

Frequently Asked Questions

About Theology of the Body Study Programs

1. What is the Theology of the Body?

Pope John Paul II devoted the first major teaching of his pontificate to what he called the Theology of the Body. This teaching calls everyone to an authentic understanding and living out of what it means to be created male and female in the image and likeness of God, and it is being embraced by Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

Through an in-depth reflection on the Scriptures, the Theology of the Body addresses the two most fundamental and universal questions: 1) What does it mean to be human? and 2) How can I live my life in a way that brings happiness and fulfillment?

The Theology of the Body is renewing marriages, awakening vocations, healing deep personal wounds, and setting people free to live the life of greatness for which they were created. This is no passing theological fad but a rich, refined understanding of our Catholic faith.

2. How will my parish benefit from this program?

Many Catholics have more than a few questions about whether the Church really has reasonable and practical solutions to the most important issues of life. Too often, many see the Church as merely a dispenser of “rules” and wonder if there is something more to a relationship with God. The Theology of the Body, by presenting the Catholic sacramental worldview, helps people see their faith in a rich, new light.

One of the fundamental human realities is our creation as male and female. By understanding God’s plan for men and women—and our call to communion—the healing of human relationships begins to take place. Many worldwide have experienced a dramatic renewal in their relationships through Pope John Paul II’s call to self-donating love. The Theology of the Body offers a new paradigm for living—one that affects how we live, how we work, how we pray, and more.

You will marvel at the lasting renewal of faith this body of work will have in the life of your parishioners.

3. Who is this program primarily for?

As noted theologian and TOB expert Christopher West often states, “If you have a body, then the Theology of the Body is for you.” Because we are “enfleshed” spirits (as opposed to angels, who are pure spirits), any theology that focuses on the proper integration of body and spirit should, by default, be of great importance and value to all people.

Pope John Paul II sought to develop what he called an *adequate anthropology*. In the Theology of the Body, he sets out a proper understanding of what it really means to be human—and then describes how this proper understanding should be lived out here on earth. Everyone ultimately needs to know what it means to be human and how to live in a way that brings authentic happiness. Thus, this program is for all Christians, including those who are living out “celibacy for the Kingdom.”

Some may have a stronger initial reaction to the teachings of the Theology of the Body because of their state in life. For example, married couples often feel an immediate delight because they learn a new way of seeing and experiencing their spouse. Nonetheless, all students of this profound teaching experience a spiritual renewal because they start to “connect the dots” and see the ramifications of what it means to live a life of “self-donation.”

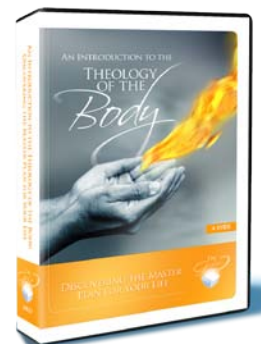
As children of the divorce culture, many young Catholics wonder if there is a better way to live out their relationships. The Theology of the Body offers them great, renewed possibilities. Many older Catholics, who may be living their faith “legalistically,” without knowing the “whys” behind the “whats,” find the TOB explanations for Catholic moral teaching refreshing and liberating. They are greatly affirmed because “what they knew all along” is now explained through a rich, reasonable language.

4. Is there a specific program you would recommend?

We recommend *An Introduction to the Theology of the Body: Discovering the Master Plan for Your Life* because of its rich content, dynamic presenter, engaging format, high-quality production values, and reasonable cost.

This program is presented by Christopher West, who is one of the most respected Theology of the Body teachers today. Christopher’s affable style, humor, and ability to “make the complex simple” has made him the most requested TOB presenter in the world.

An Introduction to the Theology of the Body is an eight-part program, utilizing high-quality, 28-minute DVDs, a leader’s guide, and a companion student workbook. A variety of support materials—including training, promotional materials, and teaching aids—offer parishes a “turn-key” program.



5. Could you briefly outline the content of the program?

An Introduction to the Theology of the Body is a comprehensive group study system designed to lay a firm foundation for those desiring to learn and incorporate the Theology of the Body into their lives. This is a bold, new series that incorporates the revised translation of John Paul II's original text, along with the "hidden talks" of the Theology of the Body – only recently discovered in the Vatican archives. *An Introduction to the Theology of the Body* is for any "body" looking to reach his or her fullest potential in this life.

Among other topics, participants will:

- Learn why the redemption of our sexuality is the key to happiness
- Discover the truth behind the lies of lust and pornography and how they can be overcome
- Develop a "new lens" through which to see the world with greater clarity
- Learn the language of sexual love
- See how God's mystery is revealed through the body and spousal love

Please visit www.TheologyoftheBody.com to view images and read more about all of our Theology of the Body studies.

