

# St. Anthony Indian Mission

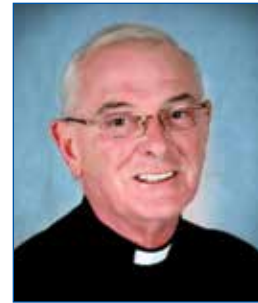
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From the desk of Fr. Patrick McGuire

Autumn greetings once again from the high desert, where as I write to you the blustery winds are bringing hope of much needed rain and even snow.

I hope that this letter will reach you before Thanksgiving because I want you to know how deeply and personally I am grateful for the support and encouragement that you have always given us -- and never so much as during these last few very difficult months. You will be first on my list of the blessings for which I will be giving thanks this year!

Of course I had not experienced Thanksgiving until I came to live in New Mexico, but it is a time that I have come to cherish because it affords the opportunity to revisit those special moments in the year (and more so now when so many challenges have faced us!) that have been met through fellowship, kindness, generosity and caring.

As I have pointed out in the past, November is the busiest month of the year for us. It usually kicks off with our Native American Day, leading up to Thanksgiving and then on to Christmas -- with Halloween sandwiched in between and December's Zuni Shalako Festival following swift on the heels of all. Although many of these events have been vastly reduced in 2020, each was celebrated as fully as the circumstances would allow. Inventiveness on the part of staff and students overcame any obstacles that might have dampened the inherent joyfulness in the hearts of the young.

Sadly, there were neither costumes nor a "Trick or Treat" parade among the grades at Halloween, but that did not prevent teachers like Miss Debbie donning a wig and decorating her room with ghostly figures and fake cobwebs. The students safely communicated with each other via the internet, sharing much laughter and good wishes. Each student (whether in school or at home) still received their bag of candy dutifully prepared by the cafeteria staff. For the spirit of laughter and joy in the young -- I give thanks.

I have come to appreciate how much more difficult it is for the teachers to conduct classes on-line and in person simultaneously. With on-line teaching even more care is needed to ensure that the on-line students fully grasp the material. Maintaining class discipline while the students are in their home environment also adds to the teachers' burden. Several teachers spend much of the weekend in their classrooms preparing for the week ahead. For the tireless dedication of our staff I daily give thanks.



In previous letters I have mentioned how successful the Zuni authorities have been in curbing the spread of the virus within the Pueblo. But as with much of the rest of the country, this ghastly virus is beginning to return. The Zuni tribal leaders have proposed a restricted celebration of the Tribe's most

important annual event -- Shalako, at the beginning of December. Authorities have restored the weekday curfew and if necessary will bring back a complete closure of the Pueblo on weekends. For the safety of all, the School has decided to return to distance learning for all students from December 7th until January 19th (this will of course include the Christmas holiday when the School would be closed anyway). While heartbreaking for many of us, this action was deemed necessary for the safety of all. For the cooperation of all the parents and the wisdom of those involved I am truly thankful.

Something missing from the heart of our little School has been the weekly All School Mass. Obviously we have been unable to gather together for our Wednesday Mass, and even the children have asked when we can have "church again."



I am delighted to report that we have at least partially restored this central aspect of our school life. Through our teaching program we now transmit the Mass from the church into each classroom -- and also to the students studying at home. At Holy Communion time, Fr. Alcuin and I take the Lord to the classrooms where those able to receive Communion do so. One student leads the priest to each classroom ringing a small bell (according to the ancient tradition) as

we pass through the School. That bell brought wonderment to students and tears to the eyes of us older Catholics. How could we not be thankful?

As the year draws to a close we must also look ahead. No matter what the consequences of the virus may be, the education of our students must continue. St. Anthony's accreditation has one more year of validity and then must be renewed in 2021. That means getting preparations underway now. At the center of the accreditation process is a whole series of self-evaluations by the faculty and staff. These will encompass student success, remedial methods, data analysis of student evaluations, teaching methods, safety protocols, Catholic identity, adherence to the goals in our Mission Statement, examining the School's philosophy, and financial viability -- to mention just a few. Clearly there is a great deal to be prepared in advance of the visit by the examining board.

Our faculty has already put the process in motion with everyone joining a range of sub-committees to prepare the necessary documents. We are all indebted to our School principal, Sr. Marsha, for her guidance and expertise in this massive undertaking. Although the documents must be prepared by all the staff, she has been a guiding light in setting up the groups and directing them in their work. For the skills of Sr. Marsha and the staff I am indeed thankful. (That I need only be involved in the finance group is a matter for even greater thanksgiving!)

As I began this letter so I will end. I am but one person trying to sustain what I perceive as a God-given treasure. But I am not alone since I have been given amazing students as the treasure and wonderful colleagues with whom to serve, not the least of these are our friends and benefactors who make the adventure possible.

With best wishes and in Thanksgiving --

Sincerely,

Fr. Patrick McGuire