

Personal Best

A CLOSE-UP LOOK AT PEOPLE WHO MATTER

He Traded the Casting Call for Higher Calling

By ED BOND
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Tim Page was handcuffed, on his knees, answering the questions of some doubting police officers.

The police were searching for cocaine rocks, wondering why this youthful looking 36-year-old was on the corner of Nordhoff Street and Sepulveda Boulevard in North Hills so late at night, with these drug dealers. He explained he was head of a street ministry program.

"Well, you shouldn't be out here," a police officer said. "It's a bad neighborhood."

"It is a bad neighborhood," Page answered. "And that's why I'm out here."

When Page moved from a Michigan suburb



Timothy J. Page, Founder

to California 11 years ago, he was focused only on becoming an actor, not trying to save the kids that most of society has already written off. But, God had other plans, he said.

After hopes for an acting career fell apart, Page for the past six years has headed a street ministry program—mostly single-handedly—reaching out to at-risk youths, gang members, drug dealers, juvenile hall residents and ex-convicts. At first called Total Involvement Ministry—TIM—the name has been changed to Answering the Call.



Tim Page, minister

Personal Best

'He just goes out there and does it personally, one-on-one. That's the way Mother Teresa started in Calcutta...'

Chaplain Will McKinley, on Tim Page's street ministry program

'For I was in prison and you visited me.' Matt. 25:36

ANSWERING THE CALL:

"He has a very good rapport with the kids and is sincerely trying to help," said the senior chaplain at San Fernando Valley Juvenile Hall, where Page volunteers with a reading program. "He's very energetic and very peppy and I think just what the kids need. . . . I think he's just a big kid himself."

Each morning before attending Mass, Page parks his car near Our Lady of Peace Church at Nordhoff and Langdon Avenue near the San Diego Freeway. There, he props opens his hatchback with a sign that reads "Try God," and hands out cookies and M&Ms to schoolchildren.

Across the street, drug dealers are dispensing a very different product. Page said he has seen taxi drivers, well-dressed businesswomen, even a telephone repairman pull over to make a buy. But remembering a Christian adage, "Hate the sin, but love the sinner," Page has instead worked to befriend the drug dealers.

"They have a faith," insisted Page, a Catholic, who hands out rosaries and religious material to anyone who asks.

He does not force religion on others, he said, just offers it when he sees an opening, and creates opportunities whenever he can.

He has made birthday cakes for some dealers and took one ex-convict gang member into his home for a while. He also has helped several find a way to pray, such as getting them to think of God as a "homeboy."

Page answers his phone with "God bless you," and, when asked how he is, answers, "I choose to be happy."

Page was offering the dealers some left-over food when the cops showed up. The police released him after he gave his explanation.

"Man, you should have seen yourself run," one of the dealers told him the next morning. "You were out of here."

Page said he wants to show dealers he is on their side, despite what they

do. He has seen them robbed. But they also have tested him. He said one time a dealer pointed a realistic-looking toy gun at him, calling him an undercover cop.

"No matter what kind of obstacle he faces, he perseveres," said Chaplain Will McKinley of the North County Correctional Facility, where Page has volunteered.

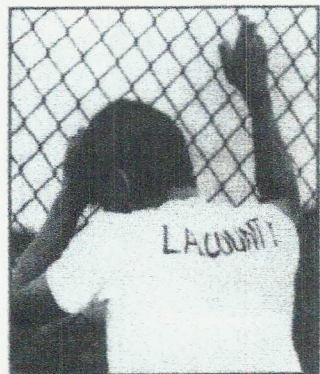
"Instead of looking to structural methods, he just goes out there and does it personally, one-on-one. That's the way Mother Teresa started in Calcutta, picking up babies out of the streets."

Those who want to help can reach Page at (818) 893-~~8888~~ 7059

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ANSWERING THE CALL:



'For I was in prison and you visited me.'

Matt. 25:36

Total Involvement Ministry, Inc.

is a non-profit, 501c3 corporation
dedicated to ministering to prisoners,
gangs, and at-risk youth.