

# Theology of the Body

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## Welcome & Opening Prayer for Life

Facilitator opens meeting with a “thank you” to all who have attended, introduction of new members, and a prayer. It is important that all participants feel welcomed and participate within their own comfort level.

## Opening Prayer: Prayer for Purity of Heart

*Lord, help me to accept and receive my sexuality as a gift from you.  
Grant me the grace to resist the many lies that distort this divine gift and help me to live my sexuality according to the truth of self-giving love.  
Grant me purity of heart so that I might see the image of your glory in the beauty of others, and one day see you face to face. Amen.*

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## Presentation – Theology of the Body

**NOTE: The Powerpoint presentation is available online for download.**

- ❖ The presentation file has been updated into the same PDF format as this session outline so it should be just as easy to access. If no laptop/projector is available, a printout of individual slides can also be copied/printed and used as both a presentation and as a handout for participant notes.
- ❖ The content in the slide presentation is designed to be straight-forward but also to allow flexibility.
- ❖ The comprehensive nature of the written facilitator notes below has been provided to allow for diversity among groups, for an extended and on-going education, and for later reference on the topic. **Therefore, it is possible that all the content included in the facilitator notes will *not* be covered in a single session. Please review the information below for each slide and then create a presentation that is your own based on the needs of your particular group.**
- ❖ If necessary, the Respect Life Office can answer any questions or provide guidance on any topics in the slide deck. Please contact the Respect Life Office at (816) 756-1850 or [francis@diocesksj.org](mailto:francis@diocesksj.org) if you cannot access the on-line files.

**Slide 1: Introduction**      Theology of the Body

### Slide 2: Topics for Discussion

- What is Theology of the Body?
- How does Theology of the Body apply to me today?
- Theology of the Body for Teens program

### Slide 3: The Theology of the Body?

The Theology of the Body refers to a series of 129 lectures given by Pope John Paul II during his Wednesday audiences in Rome between September 1979 and November 1984. These addresses were later compiled and published as a single work entitled The Theology of the Body According to John Paul II.

The Theology of the Body covers such topics as the bodily dimension of the human person, the nature of human sexuality, the human need for communion, and the nature of marriage.

Christ's mission, according to the spousal analogy of the Scriptures, is to "marry" us. He invites us to live with him in an eternal life-giving union of love. This is what the union of the sexes is meant to proclaim and foreshadow – the eternal union of Christ and the Church.

As St. Paul says, quoting from Genesis:

"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the church" (Eph 5:31-32).

By helping us understand this profound interconnection between sex and the Christian mystery, John Paul II's theology of the body not only paves the way for lasting renewal of marriage and the family; it enables everyone to rediscover "the meaning of the whole of existence, the meaning of life" (Oct 29, 80).

John Paul II's Theology of the Body is especially important for teens who are surrounded by messages that challenge their faith and encourage permissive attitudes. The Theology of the Body is a new understanding of the human person that takes one beyond the "thou shall not's" often associated with Christianity to a fresh, new approach to the gift of love and human sexuality. As John Paul II says, "Love demands a personal commitment to the will of God" (October 1, 1979).

#### **Slide 4: Created for Love**

Sacramentality of the Body

"The body, in fact, and it alone is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It was created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery [of God]...and thus be a sign of it"  
Theology of the Body, Feb. 20, 1980

#### **Slide 5: Created for Love**

We humans are called to love one another. We are not called to dominate or oppress or use others, but to respect them as persons made in God's image and likeness. This call to love is actually "stamped" into our very bodies. The physical union of man and woman is called the "marital act" because it is intended to express marital love. It is actually meant to be a foreshadowing of the union that we will all experience in heaven. That heavenly union is not a sexual one, to be sure, but it is real—more real than anything we have, or will, experience here on earth. It's a perfect union between God and mankind—for eternity.

Everyone is always telling you to "not have sex". If you have sex, you're going to get pregnant or get an STD. So, you just shouldn't do it. This concept depicts "abstinence" as the only option.

"Chastity" means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being. Our bodies are good and beautiful; they are meant to be loved and not used. Because of the way our culture twists the meaning of our sexuality and misrepresents our bodies, we have grown up thinking that abstinence is the goal. Abstinence is good, but chastity includes an understanding of the purpose of our bodies and sexuality.

