

Report of the Church of Ireland Marriage Council

Proposed by Paddy Wallace – Connor Diocese

Embargoed until Delivery

The Marriage Council was set up in 1996 – that is seven years ago. Seven years..... there was a time when folk talked about the ‘seven year itch’ in a marriage. Such a diagnosis of the weak point in a marriage would be totally irrelevant today.

We live in a rapidly changing social scene. I don’t need to describe here how fluid society is; nor to emphasise how once accepted and comforting norms have disappeared; how expectations and even perceptions of marriage are so diverse.

But we do need to acknowledge here that many of our members are bewildered and distressed by the break down of relationships, by the seeming fragility of marriages, and at this changing social scene. The main building block of stable family life appears to be crumbling. More importantly many people are hurting.

It is against that background that the Marriage Council has through its conferences tried to acknowledge and to confront the realities.

It is becoming evident that imaginative and appropriate support is urgently needed by clergy and by all who are involved in preparing for and supporting marriage. The Council has been delighted this year to launch in the dioceses in the Republic of Ireland our Marriage Preparation and Counselling Service. We are grateful to the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs for the grant which made this possible.

The significant point about this approach to marriage preparation is that it is ‘one to one’, one couple and one counsellor. Just last month Suzanne Lynch, reporting in the Irish Times, wrote that amongst a group of couples questioned, one to one marriage preparation was the preferred option. We hope that clergy will make full use of this new service.

The one day training sessions for clergy held in most dioceses, north and south, will hopefully have created a base from which to progress further support for marriage and family life. These have been facilitated by Clare Missen, and we are grateful for her skills and expertise. It is evident to the Council that much is to be gained from working in partnership and along side other agencies.

Similarly it is important to acknowledge the work that is already being done in a variety of approaches to marriage preparation in dioceses throughout the Church of Ireland and also to acknowledge the support for family life that has been initiated by the MU through their Parenting Programme, now being used in ten dioceses.

The Council’s remit is to enhance the church’s effectiveness in supporting marriage and family life. That effectiveness can only be a reality when the initiatives offered are used to the full.

I have much pleasure in proposing that this report of the Church of Ireland Marriage Council be received.

