

St. Anthony Indian Mission

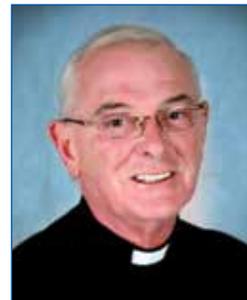
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From the desk of Fr. Patrick McGuire

Greetings once more from the Zuni Pueblo! With Easter falling early this year, the older students are already thinking about the end of the school year while the younger students are simply enjoying the moment. Our 8th graders are planning life beyond St. Anthony's. Their choice of high schools is critical for future careers, and because of limited local choices, there is strong competition for placements. It is heartwarming to know that several of the more sought-after schools gladly welcome students from St. Anthony's

The time for our 8th graders to travel to Notre Dame University on their "pilgrimage", as it is called, is drawing ever closer. The objective is to give the students an exposure to university life and explore the options open to them for further studies. In preparation for the trip, the students take part in several web conferences with graduates from the University who present the perspectives of indigenous students progressing in careers and celebrating their own unique cultures. These in themselves are great occasions of encouragement for our students.

The students, their parents, and our PTO have taken up the task of fund raising with gusto. Their latest endeavor was hosting a "Country & Western Dance" in the school gym. I joked that I now know what a grandfather feels like. Sitting on the sidelines, I watched our students thoroughly enjoy themselves while dancing their feet off. All were suitably dressed for the occasion, and my prized cowboy hats were dusted off and given to complete various ensembles.



I noticed some of the boys, in the most courteous way, approach the young ladies and ask if they wanted to dance. (After the dance, they abruptly went their separate ways. I noted that I must teach them the old-fashioned good manner of conducting their partners back to their seats.) It was a delight to watch.

I must once more acknowledge the dedication of our faculty. Mr. Bobelu (8th grade homeroom) was involved in every aspect of the event: meeting with parents beforehand, planning the activity, monitoring all the preparations and carefully watching over the students -- as well as managing a few turns on the dance floor himself. Other teachers, though not directly involved in the event, turned out to assist and enjoy being with the students in a social way. Our faculty truly view their careers as vocations as well as professions.

Our most important news to be shared is the arrival of our new school Principal, Mrs. Constance Torres. Mrs. Torres took up her new position on March 2nd much to my personal delight. A career teacher in bilingual studies, as well as having served as deputy principal in the Gallup area, she is well accustomed with the education of Native American students. She clearly understands the challenges that the students face, the difficulties of rural education, and the many ways of encouraging students in pursuing careers.



As you know, we have had a yearlong search for a principal to take over from Sr. Marsha. She and I have been interviewing applicants for this difficult position. It is difficult in the sense that we are located relatively far from urban areas, we are living in and must respect the traditional culture, and at the same time we are determined to maintain our Christian identity with the many blessings that we have to offer. Therefore, finding the right person has been a daunting task.

Yet strangely, if that is the correct expression, Mrs. Torres was waiting on the sidelines the whole time. I had met her several times, although only briefly. While living in Albuquerque, she regularly helped the Missionary Sisters of Charity in Gallup who work with me in ministering at one of the other parishes. During one event at the Chichiltah Church, she expressed an interest in the principal's position at St. Anthony's. I have to feel that the Lord had a hand in bringing us together, since the Good Lord is always looking after us and blessing us when we least expect it.

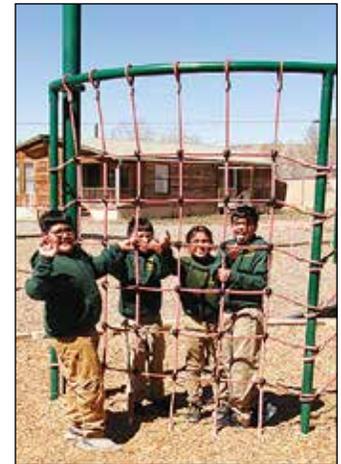
Settling into her new position, I see her delving into the Students' Handbook, getting to know the members of the faculty and students while acquainting herself with facets of our School that are relatively new to her, such as the government "Title 1" and cafeteria "Breakfast and Lunch" programs. On her second day on the job, we had a Title 1 meeting with the public school district federal programs officials. Talk about being dropped into the deep end!

We are still in a transitional stage as Mrs. Torres takes over and I let go of the reins. We regularly sit down to simply chat and ruminate about school life and get to know each other. While we in administration continue to sort out our new roles, the students continue with study and fun unabated. Nothing will dampen the students' laughter -- even curiosity about the new Principal. Even our folly of trying to grow grass is coming to fruition; we had our first mowing just the other day! Joys small and great every day.

In my near forty years as a priest, I have often been assigned daunting tasks in my ministry -- but perhaps this has been the most difficult of all. It is not so much a challenge in performing new tasks as being concerned that the students have the best opportunity to learn and build their young lives. Relieved to stand down, I am even more relieved that we have a real professional on board once again to guide us all forward for the future.

Looking back over these last months, despite times of anxiety and worry, there has always been a sense of joy in every day. If I have been weighed down at times, five minutes with the Kindergartners lifts my spirits and imagination in finding new ways to make them laugh. What a blessing our children are!

Onward to Easter and spring break. Thank you for making it all so wonderfully possible!



Sincerely,

Fr. Patrick McGuire