

St. Anthony Indian Mission

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From the desk of Fr. Patrick McGuire

By the time this letter reaches you, 2024 will be well underway, but I think it is never too late to wish friends a Happy New Year. I pray that the year will be blessed for all of us.

Since my December letter was in the form of a Christmas card, I did not have the opportunity to report to you on our November centenary celebrations. (Incidentally, when our Christmas cards were packed and ready to mail, we noticed some of the previous year's cards on one of the desks. I apologize if you inadvertently received our 2022 card in 2023.)

As I shared with you in previous letters, preparations for the centenary had been continuing for several months. We held bake sales and bingos to offset the cost of hosting a grand celebration. Our students were outstanding in their fundraising efforts and sold a huge number of raffle tickets. I doubt anyone in Zuni got past our students without buying a ticket! (I confess to having personally offered the School a small bribe of \$20 to the person who made the most sales and a pizza party for the class with the highest average sales. Two classes achieved the same average sales to two decimal places, so naturally, we had two pizza parties. The girl with the highest individual sales received her \$20 bill in a lovely leather purse. The level of excitement stimulated was well worth the effort!)

By the time the day arrived, I was a nervous wreck overseeing everything at one time in the three separate locations for the event. Our faithful staff rose to the occasion wonderfully. People arrived in the church to find a 75-inch television in front of the altar which caused quite a stir.

The celebration began with the bishop, clergy and servers processing into the gym where a group of our students welcomed them with Zuni cultural dancing. This was televised to the church and the cafeteria. From the gym, dancers led the bishop into the church. (Meanwhile, the television screen miraculously disappeared from the altar.) There was a short pause outside the church as Noah, one of the lead dancers, quickly changed from Zuni traditional attire to that of an altar server. He skillfully organized that himself!



The students dressed in traditional Zuni apparel and read the lessons and intercessions beautifully. The school choir occupied the front seats in church, with the regular choir positioned in the loft. This choir was augmented by several visiting Sisters, all of whom provided uplifting modern music, with a symbolic "Angus Dei" as a nod to ancient tradition. In an inspiring homily,



the Bishop spoke about the Eucharist presence of Christ being present in the community since the 17th century and the blessings that this brings to all.

At the end of Mass, the dancers led the Bishop out of the church and celebrated with more traditional dancing. We have a group of Filipinos living in the town and they too entertained us with magnificent displays of dancing, the highlight of which was a dance in celebration of Santa Nino. This was especially appropriate since Santa Nino is revered in Zuni as well as in the Philippines.

We adjourned to the cafeteria for lunch where our centenary committee served approximately 350 delicious and plentiful meals to all present. During the meal, music and dancing continued to entertain our visitors.

Our Bishop drew the raffle tickets. Prizes of cash, loads of wood and gravel, as well as jewelry were awarded to lucky winners -- all of it donated. I was especially delighted when the star prize of a unique cross pendant, made in the tradition of the pueblos, was won by an 8th grader from St. Anthony's.

The celebration took place on a Sunday, which prevented many of the local clergy attending. However, our special guest was Fr. Dale Jamison ofm who found a backup priest for his parishes and was able to be present to the delight of our parishioners. Fr. Dale was pastor in Zuni for thirteen years and continues to serve the Navajo people in our diocese. I hope that I paid due honor to the Franciscan Friars and Sisters in my short address to the congregation and in the brief history of St. Anthony's that I put together for the occasion.

I did promise to give a report on the celebration, so I beg your forgiveness for devoting this month's letter to the task. I hope also that I have given a sense of the joy of our centenary celebration -- a celebration that I feel suitably marked a milestone in the Mission's history.



The Christmas vacation is over. The centenary is a memory and the students are back in school working at their studies and finding new ways of bringing smiles and laughter to all of us. Despite the snow and cold, basketball training is in full swing now in preparation for the season. To the young, each day has to be celebrated and tomorrow is another day to be enjoyed. I will happily tell you all about it in my next letter.

The centenary celebrated the past and its achievements. However, history is about people. St. Anthony's greatest pride lies in the lives of so many former students who have left us to build their lives, contribute to the benefit of their families and their people, and become outstanding citizens.

Thank you for making it all so wonderfully possible.

Sincerely,

Fr. Patrick McGuire