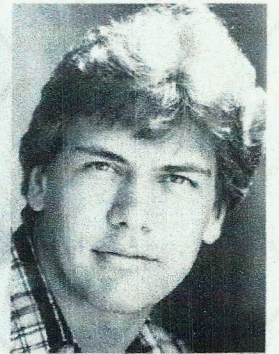


total involvement MINISTRY:

BY PATRICIA L. FRY

one man's MISSION



nearly every morning, 36-year-old Tim Page can be found standing in front of his church in North Hills, CA, ministering to the neighborhood children who pass by on their way to school.

Page set up shop when he learned that drug dealers were at work right in front of the church. According to Page, "Instead of sitting so piously in church praying for all that we need to pray for, I decided to take my rosary and my prayer book and sit on the brick wall outside our church.

"Kids would come by and say, 'can I have a rosary?' I always had a few extra ones so I'd say, 'Sure.' And it evolved from there. Now I take up ten feet of space along the wall and I put out rosaries or holy cards. I have a crucifix and a little sponge of

holy water, and sometimes I set out cookies or little candy treats. It's all free and the kids know it."

Page didn't always aspire to have his own ministry. In fact, in 1984 he left his childhood home in Michigan for sunny California in hopes of becoming an actor. But after successfully pursuing an acting career for almost two years, his opportunities seemed to dry up. As Page says, "God started closing doors." Confused, he asked God, "Why are you playing games with me? You opened the doors and now you're closing them. What do you want me to do?"

While waiting for an answer, Page continued to develop the relationship with God that he'd known all of his life. "I was brought up in the Catholic Church," says Page. "And I never left it. I've always tried to stay close to God." It was through his faith that he found the answer and the direction he was seeking.

First came a significant personal awareness. Page explains, "I suddenly realized that everything I was doing was to build my own self-esteem. It was so people would notice me and say, 'Oh, look at that young man in the suit, isn't he nice?'" According to Page, "That realization was a turning point as far as becoming more serious and wanting to do things for the right reasons."

The second part of the answer came when he attended a workshop called, "For I Was in Prison and You Visited Me." Says Page, "I don't remember having an interest in juvenile detention or prisons or anything like that, but I found myself in this workshop and I was touched by what I heard."

Page was so touched, in fact, that he volunteered right away to participate in a visitation program for kids in a detention center.

"I was going every Wednesday

and Sunday as part of the Archdiocesan prison volunteer program," says Page. "I noticed that the kids who had regular visits from their families always seemed more optimistic about their futures. I asked the officials to come and spend visiting days in the unit just being with the kids who don't get visits. And so I began spending 6-8 hours there every Saturday and Sunday.

"If the kids wanted to pray, we'd pray. If they wanted to talk, I would let them. If they wanted to listen, I would talk. If they wanted to play cards, we'd play cards!"

Page felt like he'd found his

high school, junior high and elementary classes. A lot of kids are 'wannabes.' Their brothers or uncles may have been involved in a gang and it is not uncommon that they may be headed in that same direction, so I talk to them about this."

Through T.I.M., Page is constantly looking for new ways to reach youth in crisis. According to Page, Jesus befriended prostitutes and tax collectors. He says, "Today these individuals are called gang members or prisoners and society often avoids them." Page believes these young people need more personal attention and he offers this

an interest is important."

Early in Page's ministry, someone suggested that he get involved in an after school weight-lifting program which was being sponsored by the probation department. According to Page, "I knew nothing about lifting weights." He was reluctant to get involved because, as he said, "Those guys are going to laugh at me."

He continues, "But I went. And I saw that these guys were hungering for something to do after school and they seemed to enjoy lifting weights." Page decided to become involved. He arranged for some instruction in the use of the equipment and then, as he said, "I let my acting skills take over."

There are a million stories on the streets and Page has many of his own to tell. For example, "A girl came by one morning and said, 'You gave a friend of mine a rosary a while back. The other day, he was shot five times and he may be paralyzed, but he believes that he's still alive because he had that rosary with him.'

