

# Most uninsured work full-time

By Nancy Frazier O'Brien  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Picture an American with no health insurance.

If you envisioned a poor child or an elderly person, think again. Most of the 44 million uninsured fall somewhere in between, and — contrary to stereotypes — most are working.

"Many people have misperceptions about the uninsured," said Father Michael D. Place, president and CEO of the Catholic Health Association. "They associate it with those who are very poor and those who are not working."

But nearly all of the uninsured are under age 65 because of Medicare's broad coverage of the elderly, and most of the very poor are eligible — although not necessarily enrolled — in Medicaid, the joint federal-state health care plan for the poor.

"In large part the uninsured are working women with

children and single males, who are also working," said Father Place. And at a time when the U.S. economy is booming, their numbers have risen by at least 10 million since 1988.

On May 16, the Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured released a "chart book" that provides one of the most complete pictures ever of the uninsured in America, who make up about one-sixth of the nonelderly population.

The data shows that working Americans and their families comprise most of the uninsured, with 74 percent coming from families with full-time workers. Almost one-fifth (19 percent) of families with two full-time workers has no health insurance.

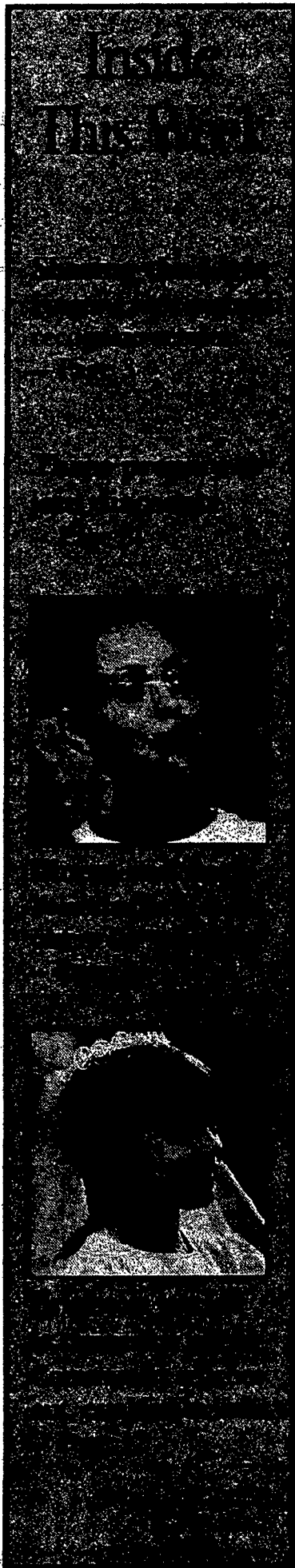
Of the 25 million uninsured workers, 58 percent had full-time, full-year jobs, while another 21 percent worked full time for part of the year. Only 21 percent of the working uninsured were part-time employees.

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## CIVIL WAR TORMENTS COLOMBIA



Carlos H. Loznou/Reuters

A woman cries at the burial of her brother in El Tigre, Colombia, Jan. 11. He was a victim of an attack by an ultra-right death squad.

Michael C. Lopez, a Rochester attorney who works in the Monroe County Public Defender's Office, knows the terrors of Colombia firsthand. The South American nation has suffered since the 1960s from a civil war that has caused more than 30,000 deaths in the 1990s alone, and that has displaced more than 1 million civilians.

Had he not left Colombia before he really wanted to, Lopez may have wound up another dead victim of the war that pits government forces and their rightist paramilitary allies on one side against leftist rebels on the other.

"Witnesses don't usually last too long in Colombia," Lopez said during a recent interview in a Rochester restaurant.

Lopez was a witness who protected the lives of two little girls, the daughters of Josue Giraldo Cardona, a leader of Colombia's Patriotic Union Party. A leftist and legal political party formed in 1984, it has seen 4,000 of its leaders — including mayors, legislators, senators and presidential candidates — killed by assassins. In October 1996, Cardona became one of that number when a lone assassin shot him eight times in front of his house. There, moments before, he had been talking to his daughters, then ages 3 and

5. Lopez grabbed the girls when the shooting began and brought them inside the house.

Lopez had befriended Cardona because of their mutual interest in human rights. Lopez, a Batavia native, went to Colombia in January 1996 to work with the Intercongregational Commission of Justice and Peace. The commission was formerly headed by Father Javier Giraldo, SJ, who himself received a number of death threats from right-wing paramilitary groups for his outspoken stances against human rights abuses by Colombia's judiciary and military.

"He's hated and despised by the military," Lopez said of the priest who has lived in exile for the past year.

Indeed, in 1998, the Catholic-led Religious Conference of Colombia and the Justice and Peace Commission both announced they had received information that high-ranking Colombian military officials had openly opposed Father Giraldo. They heard that he was now considered a "military target" who should be assassinated. While both leftists and rightists have deliberately killed civilians in the war, right-wing paramilitaries are responsible for

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