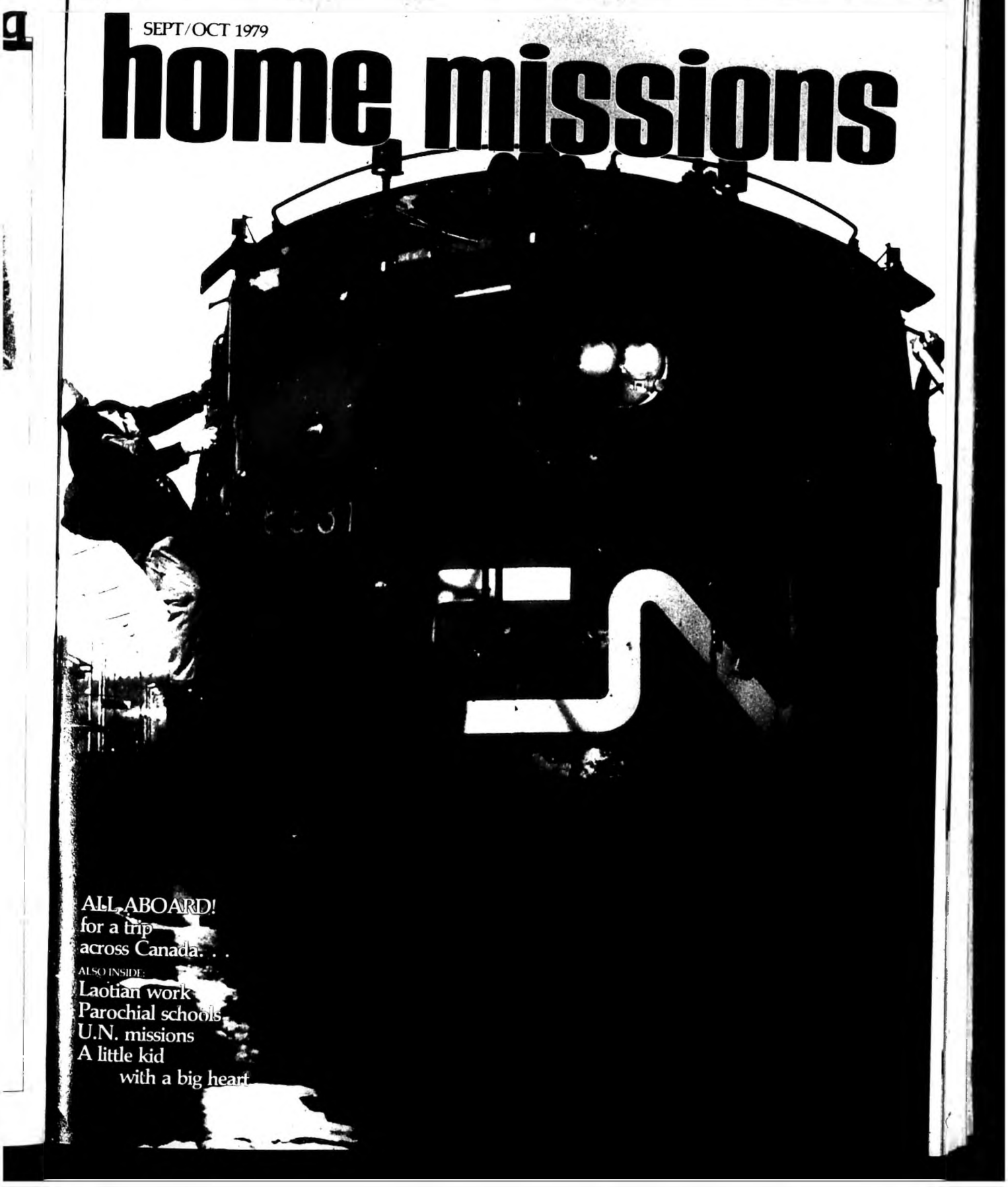
SEPT/OCT 1979

home missions



ALL ABOARD!
for a trip
across Canada. . .

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The little kid with a big heart

Ricky Thatcher was a blue baby. Within hours of his delivery, doctors had discovered serious heart defects. "They didn't think Ricky would see his first birthday," recalls his mother, Pat. For Ricky to survive childhood, doctors said he would have to undergo corrective surgery: the cost—$11,000 or more. The next years were touch and go. Ricky was constantly hospitalized with pneumonia and ear infections. "He had spells of being blue," says his mother. But this past spring, shortly before his fourth birthday, at last came the moment when Ricky's family—father Bob, mother Pat and siblings, Tammy, 9, and Bobby, 8— packed up the car and drove from their home in Fort Benning, Ga., to a two-story brown house in downtown Birmingham, Ala. Nearby was the University of Alabama Hospital—and all the tension, the risk, the pain of intricate heart surgery . . .and the hope that Ricky would have a second chance.

