

Comments from the sisters who attended the 2021-2022 Santa Croce Program:

1)

I would absolutely recommend the program for a new group.

The Santa Croce was excellent. I was very impressed by our professors. They were very welcoming. They were knowledgeable in their area, well grounded, normal priests. Even though they only had 15 hours at maximum, they were able to present the foundational and necessary information well. I was also impressed by their witness of joy in their vocation and love and knowledge of their founder and charism. I also enjoyed the classes that were chosen. In fact, I've already used much of the information. I taught a short course on the Liturgy (based on our classes) to our novices, and I plan to repeat it with our temporary professed this summer. The classes on spiritual theology and psychology I've used in my individual meetings as well. One class that may be helpful for the future would be a class on Sexual Ethics because of the rise in gender ideology. This may be even more helpful than the Bioethics course if you had to exchange anything.

It was just amazing to be in Rome for three weeks. It was really the chance of a lifetime for me. I thought the classes in the morning and seeing Rome in the afternoon was a great balance. The Lord really blessed me with energy to do as much as I could - I didn't want to waste any of the time! I came away with two blessings and I'd like to share what I wrote to our temporary professed when I returned, "I have so many blessings to share with you from Rome. I carried you with me all along the journey. One blessing is a felt realization of the breadth and depth of the Church - Her universality and history. We went to so many holy places, but we also walked the paths of so many saints before us. It's an amazing thing to see oneself as part of the Mystical Body in this way. I'm not sure if that is expressed very well, but hopefully you get the sense of what I am trying to say. Another blessing is the realization that IT'S JESUS, ONLY JESUS. He is the answer. Can we let our hearts rest and trust in Him? I went to confession at St. Peter's and afterwards I was looking for a place to pray quietly. In this awesome beautiful Church, there is so much to take in. I walked down the aisle where there is Saint John XXIII and Saint JP II - but right between them is the Blessed Sacrament Chapel - JESUS - Who is always with us wherever we find ourselves. So, of course, this is where I went and as I've returned home, I can still find Him waiting quietly in each of our lovely Chapels."

I think that expresses well the overwhelming gratitude I have for the opportunity to study and be in Rome for three weeks. I would have loved to have had the chance to go twice for two weeks, but I will remain satisfied with what the Lord has provided.

Finally, the Domus was a wonderful place to stay. I really appreciated the chance to live and pray with other communities. I feel I have new friends and resources and even a new appreciation for my own charism. And, Sr. Regina Pacis, I'm grateful for *you*. I appreciated your leadership, organization, and love for Rome. It was such a gift that you could be our guide. I think that you made many of our visits a true spiritual pilgrimage.

Thank you for this opportunity to recall all these wonderful memories! You remain in my prayers as well.

2)

Last September, I had what I keep referring to as a “trip of a lifetime,” two and a half weeks in Rome, the heart of the Church! This was such a special experience that I felt inspired to share with you all in words and in pictures! I was there for part of the Santa Croce Program for Religious Superiors and Formators sponsored by the CMSWR (Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious). Joining with me was Sr. Mary Pieta (our Postulant Directress) and six other Sisters from the U.S. (2 Mercedarians, 2 Franciscans from Wisconsin, 1 Franciscan from Illinois and 1 Nashville Dominican). Our mornings consisted of classes (Canon Law, Spiritual Accompaniment, and Bioethics) taught in English (mostly in strong Spanish accents) by Opus Dei priests at Santa Croce Pontifical University. The rest of our time was spent touring Rome (and one full day in Assisi) led by Mother Regina Pacis, a Franciscan Sister of the Martyr St. George, who lives in Rome and was an incredibly knowledgeable tour guide. All in all, if my count is correct, we visited 61 different holy sites and I prayed for you at each of them! It was also a particular joy to stay at the Domus Guadalupe with two of our own CFR Sisters, Sr. Cecilia and Sr. Monica, who live and work in Rome at the Vatican in the Secretariat of State, serving our Holy Father. We even had a few CFR outings of our own, including gelato of course!

While the classes were very good and our Professors were excellent, the highlight of our time by far was seeing and experiencing so much of Rome: the historical parts of the city, the churches, the saints, the martyrs, and the Pope. We were actually blessed to see our beloved Holy Father three different times. Being present at Pope Francis' Sunday Angelus address in the Vatican square and his Wednesday audience in St. Paul VI Hall were incredible gifts, but the most special sighting was a total surprise. We just happened to be touring the Basilica of St. Mary Major when they started to abruptly close off a certain section. Nothing was said to us officially, but we remembered that the Pope was returning that day from his trip to Slovakia and how his custom was to visit the Marian icon (*Salus Populi Romani*) in that very Basilica, before and after every

international apostolic trip. Could the Pope be coming to us?! We waited and prayed. Sure enough, about fifteen minutes later, in walks the Holy Father without any pomp and circumstance, carrying a bouquet of flowers in his arms to bring to Our Lady and pray silently before her image. What an unexpected grace it was to witness the humble devotion and simplicity of the Successor of St. Peter in person!

Being in Rome for the feast days of the Triumph of the Cross, Our Lady of Sorrows, and the Stigmata of St. Francis, as well as visiting so many tombs and relics of saints and martyrs, especially St. Peter and St. Paul—was so inspiring. Our call is to follow and witness to Jesus and this always includes the cross. It was humbling to be in the presence of such spiritual giants. St. Francis' words welled up in me: "Let us begin again, for up to now we have done very little." It was an experience of spiritual renewal for me, like a mini sabbatical. Yes, for this gift of time in the Eternal City, I will be eternally grateful!!

3)

I would definitely recommend this program to a new group of Superiors and Formators. The time together, and particularly in Rome, was indispensable. It was helpful to hear examples from the other communities and compare how we each do things, applications, formation, etc. It would lose a lot of its value as just an online course. I thought the course selection was helpful. I enjoyed the content and learning from the instructors.

I have been returning to our memories in Rome. It seemed almost too wonderful; I have to remind myself that it really happened. I am continually grateful.

4)

Yes, I found the classes helpful. Some more than others, but our needs aren't all the same. We took bioethics, which covered beginning and end of life issues. It would have been very helpful to go over the sexual ethics though, with all these homosexuality and gender identity issues today.

I enjoyed my time there and find myself thinking about it often. It has made many things in Church history more real for me. The class on the Liturgy was really helpful. Also been thinking about how to incorporate Church art more into classes.

5) The professors are excellent, and the material has been very stimulating.

6) The two weeks ...were wonderful -very enriching, informative, and helpful. I am very thankful for the opportunity.

7) It's been a wonderful uplifting experience...! So very edifying! Can't express how grateful I am for these courses.

8) I definitely recommend Superiors to participate and also for sisters, especially Formators. Besides the experience of sharing community life with sisters of different Congregations, the visit to so many places that are the cradle of our Catholic roots and the superior content of the classes; all together is a package of culture, faith, social and emotional experiences to enrich our religious life.

9) I absolutely recommend the program to other sisters and formators. It was very life-giving and enriching for me. The classes, of course were a gift, but especially the experience of being in Rome and receiving formation myself there in the heart of the Church was very renewing for me.

