

# St. Anthony Indian Mission

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From the desk of Fr. Patrick McGuire

As we approach Thanksgiving, winter is wrapping us in her soft white mantle, transforming our Pueblo into a wonderland of snow-flocked trees, the aromatic smoke of homely hearth fires and peals of laughter ringing out like bells from our young people. As my old bones cry out for heat, the kids want snowball fights and to teach me how to make snow angels! The inherent joy of young people never ceases to amaze me. May they be richly blessed.

The highlight of this last month was assuredly our Native American Day. As I have mentioned, all our students embraced the preparations with gusto. Every day the drums rang out through the campus and I noticed that even during breaks the youngest were demonstrating the intricate footsteps to each other.

On the special day, several hundred family members filled the school gym to watch the children dance in their ancient tradition. I was often distracted from the performances by watching the pride in the faces of parents. I believe that this year's program was better than ever! I noticed not one mistake as each grade danced with poise and elegance. Two young brothers who are particularly adept were chosen by their fellow students to be leaders in groups well beyond their years. They took part in four dances, at the end of which they were both ecstatic and exhausted.

But for me there was a particular moment of pride as one of the younger students took center stage. At eleven years old, he had been chosen as a "Zuni Prince" for this year. In full regalia, he took the microphone and addressed the assembly in fluent, flawless English and Zuni. He spoke of pride in his heritage and his School and gave thanks for the life and position that he had been given. The applause was rapturous and my pride was shared by every member of the faculty.



Native American Day soon gave way to Halloween. For days beforehand, cafeteria conversations were all about "who are you going as?" Because of the weather, the costume parade was held in the gym. (I realized my age when I didn't recognize some of the cartoon characters that were appearing. And I made doubly sure not to be chosen as a judge as you lose a lot of friends in that role!) It was also great fun listening to the little ones describe the roles and actions of their cartoon "heroes." As the children paraded before the judges, I gave out 110 bags

of candy that I had personally prepared the week before. Sr. Marsha asked me when I had time to do it, and I could only reply that some little things are really important. And without exception, every student said thank you. It's good to know we are instilling manners as well as morals!

On Halloween I had to go to one of the other churches for a vigil Mass for "All Saints Day." Just as I was about to leave, three "trick or treaters" arrived at the rectory door. I was a little late in leaving, but it was worth it to know that the students feel the Church is part of their ordinary community. Thankfully, I still had bags of candy on hand to give before they moved on to the convent to perform their songs.

On a personal note, you might guess that I enjoy talking with the students. They are generally very much at ease with me. At our all-School Masses I try to interact with the student body while maintaining a sense of reverence in our worship, to find ways of keeping the attention of such a wide age range of students. I don't know how I got the idea, but one week I used balloons flying high to demonstrate freedom in walking God's path and water filled balloons to represent life weighed down by inappropriate behavior. I got the desired reaction. This week I limited myself to questions and answers. After a 5th grader answered one of my questions correctly, a kindergartener stopped me and said, "I was about to say that." Honestly, those moments are precious.

I am aware that I am recounting the fun we have here at St. Anthony's. Alongside that, the academic rigor continues unabated. Parent/teacher conferences took place recently with good results. Every teacher prepared accurate and positive reports for their students, as well as indicating areas for improvement. Sr. Marsha has just completed her twice yearly observations of classes and post-observation conferences with the teachers. (The faculty all appreciate these conferences and use them to best advantage for the ongoing teaching practice.)

I am deeply saddened to report that Sr. Marsha will be leaving us at the end of 2024. She has been recalled by her religious order to return to California. Being a member of a religious order, I understand how difficult this is for her, but out of obedience she will move on. The Order gave us notice of this some time ago and we have been looking around for a new principal. Sr. Marsha has been with us for over eight years, has the respect and admiration of parents, faculty and the student body, and has moved our School forward in every way. The students recently learned of her departure; one of the 4th graders said to her, "Is it true? I am going to cry." As I write to you, the right person has not yet come forward. Our demands are high. We want someone skilled in education, faithful to our Catholicity, and loving and respectful of Native American culture. Please storm Heaven for us! Meanwhile Sr. Marsha and I are preparing plan B.

With Thanksgiving upon us, I want to give thanks for our wonderful kids and the joy they bring. I give thanks for our dedicated faculty and staff who give of their very hearts to our students. I give thanks for you and all our friends who make the wonder of St. Anthony's amazingly possible. May you be blessed in every way. With Thanksgiving --



Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Fr. Patrick McGuire

Fr. Patrick McGuire