"Kids will ask, 'Is it wrong for us to wear the rosary?' Jesus didn't answer questions so much 'yes' and 'no' as he did in parables and stories. And so I say to the kids, 'If you raked up all the leaves in your yard and I gave you a new Mercedes, and you took that car and put it on top of the leaves so they wouldn't blow away, is that wrong? The answer is not that it's wrong, because it's your car and you can do what you want with it, but if you really want to get the benefit from the car you drive it. That's what it's for.'

"It's the same thing with the rosary. It's not so much that it's wrong for you to wear the rosary, but it's better if you really get the true benefit of it by praying."

Page ministers to the homeless, too, and he urges people to look beyond their tattered clothing and acknowledge their presence. He, for example, greets a homeless person who is begging by saying, "My name is Tim, what's yours?" Then he might say, "Well, Tom, I never



Ashwin, Jimmy and Julio enjoy a beach trip sponsored by T.I.M.

niche and began to do this work full-time. For two years, he survived on donations, supplemented by his savings. When he was convinced that he could make it, he filed for a non-profit status and Total Involvement Ministry, Inc. (T.I.M.) became official.

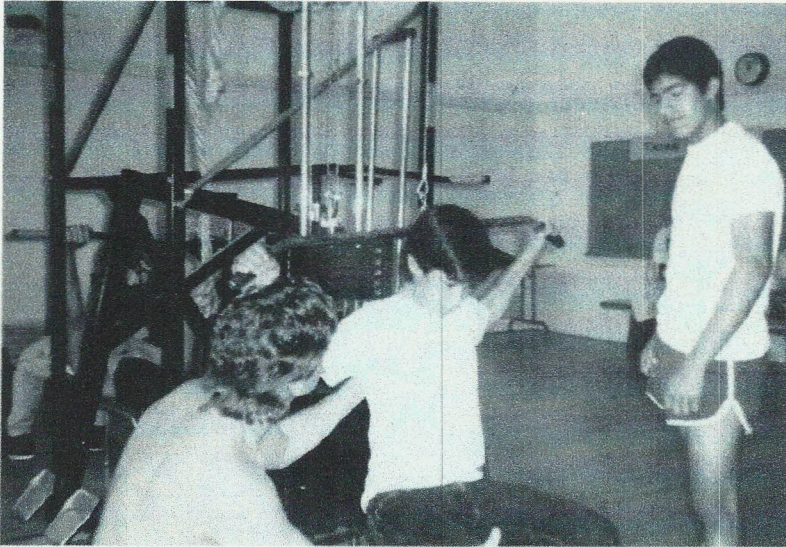
For the last six years Page has been ministering to at-risk youth, offering what he calls "dynamic prison and street ministry programs," including street counseling, sports activities, tutoring programs, outdoor adventures and prayer vigils.

Page's ministry today is primarily preventative. He says, "I talk to

through T.I.M. in the form of friendship and guidance.

"I work with anybody, regardless of whether they're a gang member or not. And I try to educate as many people as I can reach that these people are children of God. It's okay to hate negative actions, but let's not hate the individual.

Page tries always to express a personal interest in the kids. "It's key to get to know their names. When you do that, you're saying, 'You're important.' I say to the kids on the street, 'I'm glad to see you today, how was your weekend? Did you have any homework?' Showing



The after-school weight-lifting program was a great success. Tim is now looking for space to utilize a weight set recently donated for the Total Involvement Ministry.

give out money because unfortunately a lot of people abuse it, so let me give you this information phone

card." He says, "Even if they reject that, at least I know that I have not walked away; I've tried to reach

out to them."

Although T.I.M. offers some structure through tutoring programs and prison visitation, Page prefers to play each day by ear. He says, "I leave my day totally open to what God is going to put into my path."

And Page contemplates how he got where he is. "I can look back and see how God has always had my life planned. If God had said, 'I want you to go to California to work with gang members and maximum security prisoners, I would have said, 'Get out of here! No way! I could never do that.' So instead, God said, 'Okay, fine. Go to California to become a famous actor.' And so here I am working with gang members and prisoners." ♦

Patricia Fry is a freelance writer from Ojai, CA. Active in her community theater, she is also the mother of three daughters and has six grandchildren.

For more information, or to receive the T.I.M. newsletter, write: Total Involvement Ministry, P.O. Box 2061, Sepulveda, CA 91393-2061