

**CHURCH OF IRELAND MARRIAGE COUNCIL
REPORT 2006**

MEMBERSHIP

Appointed by the House of Bishops

Rt Rev RCA Henderson, Bishop of Tuam

Elected by General Synod

Rev FJ McDowell (Chairman)	Rev Canon PR Draper
Mrs O Thorpe (Honorary Secretary)	Mr G Glenn
Rev Canon Dr JPO Barry	Mrs G Good
Mrs J Bunting	Rev G Haire
Mrs H Caird	Mrs A McGrath
Mrs H Clarke	Mrs P Wallace
Mrs D Cromeey	

In attendance

Mrs S Massey

Consultant:

Mrs C Missen

The Marriage Council was established by the General Synod in 1996 in consequence of the findings of the Select Committee on Marriage, which was convened in 1991 and reported in 1995. The Council was charged with the introduction of a wide range of services in support of marriage and has worked steadily not only to introduce these services but to make them available throughout the Church of Ireland.

One of the recommendations of the Select Committee had been the appointment of Provincial Marriage Co-ordinators. However, these officers were never appointed.

Reorganisation

Last year, we reported the beginning of a process of reform and re-organisation to facilitate the work of the Council as it has evolved to meet the needs of the Church in the modern world. This process of internal discussion has continued throughout 2005 and has resulted in proposals for the future membership, role and working method of the Council being submitted to the Representative Body with a view to introducing amendments for the approval of Synod in 2007. The proposals will help the Council concentrate its resources on the promotion and delivery of Marriage Preparation, Marriage Counselling and Marriage Enrichment Programmes to parishes.

Marriage Preparation and Marriage Counselling

These activities have come to represent the main thrust of our work and continue to grow in the Republic of Ireland where our work attracts generous grant aid from the Family

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Support Agency. This work is not carried out in the same way in Northern Ireland because no grant aid is available and there is no equivalent to the Family Support Agency.

A clergy training day was carried out under the auspices of the Council in the diocese of Down and Dromore.

Marriage Council Web Site

The website continues to be updated on at least a monthly basis and attracts a very wide range of visitors. In addition to previous years, the website has been used to stimulate debate on the subject of Christian Marriage. The site has also become a little more interactive and we have developed the capacity to answer queries on-line. The Council is particularly indebted to our consultant Mrs Annette McGrath for her diligence and professionalism in this area.

On Line-Counselling

Last year, we reported that we were investigating the possibility of introducing an element of on-line counselling. However, the technical and legal difficulties of this enterprise were considered too onerous for the present time and the subject has not been pursued further. As the Council evolves further it may be reconsidered.

Marriage Enrichment Programme

The Marriage Enrichment Programme purchased on licence from Christian Guidelines has been further adapted to meet the needs of the Church of Ireland. At present the Council is involved in the process of identifying potential facilitators throughout Ireland to deliver the Marriage Matters Programme and a facilitator training day (or days if necessary) will be arranged early in 2006. Most dioceses have responded positively to our request for named individuals to facilitate the work of the Council in this area.

Roundtable Conference with the National Consultative Council on Race and Interculturalism (NCCRI)

At the suggestion of the Council, the NCCRI (a statutory body charged with advising the government of the Republic of Ireland on matters of race and intercultural concern) convened a roundtable meeting to discuss salient matters to do with inter-cultural relations in Ireland. The Council sent two representatives to the meeting and hopes to develop further this area of interest perhaps in the form of a conference on inter-cultural marriage/partnerships.

Marriage Law

It had been anticipated last year that the Republic of Ireland would have legislated to reform its marriage law similar to the reforms carried out in the United Kingdom in 2004. This has not yet occurred.