

# Accord Northern Ireland Catholic Marriage Care Service

Company Limited by Guarantee

Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report)

Year ended 31 March 2023

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The trustees, who are also the directors for the purposes of company law, present their report and the financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2023.

## Chair's report

### Reference and administrative details

**Registered charity name**            Accord Northern Ireland Catholic Marriage Care Service

**Charity registration number**    NIC102332

**Company registration number**   NI627165

**Principal office and registered office**    Cana House  
St Mary's Church, Chaple Lane  
Grotto Entrance  
1st Floor, 68 Berry Street  
Belfast  
BT1 1FJ

### The trustees

Archbishop Eamon Martin  
Archbishop Noel Treanor                    (Resigned 20 January 2023)  
Bishop Michael Router  
Bishop Donal McKeown  
Bishop Lawrence Duffy  
Mrs C O'Loan  
Mr P McGuinness  
Mrs G Loughran

**Company secretary**                    Deirdre O'Rawe

**Auditor**                                    Hill Vellacott  
Chartered accountants & statutory auditor  
22 Great Victoria Street  
Belfast  
BT2 7BA

# Accord Northern Ireland Catholic Marriage Care Service

## Company Limited by Guarantee

### Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)*

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#### Structure, governance and management

Accord NI has centres across N. Ireland with its Regional Office based in Belfast. This year the company was fully operational with a central administration; account payment processes were effectively implemented and reviewed. In 2022/23, the company had 2 full time and 2 part-time employees, 50 volunteers, and 6 in training. The Board of Trustees met on a quarterly basis and the day-to-day operations are delegated to the Regional Director. Accord Northern Ireland CLG Catholic Marriage Care Service has 8 regional centres in Belfast, Derry, Armagh, Newry, Maghera, Omagh, Ballymena and Enniskillen, with outreach centres in Downpatrick (Crossgar), Coleraine and the NI Regional Office in Belfast.

#### Objectives and activities

Accord NI is an agency of the Catholic Church providing a service to couples preparing for or seeking a deeper commitment within the Sacrament of Marriage. Accord NI's services are open to all regardless of faith, denomination or none. Services are provided, based on client need rather than ability to pay. In the Marriage Education Programme, couples are invited to explore and reflect on the essential elements of their marriage and the purpose and value of their choices within a committed relationship. Accord NI specialises in Inter-Church marriage preparation and works with clergy from the other main denominations. Relationship counselling is provided for couples, as well as individuals in a couple relationship, in a caring and confidential manner.

People who benefit from our work are;

- Those whose ability to communicate in marriage is enhanced in marriage preparation;
- Those who learn through counselling to cope with, what on their own, would be over-whelming challenges in their relationships;
- Those who avail of the fertility and wellbeing service;
- The children, parents and teachers who benefit from the pioneering work in relationships and sexuality education in schools;
- Those who are helped through counselling to separate amicably and to minimise the consequential damage to their children.

# Accord Northern Ireland Catholic Marriage Care Service

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### Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)*

#### Year ended 31 March 2023

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##### **Objectives and activities** *(continued)*

Accord NI's counselling service contributes in a very positive way to the happiness and well-being of many children, often very significantly, when their parents seek help in order to resolve their relationship difficulties. As a pastoral service based on gospel values, Accord NI seeks to support and strengthen marriages, relationships and families. Research clearly shows that inter-parental conflict can damage intimate relationships and cause disruption in family life. This is even more critical for children living in situations of domestic violence or abuse. The family is necessary for the stability of society as a unit in which children, the future generation, are nurtured, cared for and reared into adulthood. Emotionally unhealthy or dysfunctional families find the task of rearing and enabling children to be balanced and happy quite challenging and difficult. Because of the importance of the family for the life and well-being of society, it is essential that Accord NI continues to work to provide the necessary supports to strengthen marriage and the family.

Accord NI's work falls within activities mandated by the Department of Health, Family and Children's Policy Directorate. In addition, the aims of the organisation dovetail with and compliment the Government's Families Matter - Supporting Families in Northern Ireland (2008). This strategy supports the aims and objectives of another strategy - 'Our Children and Young People, Our Pledge' - which sets out the vision for improving support for families and children.

With 11 locations throughout Northern Ireland, Accord NI strives to be as accessible as possible and to reach out to those most marginalised in our society. The vast majority of people who avail from our services could not afford counselling within the private sector. An additional direct benefit is that helping families to remain together reduces the cost to the exchequer.

##### **Strategic report**

The following sections for achievements and performance and financial review form the strategic report of the charity.

##### **Achievements and performance**

Accord Marriage Education Facilitators offered support and delivered marriage preparation to 2,009 couples. Both face-to-face and the adapted Virtual Interactive Marriage Preparation programme developed in 2020 continued to provide an opportunity for couples, including inter-church couples, preparing for sacramental marriage and was enthusiastically delivered by our facilitators. There were 1,289 hours of marriage and relationship counselling provided both in-person and online.

##### **Communication**

22% noted that they and their partner were never or seldom able to talk and listen to each other  
34% felt they were always or often ignored or not listened to by their partner  
15% reported that they always or often ignored or did not listen to their partner  
23% felt they were always or often criticised or insulted by their partner  
10% reported that they always or often criticise their partner  
14% felt they were always or often belittled or put down by their partner  
4% reported that they always or often belittled or put down their partner.

