

St. Anthony Indian Mission

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From the desk of Fr. Patrick McGuire

Greetings from a sunny, warm and cheerful Zuni!

If you have ever been preparing for a journey and packing a small handy suitcase at the very last moment -- only to find that you can't squeeze much more into it -- then you will know how I feel in this month of May 2021.

Our primary focus is the end of the school year on May 28th. Although we officially end the year on that Friday, school will resume the following Tuesday as two weeks of summer school commences. Although summer school generally has a more relaxed atmosphere than regular school, this year we will be hosting more students than ever -- all with "in person" teaching. Classes will be directed towards the needs of individual students, particularly those who have been "distance learning" throughout the year. First three items for the May suitcase: bring the school year to a close, prepare for summer school, and plan out the new school year -- with a few extra things thrown in.

When I wrote to you last May, I mentioned that we were unable to host our normal graduation ceremonies. Throughout the year, Sr. Marsha and Mr. Jonathan (8th Grade) had tried several times to find a way of honoring the 2020 graduates. Unfortunately, safety precautions brought those plans to a halt. So I am delighted to let you know that "at very long last" (as Sr. Marsha wrote in her invitation letter to our former students) we are able to host a Graduation Ceremony for the 2020 graduates. You might recall that this was a particularly wonderful group of 17 students: industrious, thoughtful, polite and caring -- to mention just a few of their outstanding character traits.



How to cope with such a large gathering of people and maintain adequate safety measures has been an issue. The school yard could not quite accommodate the numbers, but it does look like we'll be able to use the school gym. With a limit of 100 people, the gym will meet all current safety regulations -- both tribal and state.

The next item to be packed in the suitcase is the 2021 Graduations. With only eight students in this year's class, their celebration could easily be overshadowed, but we will do our very best to make sure that doesn't happen. Once again, this year's 8th grade class is a really special group of young people. (But what else would we expect from a class at St. Anthony's!)

Another event to squeeze into the every burgeoning suitcase is the "May Crowning." The May Crowning had to be canceled in 2020 but not so in 2021. Pacing out the school yard, we concluded that we would be able to accommodate the entire student body for an outdoor event where the 8th graders will crown the Virgin Mary statue during her special month. This is a beautiful ceremony conducted completely by the students. Holding it outdoors will bring back nostalgic memories for many of our older parishioners. I am looking forward

to it even if it means moving chairs, tables and electrical equipment -- plus building an outdoor platform. (I have learned how to carry six folding chairs at one time -- there is no end to the skills I am learning at St. Anthony's!)

May is traditionally the month when our young students receive Holy Communion for the first time. As I previously mentioned in my letters, it was not a practical proposition to hold one Sunday Mass for the occasion. Instead, we decided on holding eight separate Services culminating on May 23rd when eight students will receive the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Managing to arrange each Sunday in such a way as to have children from the same families receive their sacraments at the same time and keep church congregation numbers within allowable limits has been quite an exercise. Of course there is always the need for last minute reorganization because of family circumstances (the best laid plans. . .). Having groups of our young people receiving multiple different sacraments at the same time may not be quite liturgically correct, but each Sunday has produced a truly warm, family atmosphere in our little church.

I have to tell you that our "Matriarchs" (the older ladies in the congregation) love every minute of it -- even when Sunday Mass lasts almost 2 hours. Their only complaint is that we still can't have coffee in the cafeteria after Sunday Mass. (That's when the ladies catch up with the local news.) I confess to having strategically placed giant bowls of candy for them as they leave the church -- to good effect!

With so many other activities in play, I must never forget that we are an academic institution. I am very proud of our students (both in class and at home); their achievements have been inspiring. The Pueblo recently held an awards ceremony for students who have made exceptional progress during this last year. While public school students vastly outnumber those of St. Anthony's, four of our students were honored for their outstanding efforts. While 100% of our 8th graders are graduating with honors, the public schools are just a touch envious.

I asked Sr. Marsha if we had managed to provide a full year of the required teaching hours despite all the breaks and setbacks. To which in her own inimitable way she looked at me and said, "Of course! We are St. Anthony's after all." (Forgive my pride in both students and teachers.)

One short aside is to note that our staff always looks beyond the immediate. Seeing the potential for "live streaming" plus other technical enhancements is already being put to good use. Each Sunday group and graduating class will now receive a DVD of their event; May Crowning is to be live streamed as are the graduations. Out of all the Covid chaos good things are happening that remind us of the joy that we experience here even at the most trying of times.

I write to you just as we are about to launch into a whirlwind of activities beginning on May 14th with the May Crowning and ending sometime mid-June. That little suitcase of tasks may well be bursting at the seams, but what an exciting and wonderful journey it creates for all of us. Thank you again for making the journey possible!



Sincerely,

Fr. Patrick McGuire