

CHURCH OF IRELAND MARRIAGE COUNCIL

REPORT 2025

MEMBERSHIP

Appointed by the House of Bishops

Member of the House of Bishops: Most Rev Pat Storey (Bishop of Meath & Kildare) (resigned Jan 2025) 1/4

Elected by General Synod

Rev Carlton Baxter (Chair) 2/4	Mrs Patsy Devoy 4/4
Rev Dr Leonard Madden 2/2	Mrs Esther Simpson 1/3
Rev Billy Burke 2/2	Mrs Kay Clarke 2/4
Rev Ian Linton 3/4	Rev Emma Rutherford (resigned Nov 2024) 0/3
Ms Heather James 3/4	

In Attendance

Ms Aisling Sheridan
(Administrative Secretary)

New Initiatives

In November 2024, due to the resignation of several long-standing members, the Marriage Council welcomed two new members at the first in-person meeting since the Covid-19 pandemic. This was an excellent opportunity to set out plans for 2025, which will include another Clergy Couples Retreat in autumn 2025 or spring 2026, further webinars on relationship-relevant topics and a new chapter in marriage preparation and counselling.

Marriage Preparation & Counselling

After many years of receipt of TUSLA funding, in 2024 the Council took a decision to discontinue applying for this funding. Marriage preparation and counselling services will now be paid from an increased allocation of central church funds. The Council will be continuing to offer six free counselling sessions per couple while funds last. Clergy are encouraged to contact Ms Aisling Sheridan, Synod Administrator on aisling.sheridan@rcbcoi.org for further information.

Most counsellors have been making their services available online since the Covid-19 pandemic. Members of the Marriage Council meet regularly online with the panel of counsellors to discuss any issues that arise in how counselling services are provided. In addition to marriage support, some counsellors are available to lead couples through marriage preparation in collaboration with church leaders.

The current group of counsellors used is:

- Mr Brian Griffin (Dublin)
- Ms Dianne Morris (Dublin)
- Ms Shona Rusk (Dublin)
- Ms Heather James (Southeast)
- Ms Sylvia Helen (Cork)

- Ms Kristina Silva (Monaghan)
- Mr Shawn Jamieson (Southwest)
- Ms Lynne Heber (Belfast)
- Care In Crisis (Armagh)
- Christian Guidelines (Down, Fermanagh & Tyrone)

Whilst these counselling services are available, the Council is very much dependent on clergy and those who support couples to refer them to counsellors. The Council therefore encourages General Synod to promote the use of marriage counsellors in their local parish contexts. Copies of the Council's information leaflet are available at the Synod Reception desk, from Church House Dublin and from aisling.sheridan@rcbcoi.org.

Future Plans

Plans for 2025 include holding further online seminars of one hour each on the following topics:

- Retirement – learning to spend more time together;
- Blended families – easing into a new situation;
- Divorce/separation – supporting through the journey.

Following on the successful Clergy Couples Retreat in October, another retreat will take place in autumn 2025 or spring 2026, led by Dr Alan & Mrs Pauline Wilson.

As always, the Council is here to support local church leaders and couples. We would be delighted to assist anyone who could benefit from our range of services.

Outgoing Members

The Marriage Council expresses heartfelt thanks to Bishop Pat Storey and Rev Emma Rutherford for their membership, as they move on to other things. Their contributions have been greatly appreciated.