The Mountaineer

United States Conference of Secular Institutes

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From the President's Desk

Dear Friends,

At this time of joy and gratitude for the coming of our Savior, we have indeed good cause to be Pilgrims of Hope on the Path to Peace which is the theme of the upcoming World Jubilee for Consecrated life in 2025.

Looking back we rejoice for the pilgrimages to Indianapolis last summer for the Eucharistic Congress to reignite belief in and and strengthen our love for the Eucharist as the central mystery and miracle of Christian life.

This coming January will see the initiation of a series of virtual sessions for 48 of those in formation across our conference. Spearheaded by Father Scott Jones from Priests of the Institute of the Heart of Jesus, these pilgrims on the way to profession will be together to bear witness to each other and learn about secular institutes. The first presenter is Father John O'Neill of Voluntas Dei.

Also in January 2025, a new effort begins for the first ever SEEK conference on the east coast in Washington D.C. There will be 6-8 members of secular institutes working for vocation promotion here and at the conference in Utah.

And on February 2nd 2025 our conference will participate in the National Virtual Meeting for Consecrated Life in the United State virtual prayer service with four other conferences. Joan Patton (Apostolic Oblates), Maritina Paniagua (Missionaries of the Kingship of Christ), and Fr Scott Jones will be our pray-ers. Please use link this to register: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_u8G91rMZQOeUfMCIK6RHOQ

We look forward to giving glory to God and praising His Mother as we begin this year as pilgrims of hope on the path to peace.

Sue Larkin

Tip on Adoration Hours:

If the heart wanders or is distracted, bring it back to the point quite gently and replace it tenderly in its Master's presence. And even if you did nothing during the whole of your hour but bring your heart back and place it again in Our Lord's presence, though it went away every time you brought it back, your hour would be very well employed.

-St Francis de Sales

Inside this issue:

From the Desk of the President	*1*
80th Anniversary of the USA DeSales Branch	*2*
SEEK25 broke records "Come to Salt Lake City"	*3-5*
1st Ever Seek in Wash DC	*6*
Caritas Christi Celebrations	*8*
Family of Mary of the Visitation in Singapore	*8*
Vocation Fair in Michigan	*9*
Kay Lawrence—RIP	*9*
USCSI Board & Dates	*10*

US Group celebrates 80th Anniversary by welcoming new Candidate

The US Group had two reasons to celebrate on November 9th: remembering the first vows taken by our foundresses eighty years ago, and Cindy DePonti taking the next step toward vows with her Declaration of Intent. Coming from all corners of the United States, we gathered in Wilmington Delaware for prayer, Mass and then celebrated the rest of the day!

Cindy DePonti is a Civil Engineer from Phoenix, Arizona and a convert from atheism to Catholicism. We have enjoyed her company at meetings and our annual retreat for the past year. Her enthusiasm for the faith and eagerness to share it has been an inspiration for all of us. She came to Wilmington along with her spiritual Director, Fr. Sam Conedera, SJ, who concelebrated the Mass alongside US Group Assistant, Fr. Don Heet, OSFS. After members renewed their promises and vows, she stepped forward and made her Declaration of Intent with reverence and a voice of determination.

It was an especially heart-warming gathering as it took place at St. Martha Villa, a nursing facility where our eldest member, Catherine Grove, is living. Because of her frail health, she had been dispensed of renewing her vows. But the formerly Catholic facility still retained its Catholic chapel and allowed us to use it. This allowed Catherine to attend a spiritual exercise with us for the first time in over ten years. We found that, with some guidance, she was able to renew her vows with a strong voice!

After Mass we gathered for a celebration feast prepared by Associates Madeline Rice and Barbara Houghton. Gifts were shared and many pictures were taken. It was great to be able to share stories and laugh together face to face and not through a Zoom screen. Afterwards, Cindy was taken to the home of long-time Associate, Mary Ann Bernardo, who was unable to attend in person due to poor health.