Continued

Ricky takes a stethoscope from his gray lunchbox-turned-doctor's-kit and listens to his father's heart. Bob growls into the stethoscope; Ricky giggles. The family moved into Brown House (*left*), temporary housing provided by Birmingham Baptist Association. Like hundreds of families who've come to University of Alabama Hospital, the Thatchers have a secure, comfortable enclave in the House—and without motel expenses, they can concentrate on Ricky. Now they wait, side by side, in hospital admitting. Underlying the smiles and jokes is concern evidenced beyond words. Tammy's grades dropped. Bobby began reading more to Ricky. "The closer the operation's gotten, the closer they've become," observes Pat. And, she says, "I catch Bobby cryin' once in awhile." For the moment, they laugh. Ricky continues examining Dad: ears, eyes, blood pressure. Bob asks, "Am I going to live?" Ricky leans back his head, smiles. "Yeahhhhhh."

By Celeste Loucks
Photography by Paul Obregon

The hours, for those who wait, are long. Idle conversation, sitting, stiffly pacing, punctuate the moments of quiet anxiety for family members who flock, by the thousands, to America's medical centers—in Houston, Baltimore, New York City, Birmingham—seeking diagnosis, treatment, a cure for a loved one.

Sometimes they must come to unfamiliar surroundings with limited resources. Sometimes, because they have no other place, they live in hospital lobbies, sleeping on couches, eating from vendin machines and hospital cafeterias.

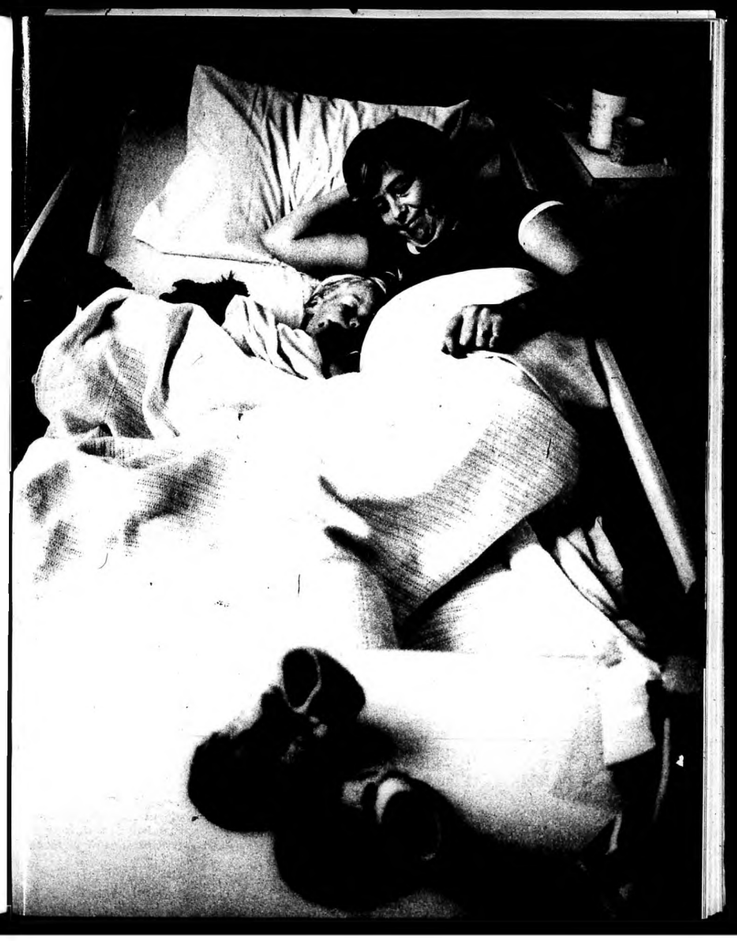
In 1975, the Birmingham Baptist Asso ciation was faced with such a plight: local hospital chaplain called associa Christian social ministries director Jac Washington. "I've got three famili who've been living in the hospital lobb for three weeks," he told Washingto "What can I do with them?"

The call came at 11 a.m. on a Thursday Washington rounded up help to cle knee-high debris from an old association-owned building in the hospital area. By 11 a.m. Friday, electricity, water, gas and telephone had been turned on—and two rooms upstairs were ready for occupancy.

That spawned "Brown House," a full-fledged ministry to people who accompany family members to Birmingham for emergency medical care, heart surgery, cancer treatment, kidney transplants and a host of other medical services. Claims Washington: "The medical ministry has done more to involve our churches than anything else. It is missions people can see, touch, tell about."

