

CULTURE OF LIFE

## New Apostolate Teaches Theology of the Body

### Pro-Family Profile

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After only a year, Ruah Woods, a new apostolate for teaching theology of the body, has already reached several hundred attendees at its center in Cincinnati and connected with schools and parishes in the archdiocese.

Marti Shoemaker, wife and mother of four and co-chair of the life ministry in her parish of St. James the Greater in White Oak, Ohio, signed up for a class after she kept hearing about it from friends. A lifelong Catholic, she found the topic an eye-opener.

"I was so amazed by the concepts and everything put forth by theology of the body," says Shoemaker. "I could not believe it was around 30 years and I didn't know about it. Going to Ruah Woods opened up this whole world to me about our faith."

Besides reaching the average Catholic, Ruah Woods also seeks "to reach leaders and teachers, pastors, deacons, youth group directors so they can take the teaching into their respective venues," says its executive director, Leslie Kuhlman.

That's already happening.

One assistant pastor offered to teach 30 people in his parish faith-formation group — but 105 signed up.

A teacher at all-girls Our Mother of Mercy in Cincinnati is now teaching theology of the body as an elective to 90 students.

A Protestant Bible college professor "was totally bowled over by it and started including what he learned in his class lectures," says Kuhlman, noting he's also teaching it at his church. "It's starting to raise the eyebrows of our Protestant brothers and sisters."

### Holy Spirit at Work

The Holy Spirit has everything to do with the unforgettable name. When board members labored for hours to come up with a name, Kuhlman whispered for the Holy Spirit's inspiration. Another member quickly looked up the Hebrew name for the Spirit: Ruah, meaning "breath, wind, breath of God."

"When God made Adam and Eve, he blew that breath, the Ruah, is what the Scripture says," Kuhlman explains, so there was an immediate connection to theology of the body.

The Holy Spirit was just as surely behind the founding of Ruah Woods. Cincinnati businessman and co-founder Tony Maas and his wife, Barb, parents of five children and married for more than 25 years, had been active for years in local and national pro-life work. Then they were introduced to theology of the body and found it beautiful.

Maas asked himself, "What can we do to make an impact to help aid our priests, parishes and schools to get this teaching out there to help change this culture we're in? I believe the responsibility is in the hands of Catholics."

So he co-founded Ruah Woods to reach as many as possible with John Paul II's teaching. A retreat-like six-acre setting in a residential neighborhood was selected as a location. They turned the house into a lodge,

complete with log furniture, a big fireplace, and windows overlooking the serene setting. The doors opened Jan. 1, 2009.

The materials used for the classes include Ascension Press's DVD and workbook series by Christopher West, God's Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage and Theology of the Body for Teens.

"We found West's presentation is one that the normal 'Joe Catholic' in the pew can get their arms around," says Kuhlman. "You can see the light bulbs and aha moments when people are exposed to this teaching. The beauty of theology of the body is it's really a delivery system for our whole Catholic faith."

"Ruah Woods is a great resource for strengthening marriage and families," says Father Earl Fernandes, academic dean of Mount St. Mary's Seminary of the West in Cincinnati, whose professors appear in Ruah Woods' website videos. "This is a new means of reaching out to the broader community at every level."

He likes this lay initiative, the collaboration between the laity and clergy, and the different programs for various age groups.

"Ruah Woods is trying to meet individuals where they're at in their particular stages of development," he finds, pointing out that John Paul II alludes to this "remote and proximate preparation for marriage" in his apostolic exhortation Familiaris Consortio.

Laypeople like Shoemaker are already benefiting. Married 27 years, she says Ruah Wood has taught her things "I can apply to our marriage that makes it even stronger."

Shoemaker, who has three boys ages 19 to 25 and a 14-year-old daughter, wishes she had these tools when all of her children were adolescents. But it's never too late, she says. "It's given me tools for what I've been trying to always teach them. Now I have the background and tools. They're not too old."

She finds it "perfect timing now with my mother-daughter, heart-to-heart chats" with her daughter.

Just as others told her about Ruah, Shoemaker is also spreading the word: She inspired three others to go to Ruah Woods.

"If we can get this message out to our parishes and schools," she believes, "everything will snowball."

In fact, to help that effort, Ruah Woods just hired a full-time young woman and man to be liaisons with the archdiocesan all-girls and all-boys high schools to help implement and support theology of the body for teens in the religion curriculum.

Little wonder Kuhlman sees the Holy Spirit at work. She and the founders already see a call to reach beyond Cincinnati. Because Ruah Woods is located near the tri-state border of Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana, they hope to be a regional hub for theology-of-the-body instruction.

"Someday," says Kuhlman, "it would be awesome to see little Ruah Woods satellites popping up all over the country."

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