The weekend was too short, and we returned exhausted but full of joy. We are thankful for those who courageously started the DeSales Secular Institute. We are excited and full of hope for our future. God be praised! *-By Kathleen Tierney*







SEEK25 at Salt Lake City and Washington DC

FOCUS is the Fellowship of Catholic University Students, a Catholic outreach program for American college students founded in 1997 by Curtis Martin and Dr Edward Sri at Benedictine College, Kansas. **"Know Christ Jesus and fulfill His great commission,"** Focus exists to evangelize and currently has over 500 full-time staff members, training recent college grads to lead all-male or all-female bible study meetings in over 200 campuses, in 41 states. The four-day conferences at the beginning of the year is the biggest Catholic young adult conference in the US annually.

Attendees: SEEK25 had a record-breaking 21,115 attendees from the United States and Canada. This included 17,274 paid participants in Salt Lake City, 3,355 registrants in Washington, D.C., and 486 in Cologne, Germany.
Priests: There were 617 priests in attendance at the two US locations, including 46 bishops.
FOCUS students: 11,084 students from FOCUS campuses attended, and 1,672 students came from non-FOCUS campuses.
Keynote speakers: Harvard professor and author Arthur Brooks spoke about happiness. Podcaster Father Mike Schmitz gave a keynote address speaking on original sin, vice and virtue, and God's love. Monsignor James Shea, president of the University of Mary in North Dakota, and Sister Miriam James Heidland of the Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity (SOLT) talked on Reconciliation.
Millions participated via the livestreaming offered by EWTN.
Two examples of breakout sessions which featured a range of speakers and topics, are: Talk by Crookston, Minnesota, Bishop Andrew Cozzens on "Why Discipleship Fails Without the Fire of the Holy Spirit," while writer Noelle Mering spoke on combatting "woke" ideology.
SEEK26 January 1-5 to be held next year in Denver, Colorado; Columbus, Ohio; and Fort Worth, Texas.



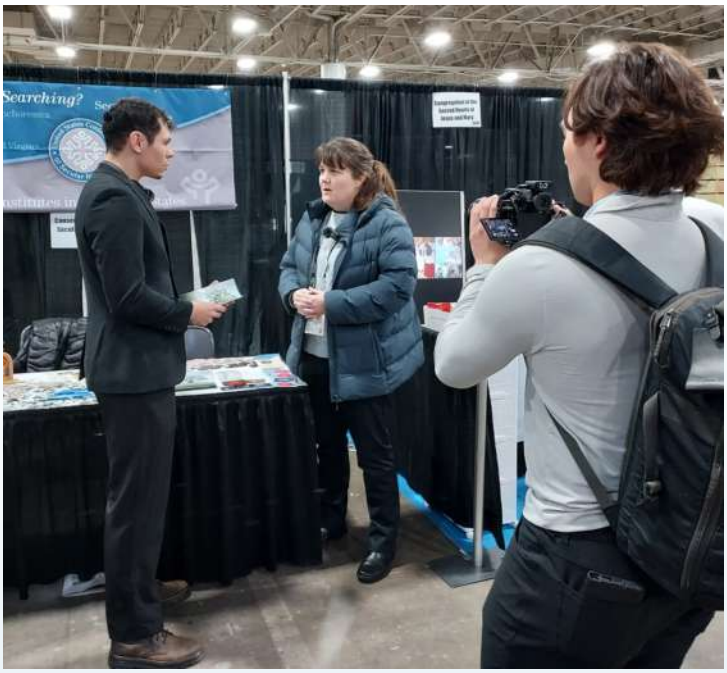
Franca Niameh, Missionaries of the Kingship of Christ, Heather Triggs, DeSales Secular Institute, Jessica Swedzinski, Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary and Jillian Cooke, Fr Kolbe Missionaries of the Immaculata

Echoes from USCSI Staff at Booth #1028

My name is Jillian Cooke, Fr Kolbe Missionaries of the Immaculata. From January 1-5 I had the pleasure of being at Seek '25 to be at the USCSI table. It was a blessing - from the beautiful Masses and Adoration to getting to know other members of Secular Institutes.
The young people were so kind and open to hear the good news of consecrated life and Secular Institutes. It was such a gift to be able to share it with them, along with aspects of my own discernment and daily life.

