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CEC NEWS

Bridges of America: Effective Help for Substance Abuse Victims



Fr. Charles Brown

“Just for something different, I’ll be a drug addict today—maybe go to prison.”
Sound like fun?

Of course not. Addiction happens over time, not in a day. It drags a person into crime, disease, and lost relationships like an ocean undertow drags a swimmer from the shore. No one caught in an undertow gets free without expert, sustained help; and the same is true of those in the bondage of substance abuse.

Enter Bridges of America, a longstanding substance abuse program anointed by the Holy Spirit that is under the auspices of the Charismatic Episcopal Church.

Bridges of America was started in 1976 by the late CEC Bishop Frank Costantino. In the early 1970s, he was just Frank Costantino, an armed robber serving time in Florida’s Belle Glade Prison. He gave his life to Jesus while still an inmate and began a life of repentance. Once out of prison, he began to help other prisoners, most of whom were substance abusers. He knew that his clients needed, not a boost, but a bridge from their old way of life to a new one, hence the ministry’s name. It grew into a program of residential and nonresidential substance abuse services for both men and women.

Meanwhile, in July of 1978, a young seminarian and substance abuse counselor named Craig Bates sat alone in his New York City apartment. Devastated by personal troubles, he unthinkingly turned on his television. The 700 Club came on. Speaking was Frank Costantino. The Holy Spirit reached now-Patriarch Bates through Costantino’s testimony and he received Christ into his heart. In the power of his new relationship with Jesus, the 28-year-old progressed to ordination and life ministry. He also contacted Frank Costantino, who became a spiritual mentor.

Bridges kept growing, aided by a contractual relationship with the Florida Department of Corrections. As the Web site www.bridgesofamerica.com puts it: “There has been a sound, mutually-rewarding working relationship between the Bridge rehabilitation programs and the Florida Department of Corrections since 1976. During the long tenure of this partnership, the Bridges (at ten locations throughout Florida) have embraced the strict guidelines and

regulations of the Florida Department of Corrections. They have, in fact, passed every inspection and fulfilled every contract for client services.” Bridges has helped about two hundred thousand people find the treatment options that transform their lives.

ENTER THE CHARISMATIC EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The emergence of the CEC fulfilled a Bridges need. As explained by the Vice President of Programs, Father Charles Brown, a former Bridges inmate on staff since 1983: “We [the Bridges directors] started having conversations with the CEC in the 1990s. . . . We had been independently ordained, but coming under the CEC legitimized the whole ministry. Frank Costantino became a bishop and we became deacons and priests. Now we are part of something bigger.

“The attraction of the CEC was the three-streams worship. We had always been committed to that anyway and didn’t know the CEC was already doing it.”

Father Charles continues, “Frank became the Bishop of the Society of Saint Dismas. Traditionally, Dismas was the thief on the cross who repented and went home with Jesus. We at Bridges consider him a convicted felon that can identify with the people we work with. . . . We equip those people with the necessary tools so they can reintegrate into society.”

Fr. Charles created the curriculum and syllabus to maintain the integrity of the Bridges programs. Following the Bridges model, similar programs have started in other countries. Fulfilling Archbishop Bates’s dream to continue Bp. Costantino’s work, three successful Bridges houses have opened in New York State under the direction of Fr. Brett Crompton, a staff member of the Pro-Cathedral Church of the Intercessor.

Bridges does not require its clients to become Christians, but the ministry operates on specifically Christian principles. The opportunity to receive Jesus is made available and many clients take it. Says Fr. Charles, “We have people at the top who are committed Christians and we see the Holy Spirit’s anointing flow out through the programs. We have a chaplaincy support service that is in constant prayer for each of the Bridges, plus volunteers doing hands-on ministry.”

Statistically, says Fr. Charles, “Every inmate we treat impacts 7.2 family members directly or indirectly.” If two hundred thousand people have been helped directly by Bridges, then 1.44 million family members have been helped, too. May God’s blessings on this outstanding ministry continue.

For more information about Bridges of America please visit their [website](#).