Love is not just about feeling good, although this is a part of love. Love is an active decision. It is a decision to give oneself to another and to do so totally. Pope John Paul II uses the term "total self-donation" for this type of giving. It isn't about what we can get, but instead is willing the good of the other person.

People talk about finding "true love," but what is it? Pope John Paul II explained: "For love is not merely a feeling; it is an act of will that consists of preferring, in a constant manner, the good of others to the good of oneself."

It's not enough to feel attractions or simply to want love. We must strive to know what is best for the other, and then make an actual commitment of our wills to bring about this "good" for the other.

Chastity is the virtue that directs our sexual desires and attitudes toward the truth of love. A virtue is a firm habit of doing what is good. To view chastity as a positive virtue we must see that it is much more than abstinence, which just means "not having sex".

#### **Slide 6: Love and beauty in a culture without theology...**

Have you ever wondered why the subject of sex is part of nearly every TV show, advertisement, song, and movie? And the sex shown or sung about is usually glorious—with no pain inflicted on those involved. Rarely do we see the pain that comes, for example, from selfishness. Did you ever think about what society would be like without selfishness in relationships? If everyone simply loved the other as he or she wished to be loved, we would have virtually no pain and no problems in relationships.

Confusion reigns, and it is leading to some seriously broken hearts. People today seem more confused about the meaning of love and the purpose of sex than perhaps ever before. Many people are searching for the meaning of life and love but don't realize that the answer is actually right in front of us; the key to finding that love we're all looking for (even if we don't know it) is hidden in God's original design of our bodies and souls.

Our sexuality is a gift through which we can choose to be generous or selfish. Society has flipped the idea of "self-giving" on its head. In fact, many "love stories" portrayed in the modern culture could more appropriately be called "lust stories." Why is this important? Because "love" involves being generous—like God—while "lust" is sexual desire that is selfish—apart from the love of God.

Not to be confused with sexual attraction, lust is almost purely self-seeking. As renowned youth leader John Crudele succinctly says, "Love seeks to give; lust seeks to get."

That heavenly union is not a sexual one, to be sure, but it is real—more real than anything we have, or will, experience here on earth. It's a perfect union between God and mankind—for eternity.

#### **Slide 7: Naked Without Shame**

"Only the nakedness that makes woman an object for a man, and vice versa, is a source of shame. The fact that they were not ashamed means that the woman was not an 'object' for the man, nor he for her."  
Theology of the Body, Feb. 20, 1980

#### **Slide 8: Naked Without Shame**

Genesis 1:1-2, 25-28a, 30b, 31a: *"In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters. God made all kinds of wild animals, all kinds of cattle, and all kinds of creeping things of the earth. God saw how good it was. Then God said: 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle, and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the ground.' God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them, saying: 'Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it, and so it happened. God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good.'"*

The heavenly union we will experience with God in eternity was foreshadowed in the book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. In it we read about God's original plan for unity with our original parents, Adam and Eve. But confusion reigned and there was a rupture—a breaking—between God and man. Because of this rupture, lust became a reality. A "twisting," if you will, took place in our hearts. Instead of seeking the good of others, we desire to seek our own good, often at the expense of someone else's dignity.

Yet God created us for union with Him. He gave us an "echo" in our hearts of the love that He intends for us all. Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body is an attempt to identify and find that love that God intends for us. If you seek, you will find it. It simply takes work on our part along with God's amazing grace.

#### **Slide 9: Somebody's Naked...**

Could you imagine a world in which there was no divorce, sexual abuse, rape, sexually-transmitted diseases, depression, eating disorders, guilt, addictions, cutting, cheating, or pregnancies before marriage? It's hardly imaginable.

- If we all long for such a world, then why do we all live in such a different one?
- If we were made for love, why does it seem so hard to find?
- If we want love, why do we so often settle for the counterfeit of lust?
- Is this why we are so embarrassed about our bodies?
- Is this why we automatically cover up the parts of our bodies that are most vulnerable to lust?

**Slide 10: Truth and Freedom**

“The redemption of the body is expressed not only in the resurrection as victory over death, it is present also in Christ’s words. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ called man to overcome concupiscence, even in the uniquely interior movements of the human heart.”

