

St. Anthony Indian Mission

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From the desk of Fr. Patrick McGuire

Greetings from all of us at St. Anthony's, with apologies for my tardiness in writing. Perhaps it is simply the effects of age, but 2025 seems to be passing more rapidly than ever. Or perhaps it just seems that way when so many things happen at the same time!

To catch you up with the news, I need to look back to our Christmas celebrations. We staged our annual Christmas program in the school gym, and as usual, there was a great turnout of families to watch the students perform the nativity play (our kids are natural actors!) and sing Christmas carols between scenes. Each year the program becomes more technically complex, with live-streaming cameras set up around the stage, microphone placements to avoid "feedback", lighting enhancements, and projections of the carol lyrics so that everyone can join in. This last item has become a well-loved attraction as we project traditional carols translated into the Zuni language. I have noticed smiles and even tears in the eyes of the older participants as they sing the hymns in their own language. "The best yet" comment from a parent made the effort all the more worthwhile.

Of course it would not have been Christmas without a visit from Santa. Every student received gifts of books, a small toy, and candy all presented by Father Christmas. The younger students were filled with excitement and even the older students -- trying to look "cool" -- could not help but remind us that they are still "kids". This year, I again managed to hide Santa's identity despite junior high students peeking into the office to catch a peek as Santa and his elves prepared for their entry. (Just between you and me, I enlisted the help of one of the parishioners from another parish, who delayed his overdue hair and beard trimming for the big event.)

One bittersweet occasion to start the new year was St. Anthony's farewell to our principal, Sr. Marsha. The students presented her with a beautiful Zuni shawl and pottery, which immediately became treasured possessions. Some of the younger students were in tears, and I confess that my own heart was in my mouth. Our faculty, along with several other school principals, shared a meal together in a final parting. Sr. Marsha has been well-loved within the community of local schools. Her final departure included a careful packing of her car, accompanied by cheery hugs and tears as she left the campus. I believe occasions like this reflect the familial nature of our life at St. Anthony's: we work hard to form our students in academics and holistic development but always with the sense of being a community that cares about each other first and foremost.



I confess that as St. Anthony's reopened in January, I was filled with trepidation. As pastor I have always been the person ultimately responsible

for the School, but now it also falls to me to take the lead in guiding the development of the students and faculty until a new principal can be given to us by the Lord. My first task was to meet with the faculty and staff to discuss how we should proceed. One of Sr. Marsha's gifts to us is the unity of purpose among the members of our faculty. I acknowledged my limitations at that first meeting and we laid out a plan to ensure the smooth running of St. Anthony's, and so far things are going well.



In January we staged a competition best described as "Zuni Christian Art". We asked the students to depict in painting how they viewed Christianity reflected in their own Zuni culture. We asked local members of the community to be the judges, including Mr. Ken Seowtewa, a renowned artist. They judged the entries both for content and artistic merit. We held an exhibition of the paintings which prompted much positive discussion, especially among the elders of the community.

Toward the end of January, we celebrated Catholic Schools Week with crazy hair day, dress-up and dress-down days, plus the ever popular student bingo and the faculty/student basketball game. We ended with the "miracles fair" in which students researched the saint of their choice and produced a short report on the person they had chosen and reflected on why it was meaningful for them. Once again our students excelled.

The educational routine of the students continues without interruption thanks to our industrious faculty. I meet all the students in the cafeteria for breakfast and at lunchtime. Truly, it's the highlight of my day! Currently there is a lot of discussion as little ones tell me of baby teeth falling out. (It is beginning almost to be another type of competition.) The day moves on to signing off on lesson plan books, and with bitterly cold weather to check on heating and potential leaks (we have had 3 so far). Then I look over job applications, sign checks, plan programs and take time to simply chat with staff and teachers. The day finally ends with driving some students home after school.



For all of us, the days are busy and filled to the brim. The students keep us on our toes but because they are so well behaved and courteous -- our interactions are always a joy. "Little things mean a lot", as they say. We accepted a new student for kindergarten, and after the first All School Mass he said he didn't like church because he had to sit still! After a few weeks, though, I notice that he now sits still and always has a smile.

In the near future, we would like to start a new venture of sending brief updates to our friends by e-mail, as well as continuing our monthly newsletter. If you would like to participate, please send us your e-mail address. As always, thank you for making St. Anthony's so wonderfully possible.

Sincerely,

Fr. Patrick McGuire