As I return to work as the Inter-Congregational Vocations Coordinator for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, I will carry this enthusiasm with me.

Women's Zoom discernment group, 3rd Thursday of the month at 7:00 pm PST.
Contact me for link: Jillian.Cooke@la-archdiocese.org / 213-751-4778



Jillian giving one of the interviews during the action-packed Tuesday to Sunday schedule.



The new TREE OF LIFE brochures were a big help. Make sure and ask Kathy Tierney for some before your next vocation event.

This year's SEEK featured a "holy competition" between Texas A&M and the University of Nebraska regarding which university could send more students, with the University of Nebraska winning the competition with about 390 attendees.

Bishop James Conley of Lincoln, Nebraska, said he was "struck by the reverence" of the Masses at SEEK. He was quoted by Kate Quiñones, *Catholic News Agency:*
"It seems that every year, the celebration of the liturgy becomes more beautiful and more transcendent. It's hard to have 20,000 college students in a big, huge hotel space to create a sacred environment," he said. "With the backdrops of the beautiful Cathedral of the Madeleine here in Salt Lake City, the music, particularly, and all the priests and the religious sisters and the bishops — it just tells me that young people are really looking for the transcendent."

What Stood Out for USCSI Staff at Booth #1028

Franca from San Pablo, CA:

It was wonderful and inspiring to see over 17,000 young seekers. All developmental levels from babies, infants, children, teens, young adult and adults were fed spiritually. Seeing fathers parenting with mothers was amazing. It was also striking to see young priests, religious and consecrated, most in in their early 20s and 30s. Plus all the dedicated FOCUS Missionaries.

I walked away reexamining my faith, wondering if I am truly worshipping in spirit and in truth. My heart was touched so deeply. In fact, I feel my spirit called anew.

How can I give back more meaningfully? This is the question I am pondering and believing the Lord who arose the desire in me will bring it to completion. I am so grateful to USCSI who gave me the opportunity to witness Seek25 and to serve.



Heather, far left, and Franca share with women

Heather from Atlanta, GA:

What stands out to me about SEEK 25?
The energy of 18,000 young adults and hundreds of priests and consecrated permeated the air during the Masses and talks at SEEK 25. As college women (and a good number of men) stopped by our Consecrated Life in Secular Institutes table, it was a pure joy to share the goodness of our life, the beauty of this remarkable life Christ calls each of us to, with them. Many women wanted to hear why we chose this way of consecration. They wanted to know the differences between secular consecration and other forms of consecrated life. And most of all, they were hungry for joy! It was a delight to share that with them. So many memorable conversations, so many sacred moments.

Other gifts of this year's SEEK? It was a tremendous delight to meet consecrated women from other Secular Institutes across the country. There were five separate communities represented, and learning more about each one and initiating friendships with other women living this life - just pure blessing. Reconnecting with religious sisters I've met at vocations panels and last year at the SEEK conference. Other gifts? Having a number of young adults from Atlanta (where I live) stop by to hear more about our vocation and meet other consecrated women, finding a few minutes here and there to spend some time with Jesus in the Adoration Chapel, attending Mass with thousands of other Catholics, spending Friday evening in Adoration and praise and worship, and having a surprise snow fall on Saturday morning! And finally, a quiet dinner with four of us trying some of the foods Utah is known for was a good way to spend our last evening.

SEEK25 Comes to our Nation's Capitol



Baby SEEK in DC

FOCUS has a good problem: there are too many participants at their SEEK Conference held annually during Christmas break. The 25,000+ crowds were pushing the limits of the missionaries' resources and so they decided to offer the experience in two locations this year. While the Salt Lake City venue still boasted large numbers, the enthusiastic crowd of 3,000 kept the USCSI booth occupied from opening to closing. Emily Donaire and Therese Druart (Caritas Christi), Heather Wacombe (Company of St. Ursula) and Kathy Tierney (DeSales Secular Institute) engaged students, missionaries, seminarians, clergy and even the Hilton hotel staff during the four day event from January 2-4.



