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## SANGRE DE CRISTO

### CENTER

Santa Fe, New Mexico, U.S.A.

#### Nature and Purpose

Sangre de Cristo Center near Santa Fe, New Mexico, is a continuing formation program for men and women religious and priests in their middle years. The Center was founded in 1962 by the De La Salle Christian Brothers. Over the twenty years of the Center's operation, about one thousand persons have taken advantage of the Sangre program to help them understand themselves as humans, as Christians, and as religious ministers in a society and a church undergoing profound cultural change.

The term "refoundation" is used to describe the work of the Center because the program does two things: a) it invites each member to a thorough examination of the fundamental understandings, motives and movements of a lifetime of ministry, and b) it encourages the development of those modes of being and doing which will bring each member's basic faith and central values effectively into his or her future ministry. The program of the Center, therefore, provides opportunities for personal interiorization through religious experience, through theological insight, and through the experience of some degree of psychological integrity.

These three dimensions of the program focus upon and facilitate the development of what is essential to an understanding and compassionate involvement in the society and church of our times.

- A permeating faith in the God who calls, who grants us personal salvation in Jesus Christ, who communicates his Spirit to us, and to whom we respond in a life of daily personal prayer.
- An adult comprehension of contemporary theological, sociological and psychological insights into God, humanity, culture, church, scripture, social needs, morality, and so on.
- A strong sense of personal identity, including the facing and acceptance of personal strengths and limitations, personal successes and failures, along with a reasonable facility in communicating both ideas and feelings.

The Sangre program calls for personal involvement in the theoretical roots of Christianity through reading, discussion, participation in formal presentations and workshops, as well as through the experience of personal solitude and prayer and the dynamics of group interchange.

#### Persons Whom Sangre Can Help:

The program and style of life at Sangre is designed for a religious or priest of middle years (from 38 through about 58 years of age) who is in good health, is adjusted psychologically, who is desirous of some updating in various areas through reading, listening and discussion, and who is willing to contribute generously to interrelating with others in this group experience.

#### Persons Whom Sangre Cannot Help:

As part of our continual growth toward Christian maturity, each of us must deal with repeated experience of weakness and failure. There are, however, some difficulties which require the assistance of a skilled professional. Sangre cannot be helpful, for example, in the remediation of alcoholism or such psychological issues as dissociation, withdrawal, or severe levels of discontent, authority hostility, depression, etc. Such a person is, in fact, in need of professional psychological or psychiatric assistance.

#### Location

Sangre de Cristo Center is about twelve miles northwest of the City of Santa Fe, New Mexico, in the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains adjacent to the Santa Fe National Forest. The extensive property in a private valley contains the buildings of the Center, an assortment of mesas and arroyos, two small spring-fed ponds and two minor waterfalls on a small stream. The site was chosen primarily because of its wild natural beauty, its bracing climate at an elevation of 7,100 feet, and its almost constant sunshine and clear air. For someone not yet familiar with the rugged beauty of the Southwestern United States, the contrast with other greener parts of the world will be startling at first.

In order to take advantage of the distinctive culture of the Santa Fe area, as well as for personal convenience, trips to the city are usually scheduled twice weekly. Optional participation in some of the cultural events of the area is possible at times.

#### The Program

**Presentations/Discussions:** One important aspect of the program is the balanced series of presentation in theology, psychology, spirituality, religious life, various ministries, social awareness, intelligence, overall comprehension of the movement of culture, and their ability to communicate. Presentations are generally given in both a morning interval of two hours and an evening interval of an hour and a half, although not all program segments have both morning and evening presentations. There is a short break midway through each presentation, and discussion is encouraged throughout. Since Sangre presenters are resident at the Center during the time of their presentations, personal consultation and informal interchange is readily available.

**Reading:** In order to gain the most from the presentation of the visiting staff, as well as to benefit generally from the Sangre experience, a collateral reading program is strongly recommended for each participant. During the orientation period a recommended reading list is distributed and explained; in addition, visiting presenters also suggest particular works relevant to their coverage. A few special mornings are set aside (with no formal presentations) during which some of this reading may be done, but these will never suffice unless some of the other open times in the program are used for the reading. As in all of the program, some specific objectives and a personal plan are part to the overall initiative and self-discipline that make Sangre work.

**Prayer and Liturgy:** One feature common to all Sangre participants is the desire for a deepening of their regular personal prayer life. Whether this desire results from a sense of enrichment and wanting more, from a sense of dissatisfaction and wanting better, from a response to the word of Jesus in the gospel, from some particular awareness of giftedness

or need, from the search for ultimate meaning in life—or from whatever source, the desire is there. To confirm in the participants the conviction of the indispensability of a life of prayer and to help them enrich their personal experience of such a life, several presenters treat of the nature and practice of prayer. Although no set time is scheduled for personal prayer, the large amount of open time throughout the program allows for individual differences, vocation, and response to the grace of Christ. Two special measures do, however, facilitate development in this regard:

- Quiet time of about forty-five minutes is ordinarily provided each morning, during which all other activities come to a halt.
- An eight-day directed retreat, somewhere near the midpoint of the program, deals specifically with one's personal prayer life and opens up an opportunity for growth and enrichment.

