

St. Anthony Indian Mission

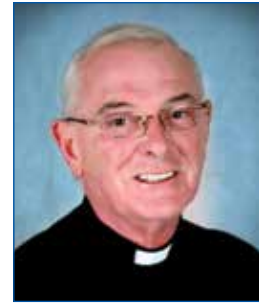
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From the desk of Fr. Patrick McGuire

Greetings from the very dry and hot high desert! Sadly, we have had almost no "monsoon season" this year. Sunday's prayer for rain did bring the blessing of a 10 minute downpour -- a good start, but much more is needed.

Never one to give out my age, I have to confess that the 1960's song by Andy Williams "Almost There" has become like a battle cry for me since I last wrote to you. I find myself humming the words as I move through the School, generating some odd looks from our overworked staff and helpers.

Until recently, just about every sort of debris including discarded paneling, shelving, desks, and old wheelbarrows could be found littered across the campus. As we moved towards Independence Day, corners of our building site began to clear and then that tune entered my head: "Almost There." George was rapidly painting rooms, and as he declared them ready, Cordelia moved in to prepare the floors for polishing. With every stroke of the mop my hopes rose steadily.

Despite all the demolition and construction, the single largest task lay in moving the library to its new location. Countless reference books, magazines and textbooks had to be sorted, sifted and shifted. Thanks to Jonathan, our language arts teacher (and several members of his family), that task is finally getting done. With each inquiry they simply respond: "we're getting there."

Virginia and Vernalita were evicted from their office to accommodate the new library and as they too sifted through accumulated memorabilia to set up their new work spaces, long forgotten treasures were discovered. They had been collecting photographs for over 50 years, and inevitably we had to linger over them and share recollections. I was, of course, the worst offender and would continually say, "let's keep going, we're nearly there."

The new fire escape for the new upper floor classrooms finally arrived, and everyone set to work unloading the heavy metal pieces and assembling them. Unfortunately, the original specifications were in error as to how it tied into the upper platform. Thankfully, the boss (a civil engineer) was there and was able to "tweak" the construction, though it did mean more welding at their workshop and another week-long delay. The boss said -- yes, you guessed it: "not to worry we're almost there!"



I keep in regular touch with my confrères in Britain and in my last email I mentioned that my latest acquired skill was in designing restrooms (two new and two reconfigured in this project). Needless to say this triggered a whole series of emails on the subject (all of which were wholesome and very funny). Laughter keeps us going through the most stressful of times.

I hope I haven't bored you with too many construction details, but this has been our life at St. Anthony's for several months now. You cannot imagine

how much we long for the students and staff to return so that our always interesting and even exciting life can resume. With August on the horizon there is some light at the end of the tunnel, and "we are almost there."

Preparations for the students' return continue, and certain obstacles need to be addressed. First, of course, is student registration. Normally we have the cafeteria set up for parents to come in and complete the paperwork. Thankfully many parents have already registered, but more are to come and in our easygoing New Mexico way it will no doubt be at the last minute. How can we deal with this given the need for "social distancing"?

We have been blessed with donations of face masks to ensure that all our students are following protocols. (Thanks to all who have sent these to us!) Sanitizing supplies still have to be located. We have been building a reserve but more will be need for ongoing protection and continuous cleaning throughout the school day. Can our custodial staff cope? Can the cafeteria staff cope with meals to be served while distancing students? With such large classrooms will students be able to see the white-board? Can we offer distance learning for students who remain at home? These are just a few of the thoughts that percolate in my muddled head. But day by day we address these issues using the seasoned experience of both staff and faculty in facing new challenges.

As we approach our re-opening, I naturally reflect on what has been achieved over these past weeks. My first thought is one of immense gratitude for our very special donors -- like you. We were not prepared for this gigantic project, but thanks to an outpouring of kindness and generosity we are keeping our heads above water.

Second, the dedication of our small staff and faculty must be acknowledged. Priscilla has kept the finance office humming along; Lulita at the front office has managed to keep the school administration going (in addition to keeping the office plants alive!); DeeAnn made sure report cards were sent out to the parents; and teachers have been lending a helping hand in every direction. Mike the maintenance man continues to confront and conquer all daily challenges (not the least of which are the free-flowing ideas that run through my head!). But through it all a deeper bonding of the St. Anthony family has been forged.

Third, the fabric of the School has been vastly improved to allow better teaching practices -- in addition to keeping the students safe. Every classroom has been repainted and deep-cleaned. At the moment, the "homeliness" of the School has been diminished, but I know that upon their return the faculty will soon have the campus transformed to a bright, welcoming and happy place for the students to be. We will come through these months with an even better St. Anthony's and a greater source of joy for all.

As I write we are moving forward at a rapid pace, but not so fast as to preclude a time of giving thanks for all who make the School possible. "We are almost there" and I give thanks for the journey and those who have been traveling with us!



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. Pat". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Fr. Patrick McGuire