

# Honoring John Sage: Transforming Lives Through Bridges to Life

*The Vincentian Charism Award was established by the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth on November 11, 2018, as the SCL Community celebrated its 160th anniversary of the pioneer Sisters' arrival in Leavenworth and as the Vincentian charism marked the beginning of its fifth century. The award is named after SCL patron, St. Vincent de Paul, a 17th-century French priest known for his charity and compassion towards the poor, and honors individuals who embody St. Vincent's charism and spirit, demonstrate a sustained commitment to gentle and humble service to the poor, and inspire and influence others toward service.*



**John Sage, founder and CEO of Bridges to Life, has been named the 2024 recipient of the Vincentian Charism Award as he transforms lives through a faith-based prison ministry program.**

## Catholic Upbringing

John's commitment to service is deeply rooted in his upbringing. He received a Catholic education from grades 1-12. In a 2019 interview, John reflected on this time by saying, "The daily presence of priests and nuns showed me the merits of service to others. I was taught and loved by people outside of my family unit who had no direct responsibility or gain by helping me. What a blessing it was to have this ingrained in my young heart during my formative years." This early influence instilled in him a core belief in the importance of service, guiding him throughout his life.

After he graduated from St. Thomas High School in Houston, John attended Louisiana State University,

earning a B.S. in finance and a master's degree in business administration. Before founding Bridges to Life in 1998, John's professional career was in real estate and finance. John has been married to his high school sweetheart, Frances, for over 50 years. Together, they have two sons and four grandchildren.

## The Journey from Tragedy to Healing

John's life took a tragic turn in 1993 when he lost his sister, Marilyn, to a violent act of crime. This profound loss left him grappling with trauma, rage, and grief for the next five years. During this challenging period, John's spiritual search led him to participate in a pilot prison program called Sycamore Tree, where crime victims shared their stories with inmates. This experience profoundly changed him, enhancing his healing and positively impacting the inmates participating in the program.

Inspired by the empathy, healing, and transformation he observed, and because of his strong faith and dedication to service, John developed Bridges to Life. This Texas-based organization has significantly impacted communities in numerous states and foreign countries.



John Sage, second from left in back row, is pictured with Bridges to Life's 50,000th graduate.

“We try to instill hope, and we want the offenders to admit their guilt. But we want them to understand this: ‘You have made mistakes. But you are not a mistake.’”

— John Sage – Purpose Prize Fellow 2011, Cogenerate.org

## Bridges to Life

Bridges to Life is based on the principles of restorative justice. It aims to connect communities to prisons to reduce recidivism, especially for violent crimes, decrease the number of crime victims, and enhance public safety. Bridges to Life’s spiritual mission is to minister to victims and offenders, demonstrating the transformative power of God’s love and forgiveness.



## “Saint Vincent Would Admire John”

John’s dedication to restorative justice has transformed the lives of over 84,000 offenders and inspired thousands of volunteers. His efforts have resulted in a remarkable reduction in recidivism, demonstrating the effectiveness of his approach in promoting genuine rehabilitation and societal reintegration. The program’s success in operating across multiple states and countries further underscores John’s influence and the far-reaching benefits of his vision.

In addition to his professional accomplishments, John’s life illuminates the Vincentian values of humility, compassion, and service to the poor. His strong faith and commitment to helping others have been a guiding force throughout his journey, making a tangible difference in the lives of countless individuals. For these reasons, John Sage epitomizes the ideals of the Vincentian Charism Award, making him a genuinely deserving honoree.

In nominating John for this award, Rolly Dessert, SCLA, wrote, “Saint Vincent de Paul would admire John for his work of mercy for those incarcerated in prisons in the U.S. and abroad. John, an All-American athlete and successful businessman, clearly saw, through a family tragedy, that he was in a prison of his own and he needed to be healed of the grief, trauma, and anger.”

John will be formally honored by the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth at the Mother House on September 27, the Feast of St. Vincent de Paul. 🕊️

To find out more about Bridges to Life, visit [www.bridgestolife.org](http://www.bridgestolife.org) or scan here:



## Program Impact:

- **Recidivism Reduction:** Over 86% of Bridges to Life’s graduates do not return to prison within three years of release, which shows the program’s effectiveness in reducing repeat offenses.
- **Empathy and Responsibility:** Offenders develop empathy for crime victims, which leads them to take responsibility for their actions and reduces their likelihood of returning to crime.
- **Community Safety:** As fewer offenders return to crime, crime rates decrease, making communities safer.
- **Volunteer Fulfillment:** Bridges to Life volunteers report higher levels of fulfillment, forgiveness, and hope after participating in the program.

## Scope and Reach:

- Since 1998, Bridges to Life has operated in over 200 prisons across 17 states and seven countries.
- Over 84,000 graduates have completed the program with the support of 3,600 volunteers.
- In 2024, Bridges to Life anticipates completing 270 projects in more than 110 prisons and alternative facilities, graduating 7,700 participants with the help of over 750 volunteers.