

## Forming a Sense of Solidarity

JESUITS IN FORMATION SERVE THOSE IN NEED...  
IN HOSPITALS, COURTROOMS, BARRIOS, AND PRISONS

According to *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms*, “the contemporary mission of the Society is the service of faith and the promotion in society of that justice of the gospel that is the embodiment of God’s love and saving mercy.”

Since this is the mission of the Society, it would seem to go without saying that young Jesuits must be formed to fulfill this mission. In an effort to do just that, Jesuits currently engaged in formation are assigned to ministries in which they’ll be exposed to issues of justice and to people in need of healthcare, legal representation, food, safety, education, or shelter.

“There is consistent teaching about social justice throughout the length of formation,” says Fr. Dave Godleski, SJ, Chicago Province director of vocations, “and there is an almost constant desire to give the scholastics an experience of living and working with the poor.” It’s this experience the Society wants its young Jesuits to have when they’re not in the classroom, because it’s through this experience that they’ll ultimately be able to fulfill their mission as Jesuits.

Fr. John Libens, SJ, director of Loyola University’s First Studies Program says service of the poor wasn’t a focus when he was a Jesuit scholastic at West Baden College in the

early 60’s. “After the Second Vatican Council and our 31st General Congregation it was apparent our formation had to change and we had to be engaged in the culture around us. While my education was excellent, I think what we’re doing in formation today is more in keeping with what St. Ignatius would’ve wanted for his men. After all, he was definite about sending his theologians who were attending the Council of Trent to work as well in the public hospitals of the day and to teach catechism to children.”

Fr. Libens says the current formation program is valuable in that it affords scholastics opportunities to be with the poor. “We will not truly know what it is to be poor unless we know poor people as people, and not as ‘cases’ or statistics,” he explains. “Relationships with poor people help Jesuits challenge even their own simplicity of life.”

The experiences of Jesuit scholastics Thomas J. (Todd) Kenny, SJ, and Michael S. Christiana, SJ, students in Loyola University’s Jesuit First Studies Program, are evidence that the formation program is working.

Todd works as a Catholic chaplain in Cook County Hospital’s trauma unit and emergency room, one of the busiest in the country. Every year more than 120,000 people pass through the emergency room and 4,500 of them are major trauma patients. The team of Jesuit

chaplains at Cook County attempt to visit every Catholic patient in the hospital and administer sacraments to those wishing to receive them.



Todd Kenny, SJ, attends the daily liturgy at Cook County Hospital. The mass, offered by members of the team of Jesuit chaplains, is regularly attended by doctors, nurses, and patients.

In addition to distributing the Eucharist and anointing the sick, Todd and his Jesuit partners at the hospital, Fr. Gene Nevins, Fr. Bob Finn, and Fr. Jim Chambers (see pg. 14), also seek to simply be with the patients at Cook County. They try to visit every Catholic patient who spends a night there. Why? Just so the patients aren’t alone. Some of them are in the hospital for the first time. They’re ill or hurt or broken. Some don’t even know what’s wrong, and, as a result, are scared. Many of Todd’s patients

in the trauma unit are children who have been shot. Todd sees as many of them as he can, comforting them, offering to help, offering his solidarity. There's one thing he doesn't do, though. "We don't bring Jesus to this hospital," Todd says emphatically. "He's already here. We just help people discover. We're like a signpost, a reminder that there is transcendence in this place."

Todd doesn't mince words when asked about the value of working with the poor at Cook County. "That's where Jesus is for me," he says. "I've got to go see him. And I don't mean that figuratively. I entered the Jesuits to do the work others might not want to do and to go places others might not want to go."



Michael Christiana, SJ, with Ernesto Palacios and Jorge Alvarado at the Irene Dugan alternative school in Back of the Yards where he tutors and serves in a variety of outreach programs for gang members and former gang members.

Every week Michael Christiana too, does some work that many others might not want to do. He ventures to the Back of the Yards neighborhood on the south side of Chicago where he works with gang members, a segment of the population often written off as hopeless, helpless thugs who make life miserable for everybody and ought to be thrown in jail. Michael, who worked with Latino gang members in Phoenix before entering the Society, now

does his ministry work at Holy Cross/IHM Parish. "The parish does incredible outreach work," he says. He works with Fr. Bruce Willems, pastor of the parish, and Oscar Contreras, a former gang member, who do outreach on the streets and also offer a number of structured programs for gang members.

Every Tuesday Michael attends reflections with gang members. These meetings, held for various gangs within their turf boundaries, are designed to give the young men in the gangs a safe forum to discuss what's important to them. Topics have included the history of the neighborhood, police violence, relationships with women, and date rape. The parish also helps run and staff an alternative school for gang members where Michael tutors students. He also spends a good deal of his time at the neighborhood park checking in with gang members. Every once in a while one of those gang members comes to the parish wanting to get back into high school. Michael helps these students through that process and works with others as a mentor.

"I believe strongly in ministry of presence," he says. "As Jesuits there's great value in being in neighborhoods. We need to be present to people. We need to be neighbors." In his work Michael, who grew up in Minneapolis and attended private schools his entire life, has become a neighbor to these residents of Chicago. And through these relationships, he says, he is learning about life. "The people in this neighborhood have helped me learn how privileged I've been. But they've also helped me learn how to live well, how to live without a lot of money, how to live with others. They've helped me find real life."

When Michael and Todd complete the First Studies Program at Loyola University they will likely be assigned to a Jesuit high school for the regency stage of their formation where they will continue to help others and be helped by others towards a more "real life" —or at least a more examined one. ■

## Upcoming Chicago Province Vocation Events

### Come and See Weekend

Chicago: April 11–13, 2003

These weekends are for men ages 18-35 who want to learn more about the Society of Jesus. Besides presentations on certain aspects of Jesuit life (vows, formation, apostolic works), participants have an opportunity to converse and socialize with a wide variety of Jesuits and to meet other men considering the Society of Jesus. There is no charge for the weekend except for travel costs and each man will live in one of our Jesuit communities.

### Six Weeks a Jesuit

This summer discernment program sponsored jointly by the Chicago and Wisconsin provinces runs from the last full week of June through the first week of August and includes living in a Jesuit community, being involved with some apostolic experiences, attending conferences on key aspects of Jesuit life, and participating in a series of reflection weekends. Travel expenses to and from the program as well as a modest stipend will be provided.

*If you're interested in attending any of these events, contact Fr. Dave Godleski, SJ.*

### For more information about the Jesuits, contact

Fr. David A. Godleski, SJ  
Vocation Director  
2050 N. Clark St.  
Chicago IL, 60614  
godleski@jesuits-chi.org  
773-975-6363