

# SEEK the Lord



## SEEK24 conference welcomes thousands of young Catholics, calls for listening, openness

A record number of attendees gathered at the Jan. 1-5 SEEK24 conference in downtown St. Louis, with excitement already mounting for the 2025 conference.

Hosted by the Fellowship of Catholic University Students in this Missouri city for the second consecutive year, the conference drew more than 23,000 attendees, including 188 international participants. SEEK attendees participated in presentations and discussions about the Catholic faith led by globally recognized speakers, along with opportunities for Mass, confession and Eucharistic adoration.

Edward Sri, FOCUS' senior vice president of apostolic outreach, recounted the beginnings of FOCUS in 1998 at a Jan. 4 press conference.

"Curtis Martin and I were graduate students together ... we did a retreat in January of 1998," he said, describing how a group of 24 students gathered in "nowhere Kansas" and sparked a movement that now touches thousands nationwide.

P.J. Cronin, a student at University College Cork, Ireland, said he heard about the SEEK conference while hanging out in a Dominican-run cafe with some friends.

"I really love Scott Hahn," Cronin said. "He really opened up Scripture for me

in ways that I hadn't seen before." Hahn is a professor of biblical theology at Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio.

Cronin said he recognized a few other speakers too, but the biggest draw was seeing other young people practicing the Catholic faith, which is not something he sees in Ireland.

"I'm there in my local parish at Mass on a Sunday; I look around and there might be one other person my age, and it's demoralizing sometimes. ... You're on your own," he said. "And I come here and there's 20,000 young college students all practicing the faith and trying to live a good life."

### Growth means reaching out

Father Mike Schmitz, director of youth and young adult ministry for the Diocese of Duluth, Minn., and chaplain at the University of Minnesota Duluth Catholic Center, spoke about his engagement with FOCUS and its impact on campus ministry. He highlighted the tremendous growth in student involvement, noting his campus now hosts 75 regular Bible studies.

"It's just amazing stuff," Father Schmitz said.

Sri admitted this growth comes with challenges. He noted it's a perennial temptation for Catholic



(OSV News photo/courtesy FOCUS)

Attendees pray during the SEEK24 conference at America's Center Convention Complex in St. Louis Jan. 3. More than 23,000 participants attended the Jan. 1-5 conference.

ministries to become cliquish.

"What the Church is calling us to — and what FOCUS is calling all of our staff, all of our missionaries to do — is to be like Jesus, who goes out," he said.

Father Schmitz agreed. He described conversations he's had challenging leaders in his ministry to continue to go beyond a small circle as a "family meeting." He said that it's human nature to be comfortable with a group of friends, but it's essential to continue to encourage students to reach out.

### The Church listens to students; students listen to the Church

Asked about the polarization visible in the Church today

and the impact of the Synod on Synodality, Father Schmitz responded by contrasting his experience growing up with what he sees among young people today.

"The anger, the bitterness, the resentment, the need to change the Church that was present when I was in college. ... I grew to love Jesus and hate the Church," he said. But Father Schmitz finds students today come with a new openness. "I find our students saying when they encounter Jesus, 'I love the Church.'"

Listening is a two-way street, Father Schmitz said, requiring the Church to listen to students but also for students to listen to the Church.

Emily Wilson Hussem, an author and speaker, described

the openness she has seen among students at SEEK24.

"They're so hungry, they're so sick of the culture, they know it's all a lie ... and they're here, and they're ready and open," she said.

Father Schmitz echoed Hussem's hope. He described meeting attendees who enthusiastically shared with him that the Bible, and a newfound love for Scripture, had saved their families.

As SEEK24 drew to a close, FOCUS announced the theme for SEEK25, to be held in Salt Lake City, using the words Jesus Christ speaks to his disciples in the Gospel: "Follow me."

For more information about SEEK, visit <https://seek.focus.org>

—By OSV News.

## Catholic High Schools Honor State Scholars

### Honorees Part of Top Ten Percent of Illinois Seniors



(Photo/Anabel Nosek)

### Boylan CCHS Names 22 State Scholars

ROCKFORD—Twenty-two seniors at Boylan Central Catholic High School were recognized as 2024-2025 Illinois State Scholars. Honored students are (back row, from left) Matthew O'Connor, Maximilan Peterson, Richard Novak, Evan Strombeck, Hunter Hatfield, Neve LaFever, Abigail Stevens, Lilian Esparza, Ryan Starck, Gabrielle Aarvig, (front row, from left) Luke Mathuruthil, Aidan Clarke, Louie Andrew Domingo, Elizabeth Fitzgerald, Jeeya Amin, Ava Lendman Kaylee Harter, Liliana Nonevski, Mary Rose. \*Note: Not pictured are Gianna Cacciatore, Nolan Coen and Rafael Gahan.

—Provided by Anabel Nosek, Boylan Central Catholic High School Marketing Coordinator.



(Photo/Marian Central Catholic High School)

### Marian CCHS Recognizes 8 State Scholars

WOODSTOCK—Eight seniors at Marian Central Catholic High School were designated as Illinois State Scholars. Honorees are Sam Hoover, Alex Burdzy, Amanda Demiglio Clarkson, Michaela Johnson, Maja Tryba, Fiona Morris, Cody Brockner and Max Astacio.

—Provided by Marian Central Catholic High School.