The Eucharistic Liturgy is celebrated at least six days each week at Sangre. The creativity of all of the participants in arranging readings, hymns, symbols and action gives to this celebration a special quality and also helps to affirm its unique place in the life of a Christian.

Community praise is generally offered each morning. Participants share the responsibility for planning and leading the community prayer. The creativity of all is called into play in the generation and combination of ritual, symbols and word that will give public expression to the presence and action of the Risen Christ in the hearts of all. Finally, about once every two weeks, an opportunity is provided for an hour of shared prayer for those who wish.

**Community Life:** Community is an analogous term. The word may be used to describe family, school, civic and religious groups, even the "one world" of humankind, yet in each case it connotes different though similar meanings. The Sangre community, both by reason of its relatively short duration and because of its intensive and compressed dynamics within a modified educational structure for the achievement of specific program goals, differs significantly from what is ordinarily meant by the term religious community. The ordinary community norms do not apply, for the most part, especially in the establishment of structures.

On the other hand, the freedom of time and the close association in a common task not only allow but actively encourage the participants to develop a degree of intimacy and sharing at a level of understanding beyond the usual experience of community living. This intimacy and sharing, along with the excellent theoretical and practical assistance of various staff members, fosters a general harmonious relationship among both participants and staff. Some even find the circumstances conducive to the development of a few warm personal friendships that may continue over many years.

There are certain important facets of Sangre life which contribute to this bonding relationship but which are not treated under other headings. Of particular importance among these:

- Social gathering from time to time celebrating the event of Christian brotherhood and sisterhood.
- Regular personal interviews with one of the program directors, both as scheduled and at the initiative of the participant.
- The unique experience of togetherness-in-solitude during the many times when one receives from or gives to others that blend of companionate presence and respect for privacy which supports the solitude sometimes needed to work through issues of personal integration.

**Recreation:** The opportunity for outdoor activities is a significant part of Sangre life. The area around Sangre and the climate are excellent for hiking, walking and moderate mountain climbing. Sangre also has facilities and equipment for tennis and volleyball.

Five special days are set aside for full-day community outings to some scenic spots of historical/cultural and geographic interest within moderate distance. For those interested, shorter outings to other areas of considerable scenic beauty are also offered on some Sunday afternoons; additional similar activities depend upon the initiative of individuals and the group. The daily schedule, of course, usually includes some open time for physical recreating as well.

Recreation of a more cultural nature is available during the afternoon visits to Santa Fe and its environs, through the house collections of musical and literacy works, through radio and television, through occasional special events at nearby Indian Pueblos, and through attendance at some of the cultural events sponsored by local civic and educational organizations. One free weekend is scheduled for those who wish to travel beyond the immediate area.

**Work:** The only paid employees at Sangre are an outstanding experienced cook and some part-time help. Each morning there is a short housework period, and dishes are done after meals. Approximately every two weeks, there is a scheduled work period of about three hours during which necessary maintenance, cleaning and some clerical work is done. The work pattern is rooted in necessity and communal responsibility in general, but it also provides a healthy variation from activities that might otherwise deal only with academic and reflective pursuits. Of course, the intrinsic human and Christian value of work itself is something to which we all witness, not just at Sangre but in the labor of our everyday lives.

**Length of the Program:** One hundred days is an arbitrary span of time. The experience of some twenty years of the Sangre program indicates, however, that these one hundred days seriously undertaken are sufficient for considerable progress in the following areas:

- growth in personal prayer life and the setting of some guidelines for future responsiveness to this continual call of the Spirit;
- digesting much of the rich content of the program, while determining ways to continue this lifelong learning process;
- developing and beginning work on a reading program which is capable of enriching and instructing for a lifetime;
- experiencing the dynamics of human interrelating on an intimate level, then choosing some means of bringing this same style of relating to future dealings with one's self and others;
- accepting and understanding one's need, dependence and vulnerability, while at the same time strengthening the awareness of one's giftedness and empowerment, so as to encourage overall a faith-filled approach to life which is both realistic and hopeful.

The very pace of the Sangre program is itself important to the experience. Open times (for example: Sundays, most afternoons, and some evenings) are as useful and necessary to personal growth during the program as are the formal input sessions. Here, as in all of life, each participant has to find ways of balancing initiative and involvement with discipline and restraint.

**Brother Bernard LoCoco**