Emily negotiated works schedules to fly in from Tampa FL:

I really enjoyed talking with the people about vocations while using the USCSI brochures. It is tiring, but I believe I needed to be there. Most people didn't know about secular institutes. I tried to keep my introduction short as some looked like they were on their way somewhere. Our table was close to the entrance so there were people coming and going.

It was busy at times. The space was a little small in my opinion for the amount of attendees we had. It was wonderful to see the young people on fire for the Lord. The talks were inspiring and excellent. Just about everyone I spoke to were open to speaking with me, which was great.





The best thing for Therese was:
The joy of seeing young people taking their faith seriously!

Heather drove in from Highland Spring, VA. Being her first experience, she was excited to speak with young adults from the area.

'The Michelle Duppong Story' is an inspiring documentary about a FOCUS missionary on the road to canonization.

The film, *Radiating Joy: The Michelle Duppong Story* directed by Danny Anderson, tells the inspiring story of Michelle – highlighting especially her suffering following her cancer diagnosis and throughout her treatment. The film also features stories about the lives she touched. The documentary includes first-hand accounts of Michelle's life and legacy and premiered during FOCUS's annual SEEK Conferences in 2024 & 2025.

According to her obituary, after graduating from high school, she attended North Dakota State University, where she first encountered the ministry of FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students).

She then became a missionary for FOCUS after graduating from college, and worked as a missionary for six years, mentoring, "hundreds of students at the college campuses of University of Nebraska – Lincoln, South Dakota State University, University of South Dakota, and the University of Mary."

Duppong then became the Director of Adult Faith Formation for the Diocese of Bismarck, and on "December 29, 2014, Michelle was unexpectedly diagnosed with cancer, which began a year-long journey that brought many joys in the midst of sorrows and suffering. She received everything with a docile spirit, praying that the Lord's Will be done and trusting in His Providence." She died on Christmas Day, December 25, 2015.

May Michelle intercede many and good vocations to our country's secular institutes, filling us with a deep radiating joy for our vocation.



Michelle's parents with her sister, Renae, and her uncle and cousin participated in SEEK25. Many students stopped by to speak with them.

Pope Francis announced plans that he will canonize Blesseds Carlo Acutis and Pier Giorgio Frassati during the Holy Year 2025.

Blessed Carlo will be canonized in the Jubilee Year 2025 during the April 25-27 Jubilee of Teenagers. Blessed Carlo Acutis will be the first millennial to be canonized.

The canonization of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati will take place during the Jubilee of Youth from July 28-August 3, 2025. This will be 100 years after his death on July 4, 1925.

Caritas Christi Celebrations



Caritas Christi had their annual retreat July 7-12, 2024, at San Damiano Spiritual Life Center in Virginia. Our Retreat Master was Fr. Robert Williams, OFMCap. During the retreat we had a woman enter CC and another woman discerning with us join the retreat. On July 11, the memorial of St. Benedict, we had our Dedication Mass where we had a Definitive Dedication, First Dedication, and two renewals.

We had a special guest preside over the Mass, his Eminence Cardinal Christophe Pierre Apostolic Nuncio to the United States. He was very personable and funny. Also he seems to understand the vocation to a Secular Institute well and has an appreciation of our form of Consecrated Life.

