

St. Anthony Indian Mission

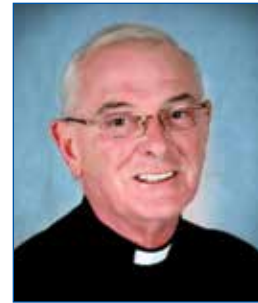
P.O. Box 486

Zuni, New Mexico 87327-0486

Toll Free Phone: (866) 832-8816

Website: www.stanthonyzuni.org

January 2021



From the desk of Fr. Patrick McGuire

Welcome to St. Anthony's 2021! I hope that you had a blessed Christmas season and an enjoyable welcoming of the New Year.

It was certainly memorable for me if for no other reason than there were no weekend restrictions with which to cope! I am a little irritated when people speak of the "New Norm" since our aim is to return to the good things we are capable of, albeit with lessons learned including the greater use of technology. School is really only getting underway as I write, which leaves some time to reflect and savor the memory of the Holiday season.

It was a blessing that on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and New Year's Day we had a small congregation (and even a choir!) in the church. Several hundred people joined us over the internet, including several family members and former parishioners, many of whom were thousands of miles away. The gulf that the virus has created was well and truly spanned.

I was thinking of these things while dismantling the decorations within the church. Sr. Ansi (6th grade), Sr. Satya (1st Grade), and yours truly had determined that the festive decor of the church would not be absent in 2020. But on January 7th it was time to dismantle our tinsel and lights, never forgetting the straw from the crib scene. That stuff gets everywhere!

I sat on the floor amid the chaos and asked myself: "what did I really miss during Christmas 2020?" Of course there was no Santa this year, we could only send gifts home to the students, and we had to cancel our wonderful Christmas program where several hundred parents invade the campus for a magical evening. Perhaps the atmosphere was not as exciting as in other years, yet we were all so busy distributing gifts (along with study packets) -- and some much needed food packages -- that we did not feel any lack of Christmas spirit.



As I pondered I realized what was missing this year. It was the presence of the little ones as they gather around the Bethlehem nativity. I have told you previously of how the kindergarten and pre-k students would stand in awe as they gazed on the scene and their teachers introduced them to the different figures. Much treasured for me is the memory of one pre-k student who reached down and tucked the tiny Zuni blanket around the figure of the newborn child with all the gentleness of a miniature mother. Needless to say, straw went everywhere! But who could forget that moment?

Amid all the necessary precautions and protections for staff and students, I felt that we must not abandon the beauty and wonder of our Christian traditions that lie at the heart of our School's daily life. I had to laugh on

Christmas day when the two Sisters told me how all the teachers had arranged "on-line" Christmas parties for their classes. Mrs. Walker even had them set up an internet choir! I don't know how they managed it, but several reports came in on how much fun the students and parents had.

In a real way the absence of the little ones at the crib is a lost moment that cannot be recovered. There have been several such moments when the uniqueness that is St. Anthony's has been lost without the presence of the students in school. We can only try to ensure that they are a reality once again.

On January 19th we returned to "in-person" learning although we continued the mix of "on-line" as well. (The rate of virus spread is slowing down again but has not yet ended. The distribution of the vaccine is a great encouragement!) We lack the "buzz" that comes from the students on campus but even at a distance we try to maintain that sense of belonging to our unique family. We offer lunch for all the students -- even those at home. That first day back 80 parents came to collect the meals. It was a stark reminder of how hard the pandemic is hitting our families.

Mrs. Walker (4th grade) planned her retirement for the end of December. A student teacher has had his placement with her for several months and now that he has graduated we have had a seamless change as Mr. Bryston took over that grade. Mrs. Walker continues as a volunteer aid; she leaves a wonderful legacy of inventive teaching methods. We will all miss her when she finally moves away.

Although I personally acknowledge every donation that we receive, I would like to express my gratitude to our friends who have helped us through these difficult months and especially over the Christmas Season. I always seem to be juggling dollars to meet our bills and I bless our donors every time I write a check. Recently, I met a group of teachers gathered in the cafeteria (dutifully social distanced). It was unusual for them to linger and they said they were defrosting. It was 10 degrees outside. They jokingly said they would donate towards the propane bill. I chuckled to myself as I paid the bill. It was another of those moments when I experienced the camaraderie and good spirits among our faculty and a sense of thanksgiving for our extended family of donors.

It would be easy to allow the difficulties we are all facing to hold us back. But the enthusiasm and dedication of all our staff -- particularly the faculty -- ensures that we continue to provide both quality and enjoyable education, while looking forward and planning on how to make the best use of what is available.

We are preparing for our accreditation renewal this year. As the teachers make self-assessments of their role in the School it is obvious that they are determined that St. Anthony's will continue to offer the very best possible for the students. Clearly we will not be lost in the negativity that could overwhelm us; rather we look forward to a positive and brighter year ahead. Like the straw from the crib, hope and determination spread positivity and goodness everywhere. Thank you for making it all possible and may you enjoy a blessed 2021!



Sincerely,

Fr. Patrick McGuire