

St. Anthony Indian Mission

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From the desk of Fr. Patrick McGuire

Greetings once more from the high desert of New Mexico! Although "desert" seems somewhat inappropriate for a landscape covered in snow. In fact, it looks as if we might have a white Easter! Hail, rain or snow, St. Anthony's continues to offer the very best that it can to our wonderful young students.

I mentioned in my last newsletter that we were preparing for our Native American Day which took place during March. The constant drumming has stopped resounding across the campus now that the event is over, and strangely I miss the background rhythm while I work away.

Around 250 people turned out to watch our students celebrate their cultural heritage, among whom were several of our "senior" parishioners -- including Mrs. Odell Seoutewa at 92 years old. She never stopped smiling throughout the event. Ms. Odell is the widow of Alex Seoutewa who painted the famous murals in the Old Zuni Mission Church. Her presence was a delight for all of us. The broad consensus amongst the spectators was that the Day was exceptionally memorable.

Each grade from Kindergarten to 8th performed a traditional tribal dance. Each dance was filled with colorful "costumes" and with exceptional grace and precision. The students had rehearsed well and not one was seen to falter in their intricate dance steps. The final display was unique in that, after their own performances, the Buffalo and the Deer Dancers combined into a complex and beautifully executed single display. It was breathtaking to watch! Even while they were sitting the kindergarteners continued dancing.



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I mentioned in my last newsletter that one of our naturally smaller students danced rings around his six-foot-tall basketball competitors. That same student was chosen by his schoolmates to lead four of the dances. This was particularly challenging since most of his steps were danced backwards! But he never faltered. He is solid academically as well, and I have a strong feeling that he has a bright future in store. Of course I pray for a bright future for all our students and do everything I can to steer them in the right direction.

Our technology has also taken a few leaps forward at St. Anthony's. Last year's Native American Day was live-streamed from our gym but viewers had to endure something of a "stop and start" presentation, whereas this year's live-stream worked flawlessly. Another recent innovation is that we installed new interactive screens in all the classrooms. These are a wonderful aid to our teachers as they now have live internet connections. The teachers can use their own lesson presentations and even write on the screens. They are fun to use and engage the students at a deeper level. (I had to learn their use for the Confirmation Class which I teach. Teaching is not one of my stronger attributes, and I now have a deeper appreciation of what our faculty does!)

I don't want you to get the idea that we are "rolling in money" and lavishing it on "high-tech" upgrades. Far from it! In truth, the screens were donated to us. In fact we were given more than we needed and were able to pass on some of our good fortune (dare I say blessing) to one of the other smaller diocesan schools on a nearby reservation. Goodness from one source begets goodness for many.



On the academic side of things, classes continue as normal. Each class is industrious both in study and personal formation. I was chatting with a sixth grader about something, and at the end of the conversation he said: "that's just my opinion." It was a simple, light-hearted expression, but it made me appreciate that our students are learning to think independently, assess things and come to their own conclusions. Critical thinking is a major contribution to their academic as well as human growth.

Recently, I met up with a former student. He came to our School quite far behind in his studies. During his time with us he progressed rapidly before graduation, has continued to do well in high school and now has a scholarship for college in Albuquerque! Perhaps this is one answer to our prayers.

Parent/teacher conferences took place last week and I am delighted to say that I saw nothing but happy faces. Sr. Marsha, in her wisdom, tells the faculty to always stress the good in each student during these conferences and from there move on to where improvements can be made. Clearly, her strategy works. The students have settled in well with our new "Title One" teacher and are progressing slowly but surely. Remedial classes are smaller than usual this year which in itself is a good indicator of the students' and faculty achievements.



As to myself, I am preparing for Holy Week as I write. Lent has passed quickly as Fr. Innocent and I have been servicing our four parishes as well as the School. On one Sunday, the students took responsibility for the parish Mass, acting as readers, ushers and even as the choir. The parishioners were delighted and the kids enjoyed themselves. (I made sure there was an ample supply of cookies on hand for the coffee after Mass.) Each week I have sent back to the students the sealed envelopes in which they made their Lenten commitments. We finish for the Easter break with the students writing on a piece of paper how they can "help Jesus carry his cross" (a commitment to help others). We end the "All School Mass" in silence, take the papers outside and ritually burn them as an offering of the commitments. I think Lent has been a true blessing for our students.

It's now time to plan ahead for the next school year. The next few weeks are strange in that while planning for tomorrow, we have to celebrate today. The circle turns once more in the mystery of life. Thank you for making it all so wonderfully possible. May you and your family have a blessed and joyful Easter!

Sincerely,

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

Fr. Patrick McGuire