6. Is this program approved by the Church?

Yes. *An Introduction to the Theology of the Body* has been granted the *Imprimatur* by the Archbishop of Philadelphia, Justin Cardinal Rigali. In addition, its presenter, Christopher West, has spoken to parishes in forty-eight states and on four continents. He has also presented the Theology of the Body at diocesan events throughout the world, including two dozen clergy convocations.

7. Who is Christopher West?

Christopher West is perhaps the world's most well-known presenter of Pope John Paul II's teachings on the Theology of the Body. He is the author of several books, including *Good News about Sex & Marriage* (Servant, 2000; revised, 2004), *Theology of the Body Explained* (Pauline, 2003; revised, 2007), *Theology of the Body for Beginners* (Ascension, 2004; revised, 2009), *The Love that Satisfies* (Ascension, 2007), and *Heaven's Song* (Ascension, 2008). West has taught graduate and undergraduate courses on a number of university and seminary faculties, including St. John Vianney Seminary in Denver, the John Paul II Institute in Melbourne, Australia, and the Institute of Priestly Formation at Creighton University in Omaha.

West holds a master's degree in theological studies (MTS) from the John Paul II Institute on Marriage and the Family in Washington, DC, and serves as a research fellow and faculty member of the Theology of the Body Institute in suburban Philadelphia. He and his wife, Wendy, and their children live in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

8. How long is the program?

An Introduction to the Theology of the Body is divided into eight lessons. As such, it is usually presented over an eight-week period. This relatively short length makes it ideal as a Fall or early Spring (e.g., Advent or Lenten) study, although we have found that it works well anytime of the year. It can also be used in the on-going formation of your teachers and catechists or as part of an RCIA program.

9. Logistically-speaking, how can the program best be presented?

Though there are a number of ways the program can be presented, we suggest a ninety-minute session held on a specific night for eight weeks. Here is one possible format:

Arrival	7:00 p.m.	Break	7:40 to 7:50 p.m.
Social/welcome	7:00 to 7:10 p.m.	Group discussion*	7:50 to 8:25 p.m.
DVD presentation	7:10 to 7:40 p.m.	Closing prayer/petitions	8:25 to 8:30 p.m.

We recommend that adult faith formation programs be run during the week. Although any night during the week would work, we suggest a Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday evening as these are commonly-used evenings for similar formation programs. Naturally, if your parish has a tradition of adult faith formation on a particular night, utilize that evening. If it is run for a young adult group, Wednesday and Friday evenings also work well.

* If your group has more than twenty participants, you may need to break it up into two or more smaller discussion groups. If you do, though, it is important to have a trained facilitator with some knowledge of the Theology of the Body lead the discussion.

10. What level of theological expertise is needed to participate in the program?

The typical lay Catholic will be able to follow the content in the DVDs and workbook, although the facilitator will need to provide a fair amount of explanation of the concepts within the program and answer any questions that may arise. To assist facilitators in this regard, we provide a leader's guide that features answers to the study questions at the end of each chapter.

11. Ideally, who should run the program?

Though not absolutely necessary, the facilitator ideally should have a degree in theology or philosophy and be faithful to the teachings of the Church. Given that many Catholics do not have a correct or complete understanding of the Church's teachings on matters of human sexuality and marriage, the facilitator needs to be pastorally prudent, knowing how to meet people where they are—and then lead them to a deeper level of faith and understanding.

In its final lessons, *An Introduction to the Theology of the Body* deals with issues of sexual morality. Thus, it is likely that some participants will have questions and even strong opinions. This is why it is critical for the facilitator to have a strong grasp of the Catholic faith and exhibit pastoral prudence. Be assured, however, that Christopher West's style and content will do the "heavy lifting" in this regard. He is skilled at communicating Catholic teaching, including the "tough issues" in a way that makes them understandable and reasonable.

12. Is there any sort of training in the program offered?

Yes. Ascension Press is developing audio training talks for each of the eight sessions that will be soon be available on-line. Visit www.TheologyoftheBody.com, and go to the leader's section. Until that time, please refer to the Leader's Guide, which offers many insights on how to effectively lead your study group.

Periodically, we also offer two-hour phone trainings at no cost that discuss the following issues:

- The pedagogy of the program
- Teaching tips for each lesson
- How to facilitate a small group
- Marketing
- Logistics and operational questions
- Handling tough questions



13. Why will my parishioners choose to participate in this program?

Some of your parishioners have already heard of the Theology of the Body and will be delighted that such a program is being offered at your parish. Others will respond through personal encouragement, especially from the pulpit, and from the marketing materials we provide.

