

# St. Anthony Indian Mission

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From the desk of Fr. Patrick McGuire

I have such a sense of relief, joy, concern, hope and faith all mixed together as I bring you the wonderful news that St. Anthony's has reopened once more with 140 students present for "in person" learning! Among those mixed emotions joy and faith are dominant as the 2021/2022 adventure begins.

Adventure is the appropriate word as we step forward ready to face whatever the new school year brings. I do believe that in the wake of the experiences of the last two years we are prepared for whatever comes our way. (Says he, still smiling but with an underlying anxiety of the unknown -- and that's where faith steps in to carry him onwards.) But what a joy it is to see the students back: bright eyed, ready to learn and with that childlike expectation for more than a little excitement in the days ahead. Many new students transferring into the upper grades add their own feelings of excitement to the campus despite the additional work for the teachers!



The sense of relief comes from knowing that after the tremendous efforts of the last two months, the School was ready to receive the students and teachers. There was no shortage of relief when Sr. Marsha, our school principal, returned to the campus from her sojourn with her Religious Congregation in California. Her experience of more than half a century of teaching is not only an invaluable resource but a reassuring comfort for "yours truly" with my short six years of ministry at St. Anthony's.

My concern is still centered around the ever-present virus that has caused so much disruption throughout the world. Although our Pueblo has been "Covid Free" for several weeks, a few new cases recently appeared at our local hospital. It is still an unknown, but we are prepared for it as an eventuality. We enforce the wearing of masks, three feet distancing, daily temperature checks, daily monitoring of the local situation and continuous disinfecting throughout the School. The students take it all in stride while faculty and staff are ever watchful.

The only area of the School which raised a doubt in our minds was the cafeteria. It is large enough to accommodate almost 200 people but not while maintaining even the reduced three feet distancing. After conferring with the faculty, it was decided that the junior high students would collect their meals and take them to their "home rooms," allowing more than enough space for the elementary students to use the cafeteria. It means more cleaning work, but our staff is ready and willing.



In addition, we have restored our Wednesday "All School Mass" in the church. This

is a great improvement over "live streaming" the Mass from an empty church. We are making use of the choir loft to maintain proper social distancing.

The one service of St. Anthony's that we cannot yet restore is the school bus service. There are just too many children to be picked up while maintaining our Covid protocols. Again, after consultation with the faculty, we decided to restore a reduced bus service in the near future catering to the students who live furthest away from the School.

That brings me to other news concerning our staff. As I mentioned some time ago, Vernalita retired from the development office due to ill health. Now her co-worker Virginia has retired from being our bus driver. Both of these ladies have given over fifty years' service to the School and will be sorely missed.

Faculty-wise we still await the arrival of Sr. Ragini from India. It has now taken almost two years to obtain a visa and because of Covid she still awaits the embassy in India to complete their part of the process. But we are yet again blessed. Ms. Walker who retired in January has generously returned as a long term substitute teacher. Another blessing is that all the other teachers have returned, giving St. Anthony's that solid sense of continuity.

On the nature front, the recent monsoon rainstorms caused a fair amount of havoc. Although we were very grateful for the precipitation, we would rather that it had stayed outside the buildings! Leaking roofs and ingress into the basement gave us unexpected headaches, but even these were handled with a smile and a laugh.

We even managed to "touch up" the gym paint to make it respectable. Mike, along with his wife and daughter, plus Joe the new gym teacher and I formed a gym cleanup crew on the Saturday before school opened. Isiah our custodian came in the next day to finish smartening up the administration building. (I don't like to have people working on Sunday -- it's the Lord's day and family day as well. I took consolation in the fact that Isiah brought his daughter with him to help.) Some of the teachers have also been working late into the evening to prepare classrooms and lesson plans. Where else would one find such dedication other than a faith-filled community like ours?



The one emotion in my mix that I have not touched upon is Hope. In my homilies I have often spoken about the difference between "Christian Hope" and regular "hope." I still hope to win the lottery and give millions to St. Anthony School. Perhaps one day that will happen. But "Christian Hope" is the certainty that through God's grace our hopes will be fulfilled. I refer not just to my hope that St. Anthony's will be a top notch school, but to the hope that all of our students will have a bright and blessed future. This summer I met several of our graduates, each of whom is embarking on either a career or moving onto college. So I know that our "Christian Hope" is already a reality for many.

Thank you for your generosity and for keeping Hope alive at St Anthony's!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. Pat-".

Fr. Patrick McGuire