

Church of Ireland Marriage Council report

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Embargoed until Delivery

The Marriage Council has sought over recent years a more pro-active role coupled with greater accessibility. It has also sought to review its role within a changing church and society, and to reflect on the nature of marriage itself.

Three key words: radical, dynamic and engaged.

It is crucial to reclaim something of the radical nature of marriage, and of its underlying sacramental spirituality; of the radical vows taken with all-embracing symbolic action in a beautiful and profound liturgy. Above all such radical commitment to another person, in a deeply fractious world, allows for an environment of grace in relationship, and even disclosure, which can lead to the healing of life's deepest hurts.

This spirituality is not peripheral, but core, as it enters the realm of relatedness in which we understand the Trinity, and even conversion of which Volf writes, "The carefully defined parameters of who I am are broken through by the Spirit, and so a fissure appears in us too. The Spirit unlatches the door of my heart saying "You are not only you; others belong to you too." " Marriage, like all relatedness, becomes a potential microcosm of the Gospel.

Marriage can often be portrayed as conservative, reactionary, and most dangerously, a static concept. Something of its dynamic nature is recovered when an evolving spirituality is reclaimed. The PowerPoint presentation being worked on hopes to bring something of this across.

The first session focuses on a theology of relatedness, particularly the inner relatedness of God in Trinity.

The second session at the stages of marriage, including what might be thought predictable, and also unpredictable moments and phases that impact relationships.

The third at necessary tools for change and growth, such as attentive listening, conflict resolution and effective communication. Each stage is geared to growth and nurture.

Finally the Council has sought to be more engaged at a diocesan and parochial level. In the report you will see the extent of Clare Missen's work with all the dioceses throughout the last couple of years, raising precisely these issues in a pastoral context and engaging with marital related issues.

Clare is one of 5 Counsellors in the Republic being used extensively in preparation and counselling work subsidised by the Council through generous funding. Mrs Annette McGrath has helped us revamp our website to a more accessible and inter-active one, which we encourage you to visit and make known. The PowerPoint presentation is being prepared for use as a one off session or over consecutive nights. Group material will accompany this and facilitators trained to lead sessions, so that at grass roots we can engage with marriage and relatedness, and that (as the marriage service puts it) it may be a witness to the love of God in this troubled world.