

**GENERAL SYNOD 2007**

**CHURCH OF IRELAND MARRIAGE COUNCIL**

**Proposed by Revd John McDowell (Down)**

**EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY**

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Your Grace, members of Synod

I imagine that most of us in this room regard marriage as the basic building block of our society. I imagine also that we are all too aware that marriage is under new and very harmful pressures all over Ireland, North and South. Greatly increased commuting distances to work for many parents; in many cases the absolute necessity of both parents going out to work to pay the mortgage. The patchy provision of child care; the increasing rate of divorce and the inevitable increase in numbers of single parent families. The rising number of second marriages, which are a blessing to many, but which have their own particular difficulties. It is against this background that the Marriage Council carries out its practical work of providing resources to support marriage and it is to the credit of our team of contracted professionals that the work is carried out so efficiently and quietly.

It is work which in cases relating to counselling is confidential. The one-to-one marriage preparation work is acknowledged as a leader in its discipline. We could provide neither without the generous support of the Family Support Agency in the Republic of Ireland. Because Marriage Counselling and Marriage Preparation are handled differently in the

North we have no equivalent funding to subsidise our work there.

Last year when I was proposing the Report of the Marriage Council I indicated that we were having an uphill struggle promoting our Marriage Enrichment Programme. Despite having made presentations to many Diocesan Synods, Clergy Conferences and other gatherings we are still experiencing the same difficulties with the uptake of this one-evening programme. To attend a marriage enrichment evening is not an admission that there is something fundamentally wrong with a marriage. It is simply an acknowledgement that our marriages, being very precious to us, require working at and to take a little time out with other couples to further deepen and enrich our commitment to one another. We shall be attempting once again to encourage parish groups or groups of parishes to give it a go, so if you want to bring a little sparkle back into your marriage why not contact us either through our website or by ringing Sandra Massey. Both contacts are listed on pages 361 or 362 in the Book of Reports.

You will also see from the report that we are turning our attention to the need for supporting clergy couples. A questionnaire has recently been sent out to all clergy couples, as individuals, and the volume of responses has been very large indeed. These will soon be collated and analysed and the Marriage Council will endeavour to provide or persuade others to provide appropriate support for a group of people who often find it difficult to know who to turn to. We are aware that some dioceses already provide resources to address this area, but we want to get some sort of handle on the problem across the whole Church and to react appropriately.

The sort of work which we are engaged in can be frustratingly slow and not easy to measure, but if it results in the promotion or maintenance or enrichment of marriage, it is more than worthwhile. Your Grace, members of Synod, I have pleasure in proposing that the Report of the Marriage Council be received.