

St. Anthony Indian Mission

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From the desk of Fr. Patrick McGuire

I hope all is well with you and your family while we continue to live through these difficult times. As the weeks pass by, we in Zuni need constant reminders to be vigilant and not let down our guard against the "unseen enemy."

At the moment I am taking consolation in the words of St. Paul when he wrote to Timothy: "I have run the race!" As you know we have been racing to prepare "our wee school" for reopening this month. To be totally frank, we have prepared ourselves as thoroughly as we possibly could. Classrooms have been adapted to social distancing, protocols put in place for safe hygiene, arrangements made for serving meals -- and masks, face shields, and sanitizers are fully stocked. But sadly the race has not ended. I share with you my agonizing decision during the first week of August. . .

I held a teleconference with our faculty and staff to outline our plans and to receive their input. After all, they are the "front line" workers. During the conversation I detected a level of anxiety that I had not anticipated. Everyone was ready to return but with an uncertainty that was disquieting. Later that same day the New Mexico State Governor announced that public schools would stay closed until after Labor Day. The Governor pointed to the regional statistical analysis on the spread of this terrible virus within the State, and in doing so she reiterated much of what our teachers had said during our teleconference.

Although as a private school we are not bound by the regulations of public schools, it would have been foolish not to pay attention to the reasoning. I consulted with our diocesan school superintendent, our principal, school board, some of the teachers, local medical personnel and parents. After a very sleepless night, I came to the decision that although we were ready -- our local community was not. My decision was to delay opening until after Labor Day. A further teleconference took place with the faculty, and there was an audible sigh of relief.



At the beginning of the following week, the Zuni Tribal Council announced a total lock-down of the Pueblo for each of the weekends in August. The population is restricted to their homes, with no business activity and no movement in the streets except for essential workers. (Since Fr. Alcuin and I look after three other churches off the Reservation, I met with the Zuni incident commander and the chief of police to obtain permission for us to travel to the other churches, which was given.) The two gentlemen explained that the lock-down was aimed at stopping the spread of the virus within the local community.

Although still deeply saddened, I felt justified in my reading of the situation and in my decision. As I write it seems as if the lock-down is effective and our fingers are crossed for the students' return in September. One fact that was mentioned on television was that during pre-vacation lock-down, throughout

the state of New Mexico -- approximately 40% of students continued with "virtual learning." I am proud to say that at St. Anthony's that figure was closer to 95%.

Needless to say, the Race continues. Earlier this summer we had begun preparations for "On Line" schooling and "Remote Teaching," realizing that we needed to make allowances for the few students whom we knew would be kept at home after re-opening. Now we are extending those preparations to include the whole student body.

Our teachers and staff have been marvelous. The electronics have been set up for teaching over the internet from classrooms, and the teachers have been instructed (on-going) in the use of new computer programs. Laptops are being issued to students -- which essentially means refurbishing old units. Parents have been informed and schedules prepared for teaching and conferencing with students. Initial "packages" have been prepared for distribution.

Finally on August 10th (right on schedule!) teachers and students were in contact with each other, parents drove onto the campus to pick up their "packages" (at one point the cars were lined up into the next street!) and St. Anthony's was open for its 98th year -- not quite in the way we had wanted, but nevertheless the race carries on. This year, it looks as if St. Anthony's will have an enrollment of approximately 140 students. Our 2020 graduates were 17 in number which pointed to an expected drop overall, but thankfully new students have come forward and enrollment continues to build!

Priscilla and I are still handling most of the office work and correspondence, so forgive us if we are a little tardy in replying to letters or answering the telephone. We do try to keep up. Lulita and Sr. Marsha are handling the School administration work; students present or not, bureaucracy goes on.

One task still to be addressed is our Student Sponsoring Program. Usually by this time we would have been assigning students to sponsors and preparing to send out photographs of the students who are being supported. Obviously at this time photos are not available, but I do hope that our sponsors will continue their invaluable support. We will bring sponsors up-to-date as soon as possible.

Heartening moments for me have been the number of students "tagging along" in their parents' vehicles as packages have been picked up. Great cheerful waves from behind glass were exchanged between teachers and pupils which told a great tale of affection and a longing to get back together. It really does tell me that St. Anthony's is so much more than a mere school.

So while I had thought that we were at the finishing line, it appears that we are still at the starting blocks! When I see the new fire escape (so vital to the School) and the renovations that have taken place, a voice in my head cries out to "get going!" but the "wee small voice" deep within says only when it is safe and the track is clear, then choose the path that will win the race.

Thank you for persevering with us, thank you for your support and generosity, and thank you for your appreciation of the young people whose future is entrusted to our hands. Blessings always --



Sincerely,

Fr. Patrick McGuire