After the ceremony, we had a special lunch with ice cream cake to celebrate and his Eminence joined us. It was a memorable day for everyone who participated and a beautiful way to close out our last full day of the retreat. We feel blessed to have been able to come together as women living the same vocation, as we are spread out and don't get to come together often. *–Natasha Sager*

Family of Mary of the Visitation in Singapore



My group of 23 members of the Family of Mary of the Visitation had prepared two months for the tickets to enter the Singapore Sport Hub National Stadium. However, we did not get inside the Stadium because we did not have the approval online tickets. We had to go back to the hotel and watched on the livestream tv the Mass with Pope Francis. This was September 12, 2024, feast of the Most Holy Name of Mary. We know Mother Mary had special graces for us, despite all the safety precautions.
–Thanh Doan

More News Briefs

VOCATION FAIR—UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN—NOVEMBER 3, 2024

Thank you so much for all the resources you sent for the vocation fair we had at St Mary Student Parish at the University of Michigan tonight. There were a lot of students who came by and asked good questions about the vocation of secular institutes. Thought you might like to see the table with resources I put together, including a freestanding poster I made about Secular Institutes.

–Prachi Shah



Christian hope does not deceive or disappoint because it is grounded in the certainty that nothing and no one may ever separate us from God's love –Romans 8:35-39

Katharine "Kay" Lawrence (June 9, 1933 - November 20, 2024)

In the Constitutions of the Secular Institute of Missionaries of the Kingship of Christ, Article 4 tells us that we need to be "leaven of wisdom and witnesses of grace as consecrated lay women." That description fit Katharine (Kay) Lawrence.



On Wednesday, November 27, 2024, Kay Lawrence's sister missionaries and many friends consigned her to the arms of the Lord at her funeral mass at Corpus Christi Church in Woodside, New York. The Mass was celebrated by the pastor, Rev. Patrick West, and concelebrated by her dear friend and member of Voluntas Dei, Fr. John O'Neill.

Born on June 9, 1933, Kay attended Catholic school in Queens, New York, high school in Frankfurt, Germany, and one year of business school at the University of Maryland branch. She had a very successful career as the executive assistant to the CEO of Cosentini Associates, an engineering consultant firm where she worked over fifty years, as private secretary until she turned 85.

Kay lived the true life of a missionary hidden in plain sight in the world. While having a daily and rich prayer life, colleagues admired her professionalism and fashion sense and her boss was heard to comment that there was something different about Kay - not a nun, but something like that. The USCSI enthusiastically celebrated 50 years of profession with Kay at one of the annual conferences. She celebrated 61 years of profession this past year. *-Sue Larkin*

USCSI Mission Statement:

- The USCSI shares in the mission of Jesus Christ in serving its member institutes by providing education, resources, and support for member institutes.
- The USCSI is an organization of member institutes committed to making known, understood, and appreciated the call to consecrated secularity in the Church.
- The USCSI collaborates with other groups to present consecrated secularity as a viable option in today's society.

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Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCwrsN2t7T8xHfrdyGCHY59g

Websites: www.secularinstitutes.org & www.cmis-int.org/en/

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/secular_institutes_usa/

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/secularinstitutes

Contributions and photos for our Spring **Mountaineer** are due by **April 2, 2025** to jessica@schsrsmary.org

What are some of your favorite ways to show your appreciation? What have been some of your favorite ways you've been thanked? Please share in future Mountaineers.

Three Echoes from a Gratitude Received:

Thanks for the Fall *Mountaineer*. Now I live in Chile, in Bellavista. Our Schoenstatt Fathers community has a house for sick and old priests next to the Shrine. We are 10 fathers. Very good spirit and very well taken care of. I am doing well, but I feel a lack of energy. Blessings and greetings to all. *-Fr Christian Christensen*

Thank you so much for your hard work and constant dedication with the *Mountaineer*. Reading again the main points of Fr. John's presentation is more and more interesting for me. More and more I love my vocation in the Secular Institute and give thanks to God for leading me to this form of consecrated life. May God bless us and everything we are doing for His glory! Union of prayers with love, Anna Le - *Jesus Caritas Fraternity*

Taking time out to write and sending Christmas Cards is one favorite sign of showing gratitude for me. Imagine my joyful surprise when there were 200 Forever Christmas stamps in this friend's card to me?! *-Editor*

***Meet* you all on February 2 - Sign up today!**

Come Sept 26-28, 2025, to MD for Nat'l Mtg