

## **Mosaic -- The Interfaith Newspaper of Houston**

### **Bridges to Life**

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By ERIC A.T. DIECKMAN / Mosaic

It started in 1993, and the murder of a woman named Marilyn Sage Meagher. Her brother, John, lived the pain and rage of that event for years. But in 1998 he built a bridge out of that place, and launched Bridges to Life.

Bridges To Life brings together victims and inmates - face to face - to help the inmates understand how crime affects others and empower what they call the "victim-volunteers." The victims are never paired with the people who committed crimes against them. The 12-week sessions also seek to reduce crime in the state of Texas by reducing the rate of repeat offenses. By hosting face-to-face sessions, it's hoped both victim and criminal receive transformational ministry.

Lay and chaplain facilitators preside over and moderate the meetings and while there is an element of spirituality, there is no proselytizing. The victims tell the story of how they were violated. The program, emphasizing empathy, crime, responsibility, accountability, confession, repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and restitution, does not allow lecturing or preaching to the inmates. Rather, the meetings focus on self-disclosure, tough questions, and listening. Listening is key to the success of the program, especially for the inmates. For many, the chance to hear, firsthand, the effects of their wrath on individuals is foreign.

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice says Bridges To Life is working. Inmates who have participated in Bridges To Life have significantly lower rates of repeat offenses. The success is strong enough that the program has been invited to branch out to numerous other prisons within the state.

For more information on Bridges To Life, call John Sage at 713.463.7200 or e-mail him at JSage1@aol.com.