14. What are the costs to my parish?

An Introduction to the Theology of the Body can easily be a "self-liquidating" program (i.e., participants cover all—or most—of the associated expenses). The parish typically covers the cost of the DVDs (\$99.95) and any expenses associated with promotion (typically less than \$50). The parish may also wish to compensate the facilitator. Student workbooks are \$12.95 each, but a bulk discount is available. You should also consider a small budget for refreshments. As mentioned, most of these expenses can be recouped through the fees paid by the participants.

15. What is the cost to my parishioners?

When it comes to paying for adult faith formation programs at the parish level, the culture of Catholicism is changing. Parishioners are beginning to understand that such programs cost money, and they are increasingly willing to pay reasonable fees for them.

We believe a reasonable fee for the eight-week session would be between \$15 and \$60. Your promotional materials will indicate that this fee covers course materials and refreshments.

If your parish attracts just twenty participants at \$30 each, you should be able to cover the cost of the DVDs, refreshments, and promotion—with some "scholarship" monies available for those who genuinely cannot afford the program. If you plan on compensating the program facilitator, consider a higher per person fee (or seek to attract a larger number of participants to help defray the extra cost). We also suggest you consider seeking funding through one of your various parish organizations, such as the Knights of Columbus or women's groups, to help offset some or all of the expenses.

16. How do you recommend we handle instances where a parishioner cannot afford the cost?

In order for the Church to grow in the realm of faith formation, charging modest fees is necessary. Without an economical model in place, many of these programs simply cannot happen. Nonetheless, there will be times when some genuinely cannot afford a given program. In this instance, we recommend you tell anyone who inquires that scholarships are available for those who have a serious financial need.

We recommend that the person handling registration ask anyone who inquires about a scholarship whether he or she can afford to pay \$5 or \$10. It is important for people to have some financial investment in their faith formation as this further commits the person to the program.

17. How can we promote the program?

Ascension Press has high-quality, ready-made promotional materials available for free download at www.TheologyoftheBody.com in the leader's section. For a small fee, we can also customize and print them for you.

Our promotional materials include:

- Posters and flyers
- Bulletin announcements
- How to Plan, Promote, and Run a Theology of the Body Study Group

18. Do people register for the program or simply show up at the first meeting?

If you are charging parishioners, we strongly recommend pre-registration. You may actually consider an “early bird” special in which a \$10 or \$15 discount is offered for early registration. If you are not charging parishioners, we still recommend a “Suggested Registration” program in which you request registration so that you can have an accurate estimate of how many will be attending.

19. Is there a particular time of the year it should be presented?

No. The program's eight-week format can easily be fit into most parish schedules any time during the year. That said, we recommend that you begin the program either in late September or late January. These are typically good times to launch new programs as people get back into a rhythm after summer and Christmas breaks. It would also work well as a Lenten series.

20. What facilities or equipment are needed to run the program?

You will need a digital projector and a DVD player (or a computer with a DVD drive). We recommend setting the chairs up in rows (i.e., theater style). Tables are not needed. In fact, if you have twenty-five people or fewer in your group, the absence of tables will enable you to move your chairs into a large circle for group discussion. (If you have a more than twenty-five participants, you will need additional rooms to break up into smaller discussion groups.)

You will also need name tags, pens, and refreshments. Ideas for leading the group can be found in the Leader's Guide.

21. How far in advance should our parish order the student workbooks and DVDs?

We recommend that you place your order at least two weeks before the first session to allow for ground shipping of your materials. It is also recommended that you order a few more than you think you will need so that you will have materials on hand for late registrants.

22. Can I return extra workbooks if we do not use them?

Yes. Unused workbooks may be returned for a full refund. You will simply need to cover the cost of return shipping.

23. What happens at an Information Session?

During an Information Session, a representative from your diocese and Ascension Press will share the vision and pedagogy of *An Introduction to the Theology of the Body* program. The 75-minute session includes a short presentation on the program and related logistics, followed by a question-and-answer session in which specific questions or situations will be addressed.

24. How can I learn more?

For more information, contact your diocesan adult faith formation office or Ascension Press at 1-800-376-0520. One of our Parish Group Specialists will be available to help you with your questions and the ordering of the appropriate amount of materials to get you started. Also, be sure to visit the leaders section at www.TheologyoftheBody.com for additional free support materials.