are married or preparing for marriage. We continue to seek ways of encouraging and supporting couples, particularly in the present financial climate.

Council Meetings

We have taken the decision to teleconference alternate meetings. This has proved successful and an efficient use of both time and finance.

Personalia

The Council wishes to record its appreciation to Rev Liz McElhinney for her dedication and contribution to the Council and welcomes Mrs Sarah Bevan and Mrs Lynne Heber.