

St. Anthony Indian Mission

P.O. Box 486

Zuni, New Mexico 87327-0486

Toll Free Phone: (866) 832-8816

Website: www.stanthonyzuni.org

September 2020



From the desk of Fr. Patrick McGuire

"Joy to the world!" No, I'm not speaking of Christmas Joy (although we should have it all year round) -- but joy that the students are finally returning to St. Anthony's! I can't tell you how good it feels to share these few words with you. As of September 8th -- the first group of students has returned!

I should explain our plan. As I shared with you in my last letter, despite being ready to receive students on August 10th, we delayed re-opening because the local community was simply not ready to move forward. It is with great respect and admiration for the people of Zuni that I report that their efforts to stem the spread of the virus are proving effective. (We hope and pray that it continues.) After wide consultation with the school board, parents, faculty and local medical people, we decided to move forward with cautious re-opening for "in person" teaching.

I cannot say that all feelings of anxiety have disappeared. After all, what parent would not be concerned for the safety of their children? And the same is true of our faculty to whom the care of those delightful young people is entrusted. In light of this, we established a strategy by which we could move to gradually bring our students back into the School.

We continue to offer "distance learning" to students whose parents want them to stay at home and to those still waiting to return to School. We improved on our previous distance learning technique by issuing 120 Chromebook computers to those students in need. Our teachers now teach from their classrooms using computer programs which allow the "at home" students to fully interact with their teachers while other students are actually present in the classrooms. In addition, for the first two weeks we introduced an abbreviated schedule, with the school day ending at 12:45.

I must express my admiration for the faculty members who have been diligent in learning how to operate the new computer programs. At first there was a certain reluctance, but they soon bravely knuckled down to the task at hand. It is heartwarming to see several of the more "tech savvy" teachers take time to mentor the teachers who are still unfamiliar with the program's more intricate operations. The family spirit of St. Anthony's shines through.

Our overall strategy is to allow the students time to become accustomed to being at School yet maintain social distancing. Our first week of re-opening welcomed students from Pre-K to 2nd grade. As predicted by Sr. Marsha, use of facemasks was not an issue, but routines of temperature checking, handwashing, sanitizing, and staying 6 feet apart had to be established. In the second week, 3rd to 5th grade students joined the classrooms, and finally the following week junior high returned. It works!

We are now operating with approximately one third of the student body in class while the others are distance learning through computers and weekly study packages. At our last school board meeting we decided to offer distance learning for the whole



of this first semester. However, as the school year progresses we are certain that the move back into classrooms will gain momentum. We already see it happening.

Meanwhile, there is a whole new dimension to our daily lives. Every day classrooms are sanitized and restrooms are cleaned every hour; food is prepared and the kitchens thoroughly cleansed; overalls and masks are disinfected and washed ready for the next day; Friday sees our staff with masks and respirators "fogging" (a new word in our lexicon meaning deep cleaning) the classrooms.



One day Fr. Alcuin and I spent several hours taping blue lines six feet apart throughout the entire School. The very next morning I awoke from a dream of blue-striped zebras! Of course I had to chuckle at this, but then imagine my thoughts when later that very same morning a horse happened to wander into the school yard! For a minute or two I thought I might be "losing it," but fortunately it all turned out to be just a humorous coincidence.

And speaking of humor, I must share with you a certain sadness that I have at the moment, involving not being able to joke around with the students. During these initial days of the new school year, the focus must be on maintaining the "protocols" and safe routines. Certainly we wave to each other from a distance and smile through our face masks, but the sense of joy that has been a hallmark of the School has yet to fully return, but I know it will soon.

Another one of our added tasks is that we are providing breakfast and lunch packages for all students -- whether they are in school or at home. Today as I write to you, 96 lunches were distributed to students at home. That tells a whole other story about the needs of the community and the widespread effects of the virus. Zuni is not a well-off place! As I stood in the kitchen, Audrey (one of our cooks) turned to me and we burst out into big smiles as we heard the laughter of a couple of the kindergarteners. It was just so good to hear the kids once more.

Shortly after I arrived in Zuni almost six years ago, I remember writing to you about a certain "learning curve." Alas, that curve has never really straightened out! Initially I had to learn what was involved in the running of a School, but lately my education has centered on coping with the consequences of the pandemic and adapting the School to the necessary technologies of these strange days -- while all the time dodging as many pitfalls as possible.

Perhaps one lesson never to be forgotten is that we are all involved in this together and together we succeed. The lengths to which different businesses have gone to help us without making big profits, the willingness of our faculty to step beyond their "comfort zone," the ingenuity of our maintenance and custodial staff in adapting our structures, the endless extra hours put in by office staff, the helpfulness of local people -- and so much more -- have enabled us to continue building the future for the next generation.

Needless to say at the very heart of St. Anthony's are you -- our faithful friend and benefactor. None of what I write could happen without you. You have my eternal thanks and are in my daily prayers, poor though they may be.

Sincerely,

Fr. Patrick McGuire