

From Volunteer to
Insurance Salesman

Creative Living, Creative Planning

by Fr. Thomas
C. Widner, SJ

How far away does one have to be to become a donor to the Chicago Province?

Jeff Thielman left his home in Connecticut to study at Boston College. While there, he spent time as a volunteer in Appalachia. After graduation in 1985 he volunteered two years in Peru and returned to Boston to study law. Now he's made the works of the Chicago Province in Peru the beneficiary of a \$100,000 life insurance policy on himself. How did it all happen?

At Colegio Cristo Rey in Tacna, Peru, he taught religion, history and English. He also coached basketball, did special tutoring and was a home room teacher. But his volunteer work took a creative turn about April, 1986. "I met some of the street children who spend their days shining shoes, washing cars and selling newspapers," he said. "They go to school at night because there are not enough schools in Peru."

Jeff explained that schools there operate on three shifts. The first group goes to school from 7:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.; the second from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.; the third, the poorest children, go to school from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. "These are the children of Aymaran Indians," Jeff said, "migrants from the Peruvian interior. They are up at 5:30 a.m. Monday through Saturday doing what they can to help support their families."

"These children receive little attention in school as a result," Jeff explained. So he began a social service project with his own high school students helping. He invited the Indian children to play soccer at the high school. Soon high school parents were bringing sandwiches for them to eat. Jeff talked to businessmen in the city and one of them, the parent of a high school student, donated a small building that in September 1986 became the Center for the Working Child.

At first the Center was a soup kitchen. The street kids paid for their meal and the price was the cost of a shoe shine. Then Jeff offered games and arts and crafts and eventually a social worker was on hand to work with the mothers of the children. Recreation programs developed. Special tutoring began because these kids attended school sporadically.

The city of Tacna eventually donated two acres of land for the Center. But Jeff's time in Peru was winding down. He decided to stay for a third year to make certain the project kept growing. A permanent center began. This included an overnight shelter for homeless kids. From the beginning, however, the emphasis was to place them out of the shelter right away. Fr. John P. Foley, SJ, arrived in Tacna in 1987. He liked the Center and kept it going.

A street child looks for a place to sit down to eat his tray of food in the Center for the Working Child in Tacna, Peru.





Jeff Thielman was one of many Chicago Province donors honored by Fr. John Costello, SJ, and the Executive Development Board for his contributions to the works of the Jesuits.

Today the Center for the Working Child is a complex of classrooms, a medical post, bakery, clothing factory, laundry, nursery, carpentry shop and a staff of 15 or 16. About 150 children take advantage of its services. Their families participate as well. Reading and writing classes are offered to parents. Catechism programs have developed. The soup kitchen provides three meals per day. "The kids get a good education," Jeff said.

Jeff returned to the U.S. in February 1989. He now raises funds for the Center. He wrote a book, *Volunteer for the Poor in Peru* (Paulist Press, 1991) with Fr. Ray Schroth, SJ, a New York Province Jesuit, to publicize the center's work. Next he returned to school, obtained his law degree from Boston College in 1992, and passed the bar in Massachusetts and Connecticut.

He began practicing law but learned that "as a business, it wasn't the best business for me." Jeff is now a salesman for Northwestern Mutual in Somerville, Massachusetts. He sells life insurance, disability insurance and does estate planning through the sale of insurance products.

He donates to the Chicago Province because Peru is the Chicago Province mission. Jeff credits Chicago Province Jesuit Fathers John P. Foley and Jim Gartland with encouraging his work in Peru. So Jeff gave the province a tax-deductible life insurance policy worth \$100,000. He pays the premium. "When

I die, the Chicago Province will benefit," he said. "The policy is made out to the Center for the Working Child or, if it no longer exists, the works of the Chicago province Jesuits in Peru."

Jeff speaks enthusiastically about this. "Anyone can buy a life insurance policy, pay the premium and make the Chicago Province its beneficiary," he says. "Life insurance replaces an outright contribution. It's an inexpensive way for someone of modest means to make a contribution. And for people of substantial means, estate planning can be a creative way to make a contribution.

"You can make substantial contributions to the Chicago Province in your lifetime," he says. "But your estate can be eaten up in taxes. If an estate is worth more than \$1.2 million, 55% of it will go to taxes to the government. But through creative estate planning, you can insure your money goes where you want—to your church and to your family. I am 33 years old. People older than I should meet with an attorney, insurance agent, or an accountant to plan gifts today. It is easy to do. It makes sense. You can feel good and exercise control over your estate. You have to check the requirements in your own state."

Jeff's goals now are to work hard in the insurance business. Over the long term, "I hope to be involved in helping people one way or another," he says. One way he does that now is to encourage people to plan for the future. A simple thing like the contribution of a life insurance policy is one more way to support the works of Jesuits in the Chicago Province. Creative estate planning can likewise enhance a donor's partnership with the province as well.

"What a wonderful legacy to leave," Jeff said.



The Chicago Province gratefully acknowledges the deceased donors listed below who remembered the Jesuits in their wills. Many Jesuit ministries and programs have benefitted as a result of their generosity.

LeVergne D. Boyle
 Bernard G. Cunningham
 Veronica Eckes
 Frank C. Florek
 Edward S. Gallagher
 Loretta M. Gildea
 Fr. Raymond P. Gordon
 Roger and Anna Mary Knittel
 Lorraine A. Langdon
 Stephen J. O'Connell
 Virginia B. Schilling
 John J. Typrowick
 Eugene Welter
 Frances Willenbrink

