

The Power of Steubenville East

Steubenville conferences take place all across the nation, originating from Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio. They consist of concert-like worship sessions, keynote speakers, small group discussions, Mass, and Eucharistic Adoration. They also have Reconciliation going on throughout the whole weekend, as well as merchandise stands and various games and activities. Now, there truly is no perfect way to explain what happens at Steubenville, but with that said, I will try my best to give you a sense of understanding.

I first attended the Steubenville East conference when I was 14 years old; an incoming Freshman in high school. This is the youngest age a student is allowed to attend. Prior to the conference, I'd heard about it and was excited to experience it for myself. Once I reached the minimum age of acceptance, I was thrilled to be able to attend. While I was there, I had a life-changing experience. I had encountered the Holy Spirit in a way that I never had before. He opened my eyes to Himself in a way I didn't know was possible that weekend. For the first time I truly understood the meaning of 'agape love', and I was able to confidently comprehend the "why" and "how" of His teachings. Following this weekend my faith was stronger than ever, and I was thrilled to go home and evangelize. As I told my friends and family about my amazing time at the conference, I could only imagine what the following year had in store.

I prepped and planned what I would be doing at next year's conference for months, and even planned on signing up for their Lead team (a team of highschoolers that met a week before the conference to help the Steubenville East committee prepare for the event). But alas, March of 2020 occurred. Steubenville East 2020 was canceled, as most events were that year. The heartbreaking news didn't stop me from growing closer with God. I knew that whatever He had in store would end up making sense eventually. As COVID continued and various regulations remained in place, another year had rolled around before I knew it. In 2021 Steubenville East held a Zoom conference, which St. Ann's Youth Ministry decided to not partake in. I don't know how this event went, but I assume it didn't nearly have as great of an impact as the in-person conferences did. And finally, after two long years, Steubenville East opened back up to students, in-person, in 2022.

I remember this conference being significantly smaller than my first year, but I wasn't too shocked; many numbers in society had dwindled after the pandemic. The music was still the same head-banging, Christian, party jams that I'd remembered, and the keynote speakers were still just as influential. Little did I know, this weekend would become the most memorable out of each of the times I'd attend. Although I felt His spirit so strongly that first year, this weekend He truly spoke to me in a new way.

Oftentimes people who talk about their experience at Steubenville will mention Adoration. The Adoration that occurs at this conference is one like no other. The priest processes the Eucharist around the room, so each individual person gets to encounter the Lord up close. When he arrived at my section, I immediately started uncontrollably sobbing. Not only that, I audibly gasped, and saw a flash of white take over my sight.

The Power of Steubenville East

Jesus was right next to me. He was in me, and He was speaking to me. I tuned in to what He was trying to tell me, and I sat and listened. The procession went on for about another half hour, and I continued to cry in awe. From this point forward, I had a new love for God. Even though I thought that after my first time at Steubenville I had no more to learn, I gained so much more that second time around. I learned that He will come to you when He knows you need Him to, not when you want Him to.

Going into my third year of Steubenville, I thought that there really wasn't anything more for me to learn. I thought I knew what to expect, and that there wouldn't be much to get out of it that I hadn't already gotten. But boy was I wrong! This year, my final year, was the year I learned the most from the weekend overall. I was 18; a high school graduate (the oldest a student is allowed to attend). Everything that was being told to us was being told to a highschooler's point of view, and I was now no longer part of that group. The advice that was being given to us, I now had to take and make my own, but it wasn't nearly as difficult as I thought it was going to be. God spoke to me directly through the keynote speakers. Some quotes that especially resonated with me from them were, **"You will not be any closer to Jesus in Heaven than you are at Mass"**, and **"Even if it was only you, He still would've died for you"**.

Not only did I grasp the deeper meaning of the keynote sessions this time, but my experience with Eucharistic Adoration was also different. I still felt Him there with me as I had before, but it felt more of a friend being alongside me than an overpowering presence. I suppose I wasn't as shocked and overwhelmed as I was in 2022, but I still cried (a lot). The main difference of this encounter is that it felt more of a dialog occurring. I was asking Him questions and listening to His responses. I felt Him ask me a few things as well, and I responded to Him. This encounter proved to me that He is constantly with me, and wants to support me in every way. As this weekend came to a close, I reflected on my various experiences with Steubenville East. How they taught me not only to know, love, and trust in Him, but to know, love, and trust in myself. I learned that growth within starts with growth with Him, and that our journey is never-ending.

Moving forward with my life, I will always remember my time at Steubenville East. It taught me to never be afraid of what's to come, and to always trust in His plan. I pray that future students that are part of St. Ann's Youth Ministry, and all students who attend the conference, will get the same experiences that I did. I pray that they will open their hearts to the Lord through the Steubenville conference and always, and that they will cherish the guidance they're given. And to all those who helped me on my faith journey throughout high school, especially those who have helped fund our trips to the conference, thank you. I couldn't, and honestly probably wouldn't, have done it without you.

Thank you, and God Bless.