

COURAGE

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The media highlights many stories honoring the heroic actions of ordinary people who step forward to help others in ways that totally blow our minds. We wonder how the young and old alike are blessed with the wisdom, strength and courage to do what is needed exactly at the right time. In stepping forward and away from the crowd they risk many things, and sometimes even life itself, to save others. While many run away from danger, there are those among us who march directly toward it.

Possessing courage is not something of which we would boast. Courage seems to appear when it is needed the most and often times in and through persons whom we would least expect. Courage is defined as "mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear or difficulty." When we hear or read about the bravery of others, we immediately feel pride in humanity, and, at the same time, a sense of longing for the gift of courage for ourselves. Courageous acts benefit all of us as the bold steps of others propel each of us to move a step forward, if even only a baby step.

In our shared ministry through Protecting God's Children® (PGC), I am sure that countless numbers of stories could be told about the courage we all witness. I think about the courage it takes for victims to step forward embarking on the road to surviving and thriving. One of the greatest blessings from my VIRTUS® ministry is to hear from victim/survivors whom I have encountered along the way. I love to hear from them and learn of their journeys and how they act courageously as they strive forward toward healing. The folks I hear from never mention the word courage and you do not hear them describing their actions as courageous, but they certainly are. Speaking up and out and naming the inequality in our institutions, structures and community environments paves the way for those whose voices cannot be heard. Because of them programs have begun, support groups have been offered, healing and forgiveness services are held and people find a language to put words and meaning to their shame and discomfort.

When victims come forward in the PGC awareness sessions and share their stories, they act with great courage. People who hear their testimony find their own courage and begin to locate a beginning point for healing in their own story. They learn that they are not alone and hope surfaces in a vibrant way. When a victim/survivor/thriver shares their truth, a deeper level of communication becomes immediately available to those listening, and people feel free to share on a level that leads to burdens being shared and lightened. When fears are expressed and heard, they dissolve into a shared, less threatening emotion, which allows people to feel comfortable in the darkness, and more readily available to follow the voices they hear into the light.

Courage comes, too, in the many persons who have come forward to present the program as facilitators. It takes much courage to go into a room filled with people who have many raw feelings about the subject of child sex abuse and how the Church is handling the situation. They bravely face the unknown because they believe in the greater cause of prevention and healing.

There are those, too, behind the scenes, who work as Coordinators for arch/diocesan safe environment programs and who serve as Victims Assistance Advocates. They consistently

stand up and speak for others who are not heard. They remind those who make decisions of the importance in going the extra mile in the areas of prevention and healing.

We are blessed to be among so many courageous folk who sacrifice much for the sake of others. The wondrous things they accomplish for the Church benefit us in ways largely untold, and we are all the better for their courage. We know that they have scars to prove their many battles and are grateful for the work they do on our behalf. May our thoughts turn to them with full gratitude and in blessing for all that they have done and continue to do for us in the name of God who loves each of us tremendously. May He watch and guide their every step.

Brought to you through the National Catholic Risk Retention Group, Inc. and its VIRTUS® programs with the goal to help prevent, address, and mitigate wrongdoing in the community of faith and to help adults become protectors of children and to help communities become safe havens for children.