

# St. Anthony Indian Mission

P.O. Box 486

Zuni, New Mexico 87327-0486

Toll Free Phone: (866) 832-8816

Website: [www.stanthonyzuni.org](http://www.stanthonyzuni.org)

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From the desk of Fr. Patrick McGuire

Blessings of Peace from St. Anthony's. I have wanted to begin a newsletter with just such a greeting for a long time. Today as I wander through the School and find each grade hard at work in class, the cafeteria staff silently preparing food, and even the maintenance men (while pulling apart some of the roof) humming quietly to themselves, there is an air of tranquility that I wish everyone in the world could share. In fact the only noise on campus is from the gym where the third grade is playing a raucous game of basketball under the supervision of Mr Joe. Some of the younger students actually refer to him as "Uncle Joe." (That was an endearing title used by the children in the Ghana refugee camp where Joe spent the last eight years nursing the disabled. Somehow it has managed to cross the continents!)

It is always good to clear one's conscience. So I confess that I am writing to you in advance of my going on leave. It is six years since I have been with my family and a window of opportunity opened recently when a priest from Nebraska generously offered to cover the four churches that I look after. Consequently, I will be out of Zuni for almost three weeks during September. The most difficult part of going on leave is admitting to myself that Sr. Marsha and the staff can manage the School without me. But they most certainly can. Confession duly made!

In the classrooms teachers are still assessing the needs of individuals to bring them up to grade -- a direct consequence of distance learning. In September our Title 1 classes resumed. This program has proved to be an amazing asset for our students. In pre-covid days (under Ms. Angel's careful guidance) we saw many students graduate out of the Title 1 program to take their graded places alongside their fellow students. Now, however, there are a few new students who are quite far below their grade levels. Several of our teachers have volunteered to help these students with after-school instruction. With this two pronged strategy it is heartening to see the students rapidly gaining ground and fulfilling one of St. Anthony's primary goals: to nurture in students a lifelong love of learning.

Sometimes we create exercises for the students that focus on character building. One week (in conjunction with the All School Mass) I gave each of the upper grades an envelope containing several different items -- ranging from dollar bills to a Harley Davidson token to a beautiful crucifix on a chain. The students were supposed to break up into groups



and determine what it was about each item that made it unique. Each of the contents had a unique element: even the two dollar bills had unique serial numbers.



Some things were obvious, while other items you had to examine more closely to see their value. The exercise was designed for students to learn to not judge "externals," but to find the goodness and value that the Lord puts into each individual. Academic progress aside, if St. Anthony's can instill lessons such as these, we will then enable students to become wonderful members of any society.

A few weeks ago, the Zuni Tribal Council conducted a ceremony to honor local veterans. Our maintenance assistant, Matthew, asked to be excused from work for an hour and came back with a plaque that he received at this ceremony. Matthew, a very unassuming young man, was seriously injured in Afghanistan. We now have two veterans on the staff of St. Anthony's, and it is wonderful how

they pass on their unique appreciation for our country and our flag to our students.

Our evening rush hour (which runs about 20 minutes) is still a concern. Without the school bus operating, parents need to pick up the students individually. Each afternoon there is a long line of cars entering the parking lot, collecting their passengers and then exiting the lot. The parking lot was never designed for such a large influx of traffic at one time. Consequently, teachers and staff are "eagle-eyed" in watching the movement of the students and making sure everyone stays safe. We've been quite blessed that everyone is patient and considerate and the traffic flows well. But I long for the restoration of our school bus schedule which would reduce the flow of traffic by at least half. Covid still lurks, and although we are currently in a good position in the Pueblo, we remain cautious and alert.



I began by speaking of the tranquil atmosphere within the School. It is certainly the case. However there is a sense of excitement and simple joy among the students as well. Keeping with our protocols, I personally maintain a safe distance, but over the lunch hour I enjoy chatting with the kids through masks. The school entrance to the cafeteria is narrow, and so we had to create a "passing zone" where students could wait to enter. I was caught in the line there and waited with the students. Everyone wanted a "high five" or a bump of elbows or fists. No one (including teachers) would pass me without it. What a joy it is to find children safe, happy, and content, experiencing the zest for life that is the right of every child.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment and generosity in making all of this possible at our humble School.

Sincerely,

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

Fr. Patrick McGuire