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#### Achievements and performance *(continued)*

##### Problematic Behaviour

13% reported their own or their partner's use of alcohol was always or often problematic  
3% reported their own or their partner's use of drugs was always or often problematic  
2% reported their own or their partner's gambling was always or often problematic  
16% reported their own or their partner's use of the phone/texting, internet or social media always or often caused problems  
21% reported that trust in the relationship was always or often affected by problem behaviours.

##### Intimacy

34% reported that they never or seldom experienced closeness and affection with their partner  
47% described their sexual relationship as either absent, poor or very poor  
10% reported difficulty always or often having sex  
7% reported their partner always or often having concerns about another close, physical, or emotional relationship of theirs  
9% reported always or often having concerns about another close, physical, or emotional relationship of their partner's.

##### Family Issues

19% reported that childcare and home duties always and often caused problems in the relationship  
21% reported problems between them and their own or their partner's extended family always or often  
5% reported issues of culture, religious beliefs or values often or always caused difficulties between them and their partner  
18% reported bereavement, other loss or grief experienced by them or their partner affected their relationship always or often  
22% reported that either they or their partner always or often experienced depression  
26% reported that finances and financial management always or often caused problems between them.

##### Conflict

49% reported they always, repeatedly or often argued with their partner  
23% reported that arguments are never resolved calmly  
49% reported that arguments are sometimes resolved calmly  
35% reported that they or their partner always, repeatedly or often yelled or shouted during arguments  
2% reported that they or their partner always, repeatedly or often throw things during arguments.

# Accord Northern Ireland Catholic Marriage Care Service

## Company Limited by Guarantee

### Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)*

#### Year ended 31 March 2023

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##### **Achievements and performance** *(continued)*

##### **CPD for counsellors included:**

- An Introduction to Addiction in Couples Work,
- Sharing Best Practice,
- Taking Stock - Moving Forward,
- Training for Accord counsellors who made themselves available to take cases who present with issues linked to their role as host families for Ukrainian refugees, - A Master Class in Family Therapy Skills covering An Overview of Family Therapy, Skills used in Family Therapy, Genograms, Family Dynamics, Blended Families, Step Families, Co-Parenting and Parental Alienation

##### **CPD for facilitators included:**

- Facilitator Training in the delivery of the new Marriage Education Programme,- Exploring the Church's teaching on the Sacrament of Marriage

During this year, the Board has begun a fundamental review of the work and future direction of Accord (NI). This has involved consultation with facilitators and counsellors through a survey (February 2022). The Board understood that for many counsellors and facilitators the principal motivation for involvement in Accord is to be of service to the Catholic and to the wider community. However, the Board in recognition of the hours of dedicated and professional service which have been provided by our facilitators and counsellors; several of whom have been with us for many years considered a new way of recognising financially the role of our counsellors and facilitators. The Board's decision was to offer to every facilitator and counsellor a contract as a worker with effect from 1 September 2022. Under the new contractual arrangements, facilitators and counsellors chose to work some or all of their hours on a voluntary basis.

##### **Financial review**

Accord Northern Ireland Marriage Care Service obtains finance from a number of sources; primarily grant support from the Department of Health and the northern dioceses, as well as marriage preparation courses, and preparation programmes.

As of 1st May 2016, the Accord Regional Office and the 9 centres ceased to operate individually and all resources were transferred into the bank accounts of Accord Northern Ireland Catholic Marriage Care Service. Since then, all funds have been lodged into and all expenses have been paid from accounts operated under the name of the Accord NI CLG.

# **Accord Northern Ireland Catholic Marriage Care Service**

## **Company Limited by Guarantee**

### **Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)***

#### **Year ended 31 March 2023**

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##### **Plans for future periods**

- Implementation of the new Accord Marriage Preparation Programme and rolling out training for all Marriage Education Facilitators.
- The development of a Certificate in Couple Counselling in partnership with Marriage Care UK.
- Selection and Training of Couple Counselling Supervisors.
- A Synodal Reflection on the Challenges facing the future of the Service of the Catholic Church in supporting Marriage, Relationships and Families through Marriage Preparation and accompanying Couples in their relationship difficulties.
- Supporting priests in completing the final stage of the Marriage Preparation Programme.
- Piloting of a new Marriage Education Facilitator Supervision Model.
- Review of Child Safeguarding and Domestic Abuse policies.

##### **Trustees' responsibilities statement**

The trustees, who are also directors for the purposes of company law, are responsible for preparing the trustees' report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

Company law requires the charity trustees to prepare financial statements for each year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, for that period.

In preparing these financial statements, the trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the applicable Charities SORP;
- make judgments and accounting estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in business.

# Accord Northern Ireland Catholic Marriage Care Service

## Company Limited by Guarantee

### Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)*

#### Year ended 31 March 2023

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The trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the charity's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

#### **Auditor**

Each of the persons who is a trustee at the date of approval of this report confirms that:

- so far as they are aware, there is no relevant audit information of which the charity's auditor is unaware; and
- they have taken all steps that they ought to have taken as a trustee to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the charity's auditor is aware of that information.

The trustees' annual report and the strategic report were approved on 14 November 2023 and signed on behalf of the board of trustees by:

Archbishop Eamon Martin  
Trustee

Deirdre O'Rawe  
Charity Secretary