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Professionals Drop Careers
To Flock to Seminary Fold

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By Jan Johnson

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--T.E. (Gene) Thieman leads two lives.

On weekends he pilots DC-9s along the eastern seaboard as a captain for Eastern Airlines.

On weekdays, armed with books, he is a student at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary here.

Thieman, 46, has been flying Eastern Airlines planes for nearly 20 years. Three years ago he decided to go into the ministry. This is his second year at Southeastern.

He's not alone in his decision to switch from a stable, well-paying career to the less financially profitable ministry.

Cornelius (Corky) Schiflett of Leesburg, Va., 41, Army lieutenant colonel, is a first-year student at Southeastern.

And John W. Sutherland, 46, gave up his job as district engineer at Federal Paper Board, Inc., in Richmond, Va., to enroll this year.

They have joined ranks that include a former dentist, textile engineer, teachers and nurses at Southeastern.

Fred Sandusky, registrar, said the school's enrollment is up about 119 students, from 857 in the fall of 1974 to 976 this fall.

"We're pushing capacity now," he said, watching students stroll across the tree-shaded campus.

Seminaries around the country are reporting increased enrollments, Sandusky pointed out.

"In time of adversity, people seek a deeper meaning in life. When times are good, they're too occupied otherwise," he said. "Many people come here and may not be certain what they want to do, but are searching. We're glad to have them," Sandusky said.

The Army officer, pilot and engineer said they weren't searching when they came to Southeastern. They had firmly decided on some career in the ministry.

"If I just wanted more meaning in life, I would do it by becoming an active participant in church life," said Schiflett. "I'm looking for more than just meaning in life. I'm answering a call. The Lord led me here to work in his service," said Schiflett, who is working toward a master of divinity (M.Div.) degree, a three-year course.

Sutherland, also seeking an M.Div., said seminary study is the outgrowth of a decision last year. "To the best of my knowledge, I was running around all my life looking for something," he said. "I found the answer last September when I dedicated my life to Jesus Christ. This is just a step in that direction. I have no idea what the next step will be," he said.

Thieman described the switch from plane to pulpit as "a redirection of my life and purpose. My life changed 10 years ago when I accepted Jesus Christ. And three years ago I was called by the Lord to enter the ministry."

He is working on a two-year ministerial certificate at Southeastern and will graduate next spring. He has also earned diplomas in pastoral ministries and educational ministries through the Seminary Extension Department of the six Southern Baptist theological seminaries and completed other correspondence work in theology and religious education.

Each man's decision required a change in lifestyle and a cut or eventual cut in salary. But all said no one questioned their vocational switch. And their families were pleased, they said.

"The world has a dollar sign in its eyes. You can't do that, put a price, on the Lord's work. If you did, you'd say what is the cost of a person's soul," Thieman said.

Sutherland agreed. "Money isn't everything. I feel like my past was for a reason. Now I am much happier, I can see the change," he said.

Each left his family in Virginia and commutes between home and Southeastern. They are here for classes Tuesday through Friday, living in dormitories.

Thielman has worked out an arrangement whereby he flies his full complement of hours for Eastern Airlines, mostly on weekends by "bidding" for his flight schedule on the basis of seniority.

On a given weekend, he will fly a route from Baltimore, Md., to Orlando and Tampa, St. Louis, Mo., New York and back to Washington, D.C. He will see his family Monday night in Virginia Beach and leave early Tuesday on the 200-mile drive from Virginia Beach to Wake Forest. On Friday, he drives about 250 miles to Washington to fly.

He hopes to continue to pilot, coordinating it with ministry, until he can retire from Eastern in about four years. While studying, he has been involved in mission work with campers, a ministry supported by his church, Oak Grove Baptist Church, Virginia Beach. The program includes Sunday School classes and sermons by Thieman, who has been licensed to preach. As for ordination, he plans to proceed on that "as God leads," while finishing his education.

Seminary Extension, whose course offerings are partly supported by the Cooperative Program through the SBC seminaries, affected his whole life--even before he entered Southeastern, he said.

"When you sit in a prayerful attitude in the quietness of your home, studying and God speaks to your heart, it's a thrill. When you are brand new in your call to the ministry, you need something to go to. I had Seminary Extension."

On weekends, Schifflett is pastor of a mission of Leesburg (Va.) Baptist Church. He retired from the Army in May, 1974. It was five years ago, while he was stationed in Hawaii, "that the Lord took hold of my life and changed it."

Sutherland is a full-time student, spending weekends with his wife and daughter in Richmond. He is living on savings, "but I can fall back on engineering if I have to."

What if they had been told five years ago they'd be in a seminary now?

Schifflett laughed. "I would have said they were crazy. I wasn't even active in the church then," he said. Becoming serious, he said, "But you've got to feel it inside of you. You've got to want to do it (go into the ministry) and enjoy doing it."

