

St. Anthony Indian Mission

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From the desk of Fr. Patrick McGuire

Greetings from a peaceful Zuni! All of us are experiencing an amazing sense of relief and gratitude. Although summer school still has a few days to run, the bulk of the students departed on May 28th for a well-earned summer break. Soon the faculty will be able to enjoy their much-deserved break as well.

Our great sense of relief, of course, comes from the fact that we were able to see the school year successfully through to the end -- despite all that our "annus horribilis" (to quote Queen Elizabeth) could throw at us. Forgive my pride, but I feel that our joint efforts for St. Anthony's are worthy of some praise. It's a sentiment shared by more than ourselves. One of the parents arrived with a token gift for every member of our staff and on the back she wrote: "This was an extraordinarily tough year for everyone, and yet, you showed up. You continued to make our children a top priority, and for that, we are grateful. Thank you." A moment like that makes all efforts seem doubly worthwhile.

We started the year with 30% of our students in school and 70% doing remote learning, but we ended with almost 80% in school! In between we had to cope with supplying computers and creating "hot spots" so that the remote students could connect to the internet at home. The latter was something of a nightmare since we live in a remote area with fairly "sketchy" connectivity. But we got there and continue on! We are preparing for the August 2021 reopening and have a mountain of work to do, but relief lies in having a much needed break from the rigors of the day to day schedule.



We have 58 students in summer school divided between morning and afternoon sessions. This is a far larger number than in any year since I arrived. Under the guidance of Ms. Angel, our Title 1 teacher, there is a serious approach to the classroom (not unleavened with fun), so that all the students are progressing rapidly. Yet another one of those small encouraging moments is to see the summer students eat in the cafeteria as opposed to meals in classrooms. Still "socially distanced" as they chat with each other, they generate a great youthful buzz that gladdens the heart.

We did successfully hold two graduation ceremonies originally planned as outdoor events. Wind and heat necessitated holding the larger event in the gym. All credit to Ms. DeeAnn, Mike, and Mr. Jonathan who rapidly adapted, decorated and adjusted the gym for the occasion -- even to the extent of organizing "live streaming" for the event. Not all 17 of the 2020 graduates could attend but all received their certificates, St. Anthony sweatshirt hoodies and personal bibles. We even managed a "cake and punch" celebration at the end.

The 2021 graduation ceremony followed a more traditional schedule. With fewer numbers, the celebration took place after a Graduation Mass in the church. Afterward, I couldn't understand why the graduates hurried eagerly



towards the fire escape at the west side of the School. (We had installed this fire escape last summer when we moved the 6th and 8th grades to the upper floor of the building). Unbeknownst to me the 8th grade had claimed it as their own. It had become their personal exit from School and they had designated it as the "8th Grade Ladder." The number of photographs taken on those stairs was astounding! Photos of the entire group; photos of individual students; photos with teachers; photos with parents; students ascending

and descending stairs -- it went on and on.

Sr. Marsha was hilarious as she took her pictures. Before each shot she called out: "Breathe in; masks off; (snap photo) masks on; breathe out." The students soon took up the cry and were able to "mask on and off" with military precision to the amusement of all. Whoever suggested that staying safe need not be fun?

The Sunday after Graduation I had the privilege of administering the Sacrament of Confirmation to some of our students. For 8 weeks we had Baptisms and First Holy Communions as I have previously reported. That Sunday was a day dedicated to our young adults as they moved away from the safe and familiar surrounds of St. Anthony's.



The reverence with which each candidate approached the Sacrament was remarked upon by many in the congregation. I could no longer read the text for tears as I anointed them with Holy Oil and offered "peace be with you." Many of them I had baptized and given First Holy Communion in previous years. That moment, with deep prayer in my heart, I touched upon a parent's feelings as they see their children move out into the wide world.

Two Sundays later we celebrated the Baptism of a baby girl. Her Godfather was a graduate from my second year at the School. I knew that he was pursuing a military career, and in fact the day after the Baptism he was flying out to begin his training. He is more than capable, and with his keen intelligence and wonderful personality I have no doubt that he will be successful.

Now it is time to knuckle down to summer maintenance projects and preparation for the year ahead. We don't have the usual summer help since Covid restrictions are still in place, so we will really have to "crack the whip" in order to get all the painting, cleaning, and rearranging of furniture done. A great deal of what we have learned in the past year will be put to good use in the classroom. Our aim is to return to full in-person teaching in 2021/2022.

These last few weeks have been a great blessing as we watched all of our hard work come to fruition. It's truly inspiring to see well-educated young people, proud of their Christian and Zuni traditions, moving out to a bright future. Of course without you, none of this could take place. Thank you and bless you for making it all happen!

Sincerely,

Fr. Patrick McGuire