

We Are Chosen! We are Blessed!

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“Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature.” —Mark 16:15

With fond memories of Pope Francis’ wonderful visit to the United States, we recall here the inspiring words of his homily at the vespers service at Saint Patrick Cathedral, New York, “There is a cause for rejoicing here ...” although “... you may for a time have to suffer the distress of many trials.” (1 Peter 1:6) These words of the Apostle remind us of something essential. Our vocation is to be lived in joy. Pope Francis continued, “Remembrance of the amazement which our encounter with Jesus Christ awakens in our hearts. To seek the grace of remembrance so as to grow in the spirit of gratitude. Perhaps we need to ask ourselves: are we good at counting our blessings?”

Our work these past 13 years to educate, inform and prevent child and vulnerable adult sexual abuse has been blessed. We know of these blessings through the countless stories of healing we have heard from those on the front lines. We have listened to the pain, and shared in the suffering of many victims who have come forth in hopes of healing. We stand in solidarity through prayer and perseverance with those whose voices have been silenced and are unable to come forward. They know we are there with them.

We are present in many arch/dioceses spreading the good news of our prevention programs near and far. We have trained thousands of facilitators from the pews of each of these arch/dioceses to go forth and bring our prevention programs to every church, school, hospital, orphanage, nursing home, hospice, rectory, monastery, friary, convent, soup kitchen, and into the hands of thousands of Catholic Charities outreach workers throughout the country.

We have educated children, teens and adults through our children’s programs in schools and religious education programs. We have sat with and listened to the anger, despair and outrage of hundreds of people who have been affected by this horror show and nightmare. We have been cursed at, called names, challenged, derided and demeaned. The arrows aimed at us have flown by day, and darkness covered many of our nights. Yet nothing has stopped us from perfecting the effectiveness our program. We have clung to it with fervor, and although many have politicized our work, message and effectiveness, we are not deterred. Why? Because we feel called and missioned to do so. We, as coordinators, directors, facilitators, volunteers, employees and administrators have answered this call with joy and great energy and commit ourselves to its mission to protect and heal. We count this entire blessing.

We are encouraged greatly by our leader Pope Francis who reminds us to count our blessings. He propels us forward with his words of support and affirmation and reminds us that when we are challenged, we need to keep our focus and move forward. Pope Francis stated, “We can get caught up measuring the value of our apostolic works by the standards of efficiency, good management and outward success which govern the business world. Not that these things are unimportant! We have been entrusted with a great responsibility, and God’s people rightly expect accountability from us. But the true worth of our apostolate is measured by the value it has in God’s eyes. To see and evaluate things from God’s perspective calls for constant conversion in the first days and years of our vocation and, need I say, great humility. The cross shows us a different way of measuring success. Ours is to plant the seeds: God sees to the fruits of our labors.”

Many have affirmed us; many encourage us and support us; many pray for us and for the success of our work. We hear many challenge us and say we are not doing enough, that we are dishonest and that they will never let us forget the horrible tragedies that have occurred. We count all as blessings. We know that we have not done enough, and that is why we continue in

our work. We listen and we develop new programs and evaluate and improve the existing programs. We listen to victims and respond to their needs, and we support those who serve and assist them, and we respond as best we can. We know our program is but a mere stepping-stone and a paradigm for empowerment and healing to take place. We honor and respect that.

We take great comfort in the presence of our Holy Father Francis and in his words of encouragement to the workers in the vineyard, which we take for ourselves, "I know that many of you are in the front lines in meeting the challenges of adapting to an evolving pastoral landscape. Whatever difficulties and trials you face, I ask you, like Saint Peter, to be at peace and to respond to them as Christ did: he thanked the Father, took up his cross and looked forward!"

We have been chosen for this ministry, and we recall our blessings no matter the cost. We count it all joy and blessing. We stand together to meet the needs of all of God's Children with joy in our hearts and on our lips. Thank you for all you do, for all you are and for all you bring to the great table of our shared blessings and gifts.

Thank you Pope Francis for all that you do for us and for the ways in which you show us God's love. Thank you for making us proud to be who we are in the fullness of our history and in the present day in which we work. Thank you for reminding us to count our blessings and to be joyful. Thank you for leading us to Hope and Mercy and for teaching us not to be afraid. We heed well your words, and promise to follow your example, "Let us commend to Our Lady the work we have been entrusted to do; let us join her in thanking God for the great things he has done, and for the great things he will continue to do in us and in those whom we have the privilege to serve." And we all say Amen!

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.