

GENERAL SYNOD 2013

Church of Ireland Marriage Council Report

Proposed by the Revd Brian Harper, Diocese of Armagh

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Across the island families are struggling with financial difficulties and, whilst this is a major factor in the disintegration of many relationships, most couples and families bite the bullet, and cut their cloth accordingly. Quietly getting on with their situation as best they can.

In the marriage council, we do likewise. I've said much the same thing year on year recently. We can't run the residential programs that we had planned, we can't do the big showcase things that we had hoped for, but we get on, as best we can within our budget. As a result, most of what is achieved is achieved in the Republic, thanks to the continuing generosity of the FSA who, even in their own purse string tightening, continue to see that marriage support is an important piece in the the patchwork of society. The marriage council can provide for those occasions when rectors feel that professional counselling is suitable for couples or when couples approach us directly. We are also funded for providing marriage preparation counselling on request. Some rectors use this as a matter of course whilst others use it when they see that a little more help is needed. I would encourage colleagues in the Republic to avail of this service – it's there for you. We have a network of good counsellors covering most of the country, including the diocese of Raphoe!

We often stand here and highlight the major issues and stresses of marriage but for every failed relationship, they are more that have succeeded. Issues have been worked through, with outside help or on their own. They have been truly blessed. Three times last week I spotted very elderly couples walking hand in hand. There is a couple that I visit in a care home who are approaching their 70th anniversary, still sitting together each day, chatting and caring for each other. And, for all that I privately complain about the wedding "industry", it is thriving because young men and women are continuing to fall head over heels in love with each other and commit to each other for the rest of their lives and that relationship becomes the foundation of many happy families and the safe haven in which many children have been raised. It is a privilege for us, as a church, to be able to support those relationships – both with the resources and time given to the wedding and then the subsequent pastoral support and encouragement to the marriage and the family.

Thank-you to Sandra for the time she lives to keeping us organised, to the members for their creativeness and to the counsellors for they quietly continue to do. Thank-you to the fiancés and long-married people and all those in between who continue to inspire and to reflect the love that Christ has for his Church.