

St. Anthony Indian Mission

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From the desk of Fr. Patrick McGuire

Greetings once more from the High Desert, where chilly mornings give way to sweltering afternoons as Mother Nature changes to her autumn attire. Looking back over the last few weeks, I find the School, like Mother Nature, getting ready for the next phase of our annual routine.

But first let me share a particularly joyous report. Recently, the students completed a round of testing and exams, and we found that the students performed exceptionally well. Of real note were students who had difficulty in language arts, particularly reading. The test results show that they have advanced by leaps and bounds! Congratulations to both students and faculty for their amazing efforts. It is a joy to behold.

As the academic life of the School continues successfully, so do the sports and the social dimensions of our community. Always of interest are the cross country running efforts of the students. In our Zuni culture, running has always been a big part of people's lives. (I am sure there must be an anthropological/historical reason for this, but I will leave that to others to study.) I am content to see the smiles on young faces as they compete on the often harrowing courses. At the end of the school day, the runners gather in front of the gym waiting to begin their round of training. As only kids can do, they have turned those waiting moments into a source of laughter. When the school bus passes the budding athletes, spontaneously a great cheer goes up and hands wave goodbye to their fellow students heading home for the evening. The next hour or so finds light-footed students racing around the campus, competing with each other and exchanging friendly banter as they go. It is a simple moment that brings a smile to the faculty as they see their students enjoying simply being alive. I do believe it reflects the joy of our whole student body.



Another important event in school life has been the election of the student council. I dutifully listened as candidates made their speeches before the whole School prior to votes being cast. A few dubious election promises were made, but essentially the speeches revealed students' aspirations for the life within the School and promises to work towards those goals. One particular candidate made a deep impression on me. She ran for office last year, and during her speech a bad case of nerves overtook her and she could not finish her presentation. Showing great fortitude, she ran for office again this year and made an inspiring and articulate presentation! It was a moment of great satisfaction to see a student mature as a person. A "shout-out" of credit to her teachers and parents as well!

At St. Anthony's we take the role of student council very seriously, never more so than at their inauguration. This took place at the end of the "All School Mass", in a simple but moving ceremony. Sr. Marsha, the school principal,



called each of the elected to come forward and asked in turn, "Will you serve diligently the student body of St. Anthony Indian School as _____ to the best of your ability, answering God's call to service, love, honesty and integrity in the office of _____?" To which each replied simply, "I will." They each then went before the new President who held the school prayer candle, lighting a candle from this and returning to their place. They then received a promise of support from the whole faculty and together (with lighted candles) promised: "We, the student council of St. Anthony Indian School, with guidance from God and the supervision and support of our school community, pledge to model and uphold the values of our faith and standards of our school. We promise to lead the St. Anthony Indian School Community with respect for each other, respect for our environment, and respect for ourselves. We dedicate ourselves to inspiring others through our example of leadership, cooperation, integrity, courtesy and service."

In my pastoral role, I oversee this service, always with a prayer in my heart. I see the new council consider, reflect and take ownership of their promises. It is yet another moment of hope for the future and pride in what the whole School seeks to accomplish in the lives of our students.

Our annual Native American day will be celebrated earlier than usual this year because of time constraints in the spring. Ever since I served in Africa, my feet take on a life of their own whenever I hear the beat of tribal drums. As I write to you, my feet will not stop moving as the sound of drums echo across the campus while the students rehearse their dances in the gym. From Kindergarten upwards every student exercises extreme concentration to perfect the dance steps with true pride in their hearts.

This is a time of preparation, not just for students and faculty but for all the parents. Six scheduled work-nights have been set aside for parents and staff to gather in the cafeteria to prepare headdresses, traditional Zuni apparel and everything needed to facilitate their children's delight in their cultural heritage. It's also great fun! Pizzas appear miraculously as cries go up for pliers, wool, glue and a million other things. I noticed one parent measuring the head of a student while muttering something about how "said head" had grown since last year!

This is yet another moment of pride for me, as I watch the eager students work with their parents to prepare for another Native American day, a day that demonstrates the values (both Zuni and Christian) inspired by the School.

As I began, so I end. This is a time of preparation and transition both for nature and our students. It's a time of growth, development and joy for all of us at St. Anthony's. Thank you again for making it all so wonderfully possible.

Sincerely,

Fr. Patrick McGuire