



Digest of the Results
of the
Clergy and Clergy Spouse
Questionnaire of April 2007

Church of Ireland Marriage Council 2008

Introduction

In April 2007 the Marriage Council sent out questionnaires to around 1200 clergy and clergy spouses as a means of gathering information and opinions on clerical married and family life. The questionnaire was anonymous and we received around 800 replies that fairly reflected the distribution of clergy throughout the different dioceses.

The questionnaire posed eight questions around issues which the Marriage Council felt were pertinent. The statistical data from the responses is given in this booklet. Whilst this was not a survey carried out by a professional Market Research company, we believe that it provides a useful snapshot of clerical family life in Ireland. We hope that the information is clearly laid out and that you are able to draw your own conclusions.

In addition to the set responses, people were asked for further comments and many took the opportunity to make suggestions and remarks. These ranged from the highly personal, reflecting heart-felt difficulties in clerical life which had an adverse impact on marital and family life, to those which were deeply appreciative of the support and care experienced during trying times.

There were some recurring themes:

- The fear that confidentiality was hard to maintain in a small Church such as our own.
- The feeling of not quite knowing where to turn when parish difficulties became overwhelming and had affected family life. The official structures for dealing with difficulties are not always easy to identify.
- The worry that any show of weakness or turbulence in either family or parish life might appear simply as failure to those in authority.

- A sense that living in tied accommodation has many privileges but also that it adds to a sense of vulnerability and of feeling “beholden” which could be a strain on relationships.
- The need to prepare those in formation for Holy Orders for the unique difficulties of their calling, for themselves and their families, especially where the ordinand is already married before training for Orders begins.
- The understanding that bishops have their hands full in trying to strike a balance between their roles as *pastor parvorum* and the source of discipline in the Church.

There are very few callings in the modern world which require the same degree of identification of the person with the job. All clergy recognise that this will have enormous rewards of faithfulness, friendship and gratitude. It can also bring almost limitless expectations and unusual demands.

This little booklet is intended simply to help pose the questions that have come back to us as a result of the survey and we hope that it will stimulate a constructive debate about the pastoral care of clergy families.

Summary of Questionnaire Results

Age and experience of sample

Clergy	20-30 years	20%
	30+ years	38%
Spouse	20-30 years	19%
	30+ years	56%

The responses will have a bias towards the middle years and above.

Gender

Overwhelming male respondents in clergy sample (379) somewhat balanced by overwhelmingly female respondents in clergy spouse sample (315).

Timing of Marriage

Approximately two thirds of respondents have been in ministerial life since they were married.

Pastoral Care

(Clergy scores in bold, *spouses in italics*, %s are of number of answers)

Enrichment courses	20% <i>18%</i>	Confidential pastoral support	38% <i>38%</i>	Note that the responses most likely reflect experiences with problems broader than those concerning marriage.
Couple retreats	22% <i>24%</i>	Counselling	20% <i>20%</i>	

Rating of pastoral care

Quite similar response from clergy and spouses

40% falling within the very good and good bracket

55% falling within the fair and poor bracket

Source of pastoral care

Note that these replies are not mutually exclusive.

72% clergy (64% spouses) will have gone to their Bishop and fellow clergy for pastoral support. Not all experiences have been positive.

25% clergy (30% spouses) have sought or received support from their parishioners.

Naturally, families and friends are an important source of strength.

In only 10% of responses given to this question has the help of a marriage course or counsellor been sought.

Activities helpful in strengthening ministry marriage

Confidential pastoral support is the most popular option.

Likelihood of seeking outside help

Definitely	23% 20%	Possibly	35% 38%	No comment	5% 2%
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Probably	31% 27%	Definitely not	6% 13%
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54% clergy, 47% spouses at the positive end of the spectrum (definitely, probably).

35% clergy, 38% spouses less certain (possibly).

Likelihood of availing of confidential help from Church of Ireland

Definitely	17% 18%	Possibly	36% 37%	No comment	3% 0
Probably	35% 31%	Definitely not	9% 14%		

52% clergy, 49% spouses at the positive end of the spectrum (definitely, probably).

36% clergy, 37% spouses less certain (possibly).

The likelihood of seeking help is thus similar, regardless of its source.

Willingness to contribute to cost of help from Church of Ireland

54% clergy, 46% spouses at the positive end of the spectrum (definitely, probably).

39% clergy, 46% spouses less certain (possibly).

Dioceses represented by clergy:

Armagh	10%	Tuam, Killala & Achonry	2%
Clogher	4%	Dublin & Glendalough	16%
Derry & Raphoe	10%	Meath & Kildare	3%
Down & Dromore	16%	Cashel & Ossory	7%
Connor	17%	Cork, Cloyne & Ross	7%
Kilmore, Elphin & Ardagh	3%	Limerick & Killaloe	2%

Unaccounted for: **3%**

Themes

With the open question, many took the opportunity to comment, often with great strength of feeling. The following were recurring themes:

Pastoral structures

- Recognition of the tension arising from a Bishop's dual role of manager and pastor.
- Clergy and spouses expressed a strong desire for better pastoral care.
- Some suggested a clerical chaplain in each diocese whilst others wanted pastoral support independent of pastoral structures.

- Concern about lack of confidentiality and breach of trust within the Church of Ireland.

