

# St. Anthony Indian Mission

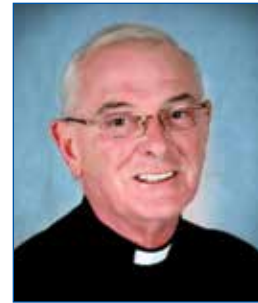
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February 2022



From the desk of Fr. Patrick McGuire

Warm greetings from Zuni where we transition between snow and ice and sunshine on a daily basis! It adds to the excitement of waking up to a new day with all the blessings that it will bring. Indeed, every day has its own form of blessing when we look back and consider the laughter of that day. Being surrounded with the vitality of so many young people there is never a shortage of mirth.

Our January ended with a visit to St. Anthony's by our Bishop, James Wall. He normally tries to make at least one visit every year, but of course with the Covid restrictions of the last two years his visits had to be canceled. In fact I was a little concerned when the chancellor of the diocese e-mailed me to let me know that he could not accompany the Bishop. The chancellor is a retired medical doctor and when Covid infiltrated his home he naturally went into isolation. Thankfully, Bishop Wall was not affected and his arrival had all the students excited and a little awestruck -- at least for a short time.

The Bishop celebrated the Wednesday "All School Mass". I must say that our Altar Servers were rather impressive in the dignity with which they served, while handling several unusual elements such as incense, miter and crozier. The students were enthralled as the Bishop spoke of prayer and worship in his homily. The students made intercessory prayers in English and Zuni, praying for the world and all the friends who make our School possible. Needless to say, our worship displayed its most touching expression as the kindergarteners mimed the hymn "Like a Sunflower" as a meditation after Holy Communion. Their hands were raised to the heavens in an exquisite prayer, and through my watery eyes I noticed several students in the congregation making the same gesture. Clearly the Holy Spirit was at work.



That sense of awe quickly disappeared as the Bishop and Sr. Marsha toured the classrooms and the cafeteria. The Bishop mentioned to the Kindergarteners how beautifully they had prayed and asked if they had practiced. One young lad piped up and said "of course we did -- twice." Laughter pervaded the cafeteria and all the Bishop could say was, "what characters"! Bishop Wall made a special point of thanking the teachers and all the staff for their dedication, hard work and care of the students.

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Shortly after the Bishop's visit we had Catholic Schools Week. In my last letter I mentioned that we had hoped to "live-stream" some of our activities. Sadly that was not possible. Because of an upsurge in the virus, we had to confine ourselves to classroom activities. However, that did not diminish the determination of all to mark the week as a time for rejoicing in our School identity. One item on our usual program that we all missed was

the annual student/faculty basketball game. The 8th graders were particularly disappointed at not being able to demonstrate their prowess. The faculty usually makes a decent showing for the occasion, but I suspect there was a sigh of relief from several of the teachers!

Another event that is sorely missed by St. Anthony's School -- and indeed the whole community -- is our monthly bingo. This has always been a fun event, well supported by the locals, and a good fund-raiser. But naturally we have been unable to hold it for almost two years now. I am regularly asked when it will start up again, and there is always disappointment when I say not just yet. I have even had requests that I call the numbers in my Scottish way (many enjoy my quips between numbers using distinctly Scottish expressions).



Although we are coping well with handling the latest manifestation of the virus, it still presents challenges. Everyone entering the premises is subject to a temperature check which is still a reliable indicator of possible infection. But of course it can take several days before symptoms manifest themselves. Through no fault of their own, some students pick up the virus, come to school, and later show symptoms. The result is that the whole class must go into isolation, including teachers.

We have had four such incidents this year. Thankfully there have been no serious consequences and all have returned safe and well. During their isolation, students receive study packages at home with the caveat that they will be tested on their return to school. Overall, the students have been diligent in keeping up with their work. The process does still cause disruption to the whole school. While there is little anxiety among the students, they do take their protocols seriously. As I have mentioned previously, the little ones make a game of it -- counting off the one foot square linoleum tiles on the floor to make sure they keep their proper distance from each other.

Teaching time is also reduced as we close school early, usually on Fridays. The intercom resounds with the message "please exit the buildings as fogging is commencing" and every inch of the buildings is disinfected and cleaned. Our custodial and maintenance people look like actors in a science fiction movie as they vest in respirators and protective clothing. We long for this to come to an end, but until it does we will do everything possible to keep St. Anthony's as a safe haven

Academically, we move forward at an alarming pace. Only three months remain of the school year. Recently, students were required to take regular online "star" testing. Just as they were due to start, local workmen accidentally cut through the internet cable in town. Students were naturally "disappointed" and even more so when they had to take the test the next day! This has been a quiet, normal month, yet one filled with unique moments that only young people can bring into being. Notwithstanding technical issues, fogging, the virus or fun times, lessons continue unabated and students grow in knowledge, spirit and joy day by day. Thank you for making the blessing of St. Anthony's possible.

Sincerely,

Fr. Patrick McGuire