Already in the first half of the XIII century we find two different kinds of school in Santa Croce as well as in the other Franciscan faiaries built in the main towns: one is open to young resident people interested in learning the medieval Trivio and Quadrivio subjects: grammar, rhetoric, dialectics, mathematics, geometry, astronomy and music; the other one is reserved to Franciscan students, also coming from other provinces, to study philosophy, theology, biblical sciences. This second school was named Studio Generale dell’Ordine.

Shortly the Studio Generale dell’Ordine became famous and successful thanks to the important scholars who taught there and to its rich library.

In 1246 Father Guido della Fassa, the Guardian for the Franciscan Community in Santa Croce, purchased the Decretum Gratiani a fundamental book for the scholars, at disposal of the Florentine friars. This is the first step towards the creation of a library which, at the end of the seventeenth century, will be considered one of the most important libraries in Florence and elsewhere.

To understand what Santa Croce library was, it is sufficient to think that, after the suppressions, many printed books, rare and ancient editions and 781 manuscripts were moved to the Laurenziana and National libraries, while most archival material was brought to the State Archives.

Santa Croce lessons were attended by many friars, members of wealthy noble families and poor children who were destined to have a privileged role in the cultural life of the city. The poet Dante Alighieri studied here; Giovanni de’ Medici, son of Lorenzo the Magnificent, who became Cardinal and Pope with the name of Leo X, received here his education.

It would be much too long to make a list of all the great teachers who worked in Santa Croce. Among the most important ones we recall Pietro Giovanni Olivi who moved to Florence from Paris; Ubertino da Casale; Fra Accursio Bonfantini the first one to comment Dante’s Comedy inside the Cathedral of Florence and lecturer at the Studio Teologico in Santa Croce; Friar Cataldo Della Casa who made copies of the books by Petrarca and Boccaccio and of the classics by Seneca, Senofonte, Plutarco. These transcriptions enriched the friary’s library; Friar Francesco della Rovere, General Minister ten Cardinal then Pope Sixtus IV; Friar Francesco Nani nicknamed Samson by Sixtus IV because of his defense of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, General Minister buried in Santa Croce; Friar Luca Pacioli, great mathematician, the first to divulge texts on mathematics; Friar Benigno Salviati, director of the Studio Teologico, inquisitor, Provincial Minister; Bishop of Cagli, Archbishop of Nazareth, defender of Savonarola, great theologian and man of letters; Friar Felice Peretti, General Attorney and Vicar of the Franciscans, Cardinal and Pope with the name of Sixtus V; Friar Lorenzo Manganelli, Cardinal and Pope with the name Clement XIV; the eminent historian Friar Nicola Papini, Provincial and General Minister.

At the time of suppressions all their work and dedication, all the study and glory will be soon wiped away like dust. For Santa Croce it’s the beginning of a life of suffering and anonymity which will last several decades.

The severity and arrogance of subversive laws promulgated between 1866 and 1868 started to lighten so the Franciscan friars became self-confident and resolute. In 1926 the seventh Centenary of Saint Francis death was properly celebrated. By 1929 the Franciscans could use all the rooms of the friary. The boarding school for those who wanted to embrace
religious life was re-opened. The heart of Santa Croce starts to beat again and the friars regain the consciousness of its brilliant religious and cultural tradition. In 1931 the big organ located inside the church was inaugurated. In 1933 Santa Croce was consecrated by Pope Pius XI as a Basilica. On the 20th of May 1944, in occasion of the fifth Centenary of the death of Saint Bernardino of Siena a new library, composed of the manuscripts and books saved from the suppressions and the texts coming from the friaries of the Province, was inaugurated inside the friary.

To bring about the healing of the religious and spiritual wounds of the war, on 25th of January 1945 the friars created in a cloister of Santa Croce the first Italian Studio Teologico per Laici. In the first months of 1946 the first issue of Città di Vita, magazine on religion, art and science, destined to become the “voice” of the Franciscan friars of Santa Croce and their culture in the world.

In the following years many difficulties such as the vocational crisis and the birth of the Florentine Theological Institute created by the Diocese slowed down the cultural revival changed the academic year. However some of the weeks of the Studio Teologico per Laici, whose activity generated prestigious issues of Città di Vita, are unforgettable: Dante Minore with the introduction of Piero Bargellini; Giotto e giotteschi in Santa Croce; Primo Rinascimento in Santa Croce; È possibile una teologia per Laici?; Lettura critica di San Bonaventura; Filippo Brunelleschi nella Firenze del ‘300 – ‘400; Ghiberti e la sua arte nella Firenze del ‘300 – ‘400; Arte e religione nella Firenze dei Medici; Masaccio e il mondo della rinascenza fiorentina; Leggenda di Piero della Francesca. Finally Santa Croce nel solco della storia, the most important book on the history of the church and of the friary of Santa Croce.

Today the activity of the Studio Teologico per Laici has started again with lectures on history, art and spirituality in Santa Croce and above all the academic meetings on current events, in collaboration with the Department of Philosophy of the University of Florence, for instance Il Pensiero filosofico Francescano. Dialogo tra passato e presente; La felicità: desiderio o utopia?.

Moisé writes: <<The history of Italian civilization is written in the dust scattered in Santa Croce temple. The Franciscan friars living in Santa Croce significantly contributed to civilize Italy>>.