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The Catholic Church places an enormous value on married life. Marriage is not the creation of the state. Rather, it is instituted by God as a permanent union of mind, soul, and body of a man and woman. Marriage was given the dignity of a Sacrament by Christ.

Couples enter marriage wanting the best for their spouses and themselves. They desire a permanent union which will bring a rich measure of happiness to themselves and their children.

The Church desires that and even more. The Church believes that the starting point for all human relationships is our relationship with the Triune God. It is from our relationship with God, who is self-giving Love, that we can love the other person fully. As members of the Body of Christ, we are called to love as Christ loves – faithfully, generously, and permanently. When Christ is the silent third party of a marriage, that is certainly possible.

Through the grace of the Sacrament of Marriage, husband and wife are able to witness to Christ's self-giving love for His Church and are able to fulfill the unitive and procreative purposes of marital sexuality: "Be fruitful and multiply." The radical self-giving love, which marriage entails, by the grace of God can lead to everything a married couple hopes for.

A great marriage requires preparation, both remote and more immediate. Remote preparation begins very early when the example and teaching of parents convey the values so important in marriage: respect for other persons, selfless and self-giving love, compassion and forgiveness, generosity and chastity.

The human and Christian values of marriage and family, first learned in the home, are later reinforced by priests, deacons, teachers, and other members of the Christian community.

The percentage of divorce drops drastically when the partners in marriage pray together and attend church together.

Chastity also increases significantly the odds for a lifelong marriage. A study has shown that those who remain virgins until marriage have a divorce rate 60 percent lower than non-virgins. The argument that cohabitation increases the prospects of a lifelong marriage have been shown to be false.

All that the faith community can do to help our young people live disciplined and virtuous lives is the best remote preparation we can give them to enter into the “intimate partnership of married life and love” to which God calls them in the Sacrament of Marriage.

Because of its deep love and concern for those planning to enter marriage, the Church has, for many years now, also required couples to undergo a more proximate premarital preparation. The proximate preparation includes interviews with the parish priest or deacon, a premarital inventory which helps couples identify their strengths and weaknesses, discussions with married couples who serve as mentors, and the opportunity for a couple to plan the readings, prayers, and music that will be used in the marriage liturgy.

Since the number one reason for most marriages to break up is poor communication, one of the goals of the premarital proximate preparation program is to help the couple build bridges for long-term successful communication.

In the Sacrament of Marriage, a couple becomes one in Christ. Christ dwells within their union and strengthens them to take up their crosses, to forgive each other, to bear each other’s burdens, and to love each other with a self-giving,

tender, and fruitful love. Christ enables them, in good times and in bad, to bear witness to His own faithfulness to the Church.

In the United States, weddings have often been an occasion for over-spending and selfish over-indulgence. Even family relationships are often stretched to their limits and feelings are hurt in preparation for the extravaganza. The Church strives to take the focus off the wedding and to place greater effort giving the witness and teaching which will enable couples to be better prepared to live lifelong, holy, and happy unions.