Theology of the Body, July 21, 1982

**Slide 11: Truth and Freedom**

So why is there so much pain and suffering in the world today? It all started with one simple choice: when Adam and Eve chose to go with their own plan instead of God’s plan. Their original sin affects us all. Instead of wanting to do what’s right, we often desire to do the wrong thing. This tendency to sin is called *concupiscence*.

Concupiscence is not something that affects only a select group of people; it affects every single one of us as members of a society that is damaged and hurting from the effects of sin. Just look at all the broken families, broken hearts, sexual abuse, addictions, infidelity, and shame and regret in people’s lives. This is what despair looks like in a society that thought it found sexual liberation and freedom by using sexuality in whatever way it wanted. Consider how all this has brought us to where we are today.

**Slide 12: *Holy Moses!***

Take a few minutes to discuss the benefits and costs of each of us having “free will”. Why did God give us free will?

**Slide 13: Language of the Body**

“Man is precisely a person because he is master of himself and has self-control. Indeed, insofar as he is master of himself he can give himself to the other. The dimension of the liberty of the gift becomes essential and decisive for that language of the body, in which man and woman reciprocally express themselves in the conjugal union.”

Theology of the Body, August 22, 1984

**Slide 14: Language of the Body**

As some observers have noted, we are experiencing the “frog in the pot” scenario. You may be familiar with this example. If you take a frog and put it into a pot of boiling water, it will immediately jump out. However, if you place the frog in room temperature water and then slowly heat the water, the frog will continue to adjust to the rising temperature and not know that it is in danger. It will stay in the ever-increasingly hot water until it finally dies. This describes very well the moral swamp displayed in our modern media. We have gradually become desensitized to the increase of explicit sexual content in our media. The result of all this is that our country is plagued by a seriously warped understanding of marriage and the role that sex should play in relationships.

Lust is “disordered desire for or inordinate enjoyment of sexual pleasure” (CCC 2351). It is sexual desire apart from God’s love that selfishly seeks one’s own pleasure at the expense of another. Lust often dominates our culture. This domination can easily lead to apathy, or lack of concern, on the part of many. Apathy then leads to a lack of motivation to change. We begin to settle for less than true, good, and beautiful relationships. These are heavy words, we know. They almost sound dismal. A natural question one would ask is, “Is there any hope?” Are we all doomed to suffer broken hearts and marry people who will commit to us only as long as it is convenient? Where is God in all this mess? God is with us, and there is hope! The good news is that life and sexuality were not always the way we find it now. Jesus tells us, “In the beginning, it was not so” (Matthew 19:8). In fact, in the beginning, love had its way and lust didn’t even exist.

**Slide 15: OOOOOOOOOOW!!!**

When it comes to the language of the body, as with any type of communication, you need to be aware of not only the message you deliver, but also the message that is received...so *watch your language!*

**Slide 16: Free, Total, Faithful, Fruitful**

"In the reflections of the sacramental sign...it concerns a truth once affirmed at the beginning of the marriage, when the newlyweds, promising each other 'to be always faithful...and to love and honor each other all the days of their life,' become ministers of marriage as a sacrament of the Church."

Theology of the Body, July 11, 1984

**Slide 17: Free, Total, Faithful, Fruitful**

Love Equals Communion

In Genesis 1:26-31 we learn that when God made man and woman it was "very good." They were made in his "image and likeness." We may hear that phrase often but let's consider what it means: The Bible says "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). Now, when love is present, it is never in isolation. This is why a person can't marry himself. Rather, whenever you have love, you must have a lover, a beloved, and the love between them. There must be a communion of persons, united in love. A communion of persons is created when two or more persons give themselves to one another in love. So, in the case of God, you have the Father, the Son, and the fire of love between them, which is the Holy Spirit. As a "communion of persons," God created humans to participate in heaven and on earth in God's love. This means that God created us male and female precisely so that we could image His love by becoming a sincere gift to each other. Giving this sincere gift to one another creates a communion of persons, through which we share God's love with each other.

Not Meant to Be Alone

When God said that Adam and Eve were made in His image and likeness, one thing this meant was that they were designed for love. But when Adam was created, he was without Eve. But even before Eve was created, Adam knew something was missing. As a result, God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 1:18).

