

## Does Marriage Preparation Make A Difference? Yes.

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We may never feel more in love than when we first meet, court and get married. It's a heady experience that one of my professors called "delicious insanity." Sadly, we know that the certainty we may feel at that time that we will be together forever often turns out not to be realized. In fact, one study shows that of those people who divorce, most will do so in the first seven years of their marriage. Can anything be done to help? Yes.

One of the parts of Church of the Holy Communion marriage preparation process is the use of the PREPARE Program. PREPARE is an acronym for **P**remarital **P**ersonal and **R**elationship **E**valuation. It is a computer scored instrument that helps couples identify their relationship strengths and growth areas.

While it was not originally designed to predict anything, research indicates that it does predict. PREPARE scores were able to predict 85% of the time couples who would divorce or separate, and 80% of the time couples who identified themselves as happily married five years after taking PREPARE.

A recent study of PREPARE focused on the effectiveness of the program in terms of couple satisfaction. Couples who took PREPARE, even if there was no feedback or counseling provided (we provide two hours) significantly increased their couple satisfaction as compared to the control group in the study.

The improvements were made in several important relationship skill areas: communication and conflict resolution; and in three relationship areas: roles, couple closeness and flexibility. Three of these areas had previously been shown to be good predictors of divorce:

communication, conflict resolution, and roles. The implication is that PREPARE helps couples in the most sensitive areas of their relationship and doing so helps in reducing the likelihood of divorce and increasing satisfaction with the relationship.

PREPARE scores can be used to group couples into four groups: Vitalized (the most satisfied), Harmonious, Traditional, and Conflicted (the least satisfied). The study showed that over half the Harmonious and Traditional couple types increased their satisfaction by one or more levels after PREPARE. **Most important of all the findings may have been that conflicted couple types moved to a more positive couple type in 83% of the cases.**

Overall, the PREPARE Program had a significant impact on 90% of the couples, demonstrating that the program is a very useful prevention program for increasing marital satisfaction and reducing divorce.

Some of the comments from couples who have completed the PREPARE program may illustrate even further its value. One said, "We were not as ready for marriage as we thought. We think we will have a greater probability of having a successful marriage because of the counseling."

At Church of the Holy Communion, the PREPARE program is one part of a two part program of marriage preparation. The second is our *Good Beginnings: Engaged Couples Workshop*, which each couple completes. This day and a half workshop is led by trained, but imperfect or "real" couples who, using a guided format, share their experience in marriage. The topics covered include, communication, conflict resolution, forgiveness, and love. Couple feedback has been very positive and gives us assurance that we are helping couples "divorce proof" their marriages.