"I would have been overwhelmed to think about it," Thieman replied.

And Sutherland said he wouldn't have believed it. He made the decision to enter the seminary only last April.

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Adapted from a Raleigh (N.C.) Times story by Jan Johnson.

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Thousands of Young People
Involved in Mission Tours

ATLANTA (BP)--At least 10,000 young persons in more than 300 groups traveled around the United States this summer, giving time, talent and money in support of Southern Baptist home missions efforts.

The 10,000 were in Home Mission Board-sponsored trips arranged through the office of Joel Land, assistant director of the department of special mission ministries.

"And we know there are many others who went on mission tours without arranging their trips through our office, Land said. "I'm sure the total number involved was more than 20,000."

Reports from Home Mission Board-sponsored youth groups indicate their efforts resulted in more than 3,500 professions of faith, 2,400 rededications and 300 decisions to enter church-related vocations.

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"These young people usually spend a week at their own expense assisting the missionaries, Land said. "They were involved in all kinds of projects--painting and cleanup of buildings, backyard Bible clubs mission, Vacation Bible Schools and resort, outdoor and inner city efforts.

Most of the groups, which ranged from four to almost 100 young people, plus counselors, went into "pioneer" or newer missions areas outside the south and most spent their time "mostly helping new churches get started and into their communities more extensively," said Land.

National Baptist Memorial Church in Washington, D. C., hosted 10 church groups. Dennis Evans, minister of community missions, said the young people worked in eight city parks and school recreation areas doing day camps and recreational ministries. Choir groups performed concerts two nights each week in the church parking lot.

Virtually every report to Land's office at summer's end was an enthusiastic one.

David T. Richardson, pastor of Concord Baptist Church, Chattanooga, Tenn., took 20 young people and three adults to Olean, New York. They worked in parks, led Vacation Bible Schools and did four concerts. At week's end, they had registered seven professions of faith.

"There was a definite change in the spiritual maturity of many of those who worked on this tour," Richardson reported. "It was a profitable tour--with lasting results."

Another Tennessee group, 60 youths from First Baptist Church, Clarksville, went to Worthington, Ohio. They enrolled 400 boys and girls in backyard Bible clubs and sang concerts in nursing homes, retirement centers, shopping centers, the local football stadium and even a swimming pool. They also sang each night at Worthington Baptist Church. They registered 15 professions of faith and two of the choir made decisions to seek church-related vocations.

Five of the 83 young people who went to Buffalo, N. Y., from Eastside Baptist Church, Marietta, Ga., made decisions to seek church-related vocations during their trip. The Georgia young people led services that saw 141 professions of faith. They had five mission Vacation Bible Schools which averaged 390 in attendance and sang in churches, shopping centers, parks and one department store.

The list of 300 groups taking mission trips represents an increase of about 50 over last year's total, Land said.

"We have had an annual increase of about 50 for the last four years," he said. "Many of them now are going back for return trips and some have gone every year for the last four of five years."

Land said assignments for next summer will be made between December-May for groups which apply to his office.

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Bicentennial Feature

Baptist Returns to Pulpit
After Being Horsewhipped

Baptist Press
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BOWLING GREEN, Va. May 1, 1771--(BP)--It was a beautiful spring Sunday. The worship service began peacefully enough as the Baptist minister, John Waller, announced the opening song.

But Waller was apprehensive as he saw three men approaching. It was the parson of the state church in the parish, his clerk, and the sheriff.

The 18th Century Baptist preacher had already felt the heel of the established church. Three years earlier he had spent 43 days in prison for preaching Baptist doctrines. But he was not prepared for the outrage which was to follow.

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While the congregation sang, the parson stepped up on the platform with Waller and flipped the pages of the hymnal with his whip while the Baptist attempted to keep his finger on the selection.

Ignoring the disturbance, Waller next attempted to lead the opening prayer. As he prayed, the parson repeatedly stuck the butt of his whip in Waller's mouth.

Seeing that the parson's attempts to halt the service were futile, the clerk then stepped up on the stage, seized Waller, dragged him away from the pulpit, and delivered him to the sheriff.

The sheriff, doubtless aware that their intrusion was a lawless affront, remained some distance away from the congregation. But when Waller was dragged before him by the clerk, the law of Caroline County went into action without the formality of a trial.

The sheriff unlimbered a horsewhip and in a rage gave the helpless preacher about 20 lashes. When the ordeal was ended, Waller was covered with blood.

Still the minister of the state church was not through. He gave the Baptist minister a second lashing of verbal abuse before the trio left the meeting.

As for John Waller, he picked himself up, found that he was still able to stand and walk, and returned to his pulpit. His hearers agreed afterward that it was one of the most powerful messages he ever delivered.

As long as the Baptist message is being preached in Virginia by men like John Waller, it is small wonder that fire of persecution serve only to refine it.

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