Training and support

- Begin with preparation at Theological College. Encourage a culture of mutual support among clergy.
- Acknowledge the couple/family both during and after training.
- There should be more social contact between clergy couples and families.
- Clergy wives mentioned as supportive of each other.
- Request for organised weekends away for families rather than just for couples.

The nature of the job and its boundaries

- Pressures on family life – time, lack of privacy, relocation, financial strains
- Time management skills should be taught.
- Need for time off and more weekends off.
- Clergy spouse is not an unpaid curate.
- Educate congregations about the above.
- Non-stipendiary ministers need support too!

The Marriage Council

- A plea for more information – literature, resources.
- Be proactive/lobby

STATISTICAL ABSRACT of QUESTIONNAIRE

CLERGY and *CLERGY SPOUSE RESPONSES*

	Male	Female	Unknown	Total
Clergy	379	61	13	453
<i>Clergy spouse</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>315</i>	<i>2</i>	329

1. How long have you (has your spouse) been ordained?

	%			%	
0-5	11	6	20-30	20	19
5-10	8	5	30+	38	56
10-20	23	14			

2. Have you been in ministerial life since you were married?

	%			%	
YES	60	64	Unaccounted for	6	2
NO	34	34			

3. How would you rate the pastoral care/ support offered to you and your spouse by the Church of Ireland?

	%			%	
Very good	12	14	Fair	30	28
Good	27	26	Poor	23	29
			No comment	8	3

3a Where has this come from?

	%		%
Bishop	38 <i>34</i>	Parishioners	25 <i>30</i>
Fellow clergy	34 <i>30</i>	No-one	3 <i>6</i>

	%		%
Other	32 <i>25</i>	Marriage Course	5 <i>6</i>
Family	16 <i>17</i>	Counsellor	5 <i>4</i>
Friends	34 <i>42</i>	Other Clergy	8 <i>6</i>

4. Please tick the activities you think helpful in strengthening ministry marriages.

	%		%
Enrichment courses	20 <i>18</i>	Confidential pastoral support	38 <i>38</i>
Couple retreats	22 <i>24</i>	Counselling	20 <i>20</i>

5. If your relationship was under strain, would you seek outside help?

	%		%		%
Definitely	23 <i>20</i>	Possibly	35 <i>38</i>	No comment	5 <i>2</i>
Probably	31 <i>27</i>	Definitely not	6 <i>13</i>		

6. If such help was available in a strictly confidential, sympathetic and professional manner from the Church of Ireland, would you consider availing of it?

	%		%		
Definitely	17 18	Possibly	36 37	No comment	3 0
Probably	35 31	Definitely not	9 14		

7. Would you be willing to contribute to the cost of such help?

	%		%		%
Definitely	25 16	Possibly	31 33	No Comment	7 8
Probably	29 30	Definitely not	8 13		

Dioceses:

	%		%
Armagh	10 11	Tuam, Killala & Achonry	2 2
Clogher	4 6	Dublin & Glendalough	16 17
Derry & Raphoe	10 8	Meath & Kildare	3 3
Down & Dromore	16 16	Cashel & Ossory	7 8
Connor	17 17	Cork, Cloyne & Ross	7 7
Kilmore, Elphin & Ardagh	3 3	Limerick & Killaloe	2 1

Unaccounted for: **3%** 1%

8. Have you any suggestions for the Marriage Council relating to supporting those in ministry life?

Most did not *accurately* answer question 8, if they responded at all, but the comments logged flagged up some important points:

A Sample of Comments

From Clergy Spouses

“Take the best of what is available outside the Church of Ireland and make it available. I do not believe that in-house counselling no matter how confidential it is said to be, EVER is”.

“A clergy wife drew alongside me quietly yet supportively. This is a special ministry in itself, so (we) need to look carefully at the people chosen for a pastoral role”.

“Could a pre-ordination preparation be available for those whose husbands/spouses decide to become ordained after they are already married”?

“The Church of Ireland is too small to support professional counselling and people would prefer to seek help from total strangers rather than from a source which could be considered too close to the working environment”.

“Something needs to be offered quick as clergy marriages are under constant strain and several of us are at breaking point”.

From Clergy

“I think couple retreats and counselling would be very valuable, where it would be good for clergy to be challenged about not neglecting family relationships while serving in a busy parish”.

“It needs to start at the Church of Ireland Theological College - the training denies marriage by having no married accommodation and

pathetic grants.

“There is a deep need for marriage ministry within the Church. Much wisdom is needed in the choice of counselors and pastors”.

“As leaders I think clergy may be too embarrassed to admit the need of help as they are expected to set an example for others. This can add to the stress of a situation. In busy parish situations the need to have time off together is of paramount importance. An added pressure today is the cost of housing provision towards retirement”.

ACTION AS A MARRIAGE COUNCIL

- We have prepared a resource that compiles useful information on support/counselling and on finance.
- We seek an opportunity to contribute to theological training with preparation for living life as a clergy person, couple or family.
- We are available to resource dioceses should they wish to hold family or couples conferences.
- Responding to the outcome of the General Synod debate and other suggestions.

CONCLUSION

Quite clearly the Marriage Council alone is not in a position to address many of the pastoral care issues raised through the results of this questionnaire. However it is hoped, by making the results available in this form, that a debate can be stimulated in General Synod and in the Church at large.