Since we're made in God's image and likeness, the Church teaches that, "Man can fully discover his true self only in a sincere gift of self." In order to give to someone else, one must not be alone. Someone else is there for communion.

This total gift of self can be seen in the married life or in the celibate life, which is choosing to forego earthly marriage so as to devote oneself entirely to the marriage of Christ and the Church. In both cases, marriage and celibacy, we are called to make ourselves living sacrifices. In the words of Blessed Mother Teresa, "Life is not worth living unless it is lived for others."

**Slide 18: "We Do!"**

Briefly discuss how the vows in the Catholic Sacrament of Marriage reflect the concepts of free, total, faithful, and fruitful.

**Slide 19: Finding Your Vocation**

"Marriage and celibacy are not opposed to each other, but are complimentary. Both furnish a full answer to one of man's fundamental questions, the question about the significance of 'being a body'...of 'being in the body' a man or a woman."

Theology of the Body, July 14, 1982

**Slide 20: Finding Your Vocation**

Philosophers have asked questions about the meaning of life for thousands of years. If you've ever wondered, "Who am I? What is my purpose in life? What is love all about?" Answering these questions was a major goal of John Paul II through his teaching of the Theology of the Body. After all, he was not just a great pope but also a great philosopher. So, what is theology? Theology may be understood as the study of God.

St. Anselm, an eleventh-century philosopher, theologian, and archbishop, called it “faith seeking understanding.” The word theology can be broken down like this: In Greek *theos* means “God” and *logos* means “word.” Logos was also defined by the ancient Greeks in other ways that relate to “science” and “study.” (Notice that our modern words which have “-ology” at the end of them refer to some type of study: biology, archaeology, radiology, psychology, etc.) So, the Theology of the Body is the study of God as revealed through our bodies. By looking at the creation of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis, we begin to find the answers to our questions about the purpose of life.

**Slide 21: vo-ca-tion n. (vō-kā'-shən)**

Briefly discuss whether or not being pro-life is a vocation.

**Slide 22: Living the Good Life**

“Purity is the requirement of love. It is the dimension of its interior truth in man’s heart.”  
Theology of the Body, Dec 3, 1980

**Slide 23: Living the Good Life**

Our most intimate human love actually points us to the love that we were ultimately created for: union with God (here and in heaven). It may be hard to believe that God desires an intimate relationship with you, especially if you’ve been through a lot of suffering in your life. You may not even believe that God loves you. But don’t forget that the man who gave us the Theology of the Body, John Paul II, was no stranger to suffering and death. First his sister died, then his mother, then his brother, then his father, and then many of his friends ... all by the time he was twenty years old. As a young man, he witnessed the brutality of the Nazis in World War II and was forced to take a deep look at the heart of man and the meaning of life. Through his prayer, personal suffering, and study, Pope John Paul II learned that God had not abandoned man. Rather, he saw that God has a plan of hope and freedom for each one of us.

Here is a roadmap we can use to get started “living the *good life*”...

1. Understand the purpose of the body and sexuality as positive gifts given by God.
2. Explore how the original experiences of Adam and Eve are foundational to the meaning of understanding our own life experiences.
3. The Theology of the Body gives us a new lens through which we can view ourselves, our world, and eternity.
4. Integrate the Theology of the body into a life of authentic love and holiness and a life of active service and evangelization.

**Outreach Planning**

**Slide 24: Theology of the Body for Teens**

The Diocese of Kansas City – St. Joseph currently offers training sessions on the *Theology of the Body for Teens* program to youth directors and to parish leaders of youth groups. The program is divided into 12 unique segments that reflect the instructional approach of John Paul II’s revolutionary teaching.

This program is also being evaluated for integration into our Catholic schools, youth ministries, CCD classes, and homeschooling settings. Please provide your feedback to the Respect Life Office on how you think this information may best be introduced into the existing curriculum of your current youth ministry activities.

**Slide 25: Summary**

- What is Theology of the Body?
- How does Theology of the Body apply to me today?
- Theology of the Body for Teens program

## Closing Prayer

### Slide 26: Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
and where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood as to understand;  
to be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive;  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen*