

# Death row prisoner gains new perspective on life

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As a member of the violent Hermanos de Pistolerros Latinos gang, Miguel Angel Paredes viewed life lightly and death as the cost of doing business. As a Christian, Paredes—who faces execution Oct. 28 for a triple murder 14 years ago—sees life and death differently.



Miguel Angel Paredes faces execution Oct. 28 for a triple-murder 14 years ago, but he wants to use the time he has left to tell others about the peace he has found in Jesus Christ. (PHOTO/Ken Camp) In the past, he considered death a matter-of-fact likely consequence of criminal activity, looking only at the people directly involved. Now, his focus has shifted to the larger circle of people affected.

“We all have family,” he said. “I know my victims had family who loved them. If I could, I would take all their pain to myself.”

That attitude contrasts sharply with the way Paredes considered others before he accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

“Before, I used to be selfish and indifferent to people. It was all about what you could do for me,” he said.

### **One of 20 children**

Paredes was born in Chicago to Mexican immigrant parents who had 20 children. Seven died before he was born, and he knows little about them. He, his parents and the remaining seven brothers and five sisters eventually ended up in a crowded apartment on San Antonio’s West Side, across the street from a low-income housing project.

“When you got up in the night to go to the bathroom, you had to look to make sure you didn’t step on somebody,” he said.

At first, Paredes’ parents and his older brother, Jorge, tried to shield him from the drugs, sex and violence that plagued the nearby housing projects. But by age 12, he already was “fighting a lot” and “hanging around with kids who were related to gang members.”



Miguel Angel Paredes

in held in the Allan B. Polunsky Unit in West Livingston. By age 15, he had a pregnant girlfriend and a record as a juvenile offender—first for criminal mischief and then for violating his probation by carrying a weapon.

After serving time in a Texas Youth Commission facility, he worked in a tire

shop and tried to provide financially for his infant son, Miguel Angel Jr. But when his relationship with his son's mother soured and she denied him access to his child, he lost the will to live.

"I was suicidal—looking for death," he said. "I wanted to numb the pain I was feeling."

First, he joined a neighborhood street gang. Later, after he came into contact with ex-offenders who had been initiated into the Pistoleros prison gang, he was admitted into their ranks before he turned 17.

### **Gang love and loyalty was a 'hoax'**

"I thought I had found the things I wanted—love and loyalty. Those are really the only things gangs had to offer. But it's just a hoax, not reality," he said.

In 2000, he and two associates, John Anthony Saenz and Greg Alvarado, shot and killed three people in San Antonio—Adrian Torres, Nelly Bravo and Shawn Michael Caine. Saenz went to Torres' house to carry out a drug-related transaction, and Paredes insisted he accompanied him to "back up" his friend in case of an ambush.



Miguel Angel Paredes created this pencil drawing of Jesus' crucifixion. On Oct. 28, he faces his own execution. After the shooting, Paredes, Saenz and Alvarado took their victims' bodies to Frio County, where they wrapped them in carpet and set them on fire.

Alvarado is serving a life sentence at the Robertson Unit near Abilene. Saenz is serving three concurrent life sentences at the Ramsey Unit at Rosharon. Paredes was convicted of capital murder and is incarcerated at the Polunsky Unit outside Livingston, awaiting execution.

Paredes rationalized his involvement in the killing by pointing to Torres' alleged involvement with the Mexican Mafia. According to his "crazy mentality," he said, people involved in criminal activity should understand the risks.

For most of his time on death row, Paredes possessed the same quick temper and disregard for life that characterized his life before imprisonment. But a few years ago, he began "silently seeking" God.

“I started asking God to take away the pain and show me the truth,” he said.

During Advent 2011, he read the entire New Testament.

### **No more second guessing**

“Little by little, it gripped me. God loved me a lot,” he said. “There was no more second guessing. I understand now who is my Savior and my Lord. I have been completely different since then.”

[Dorothy Ruelas](#), a prison ministry volunteer from Sugar



Dorothy RuelasCreek Baptist Church in Sugar Land, began correspondence with Paredes soon after he completed reading the New Testament.

“He told me he knew God had sent me to him exactly at this time in his life, so he could continue his spiritual walk,” she said.

Ruelas encouraged him to share his newfound faith with other people—including other prisoners on death row.

“His testimony on Death Row is very powerful, because the other inmates who have known him for many years see the changes in his life—changes they never believed could happen to someone like Miguel Angel,” she said.

Paredes considers it “a great day” when he can offer encouragement and a Christian witness to other inmates.

“You have to be ready for whatever God brings your way,” he said.

Other inmates who knew Paredes before he became a Christian recognize his actions match his profession, Ruelas added.

### **Sharing his faith**

“Miguel Angel has strived to set an example to all in living, serving and loving them the way Christ would do it. He has reached out and shown love and witnessed to those who are not well-liked on death row,” she said.

Paredes also has shared his faith with every family member who has written to him or visited him, he noted. He has assured them all he is ready to meet God on his execution day, and he accepts his death sentence as the consequence of his actions.

“I don’t have a yearning for the earth any more,” he said.

However, he dreads the grief his execution will cause friends like Ruelas, who plans to be present as a witness, and his family—particularly his teenaged son.

“I wish somebody would tell that story,” he said. “I wish everybody could see who is really being hurt—to see the forgotten people.”