It took eight months, several thousand dollars and lots of volunteer hours to completely refinish the house: two large apartments with kitchens upstairs; downstairs, five rooms (for women), joined to a kitchen-living area. "We scrounged. It snowballed," says Washington. "We've been full since we opened in 1977. We're constantly turning people away." Continued

"Hey Batman. How ya doin'? Let me take your blood pressure." The nurse leans forward; Ricky pushes closer to Mom. He whimpers. "Ricky," coaxes the nurse (*left*), "I won't hurt you. I'm your friend." Blood pressure is 120/68, high for a child. Prior to the operation come several days of monitoring vital signs. "It has taken as many as six people to hold him down to get blood—he's been hurt so much, so he's scared," explains Pat. Most of Ricky's waiting hours are spent racing up and down the hospital corridors on a set of Big Wheels—a low-slung tricycle. The family spends as much time as possible there, living on sandwiches and soft drinks. At night, Pat or Bob sleeps at Ricky's bedside. They don't complain about accommodations. But one morning when a smiling nurse arrives for more tests, Ricky cries and Bob, who has held his son through a night of similar interruptions, mumbles sadly, "Holy smoke, Ricky can't take much more."



"If you had 10 more apartments and 15 more rooms for women, we could keep them filled," says Suzanne Grainger, a social services caseworker at University of Alabama Hospital. "If I came from out of town, I would be hard-pressed to stay in a motel," she continues. "It really puts families in a financial bind." Rates for nearby motels start at $24 a night.

In addition to housing and food, families may need emotional support, transportation—even a laundry. "Many times the churches have gotten involved," says Grainger. "Members have stayed the whole day of surgery, have taken the people shopping, provided food. This ministry has meant a lot to the families."

Brown House—at 19th and 8th streets, South—is within walking distance of hospitals and treatment centers. Its refrigerators and cupboards are stocked with frozen food and staples. Once a week a church volunteer does laundry.

Monthly, a church in the association

Continued

Wearing a stiff, blue hospital gown, Ricky sits quietly. Tears cling to his drooping lashes. His mother gently strokes his back—a pastor comes in. All heads bow: "Our heavenly Father," he begins, "we thank you because we can come to you in prayer. Guide the hands of those who perform the surgery. Comfort the family as they wait today." A gray-blue stretcher is wheeled to the door. Each family member kisses Ricky. "Gonna go for a ride?" Ricky whimpers. His eyes close. A physician pushes the stretcher to the elevator. For a moment, the parents linger (*left*). The doors of the elevator, ready to take Ricky to surgery, open—the doors shut. Quietly, the family moves back down the hall and gathers up Ricky's things from the room. Echoing in their ears is the nurse's promise: "We'll call you when the difficult part is over." Waiting. Waiting. Waiting. Six hours later, the call: "Ricky is out. You can come see him in recovery now."

works in the ministry. Nancy Rhyne, who helped renovate the house and now coordinates volunteers, says churches provide handcrafts for waiting family members—sunshine boxes for patients. RAs and GAs from participating churches have brought fruitbaskets; one church prepared Sunday dinner. Often, residents of Brown House are invited to mid-week suppers at the church or into members' homes.

Once, a church family "adopted" a Brown House family with children of similar age. The family had a child undergoing cancer treatment. "It was a traumatic experience," Rhyne admits, "you suffer when they do." But, she says, "it fills something in your life that nothing else can do."

As occupants move in and out, members of the volunteering church defrost refrigerators, clean ovens, sweep, dust, scrub bathrooms and sinks.

Dale Conville, a Baptist Young Women volunteer from Hunter Steet Baptist Church, got involved through a missions group: "We talked about specific goals for personal involvement—and here was missions right across town." Hunter Street volunteers sent greeting cards and made hospital visits, kept in touch by phone and provided items such as an ironing board.

The association charges no more than $5 a day for an apartment; $3 for a room. The money pays utilities, basic upkeep and supplies. But, Washington emphasizes, "Those payments are maximum. For a needy family, we charge less."

Brown House has sheltered hundreds of persons from Alabama and other states. It housed an elderly Talladega, Ala., woman whose 76-year-old husband had come for surgery. "They had never been separated in more than 50 years of marriage," comments a friend. But with their limited income, "they could not have remained together without Brown House."

After lightning struck their house, William and Lynda Ledbetter rushed their 4-year-old Jeremy to children's hospital.

Continued

A maze of tubes connects Ricky to fluid, medication and TV monitors. A ragged, red seam runs from his neck to his navel. Peering into the clear plastic tent, surrounding him, Pat asks, "How ya doin' baby?" Ricky is silent, listless. "He's still in outer space," comments the nurse. "In a few days, Son, you'll be better," assures Bob. Ricky coughs weakly, slowly closes his eyes. Despite a positive report, Pat tells Tammy and Bobby later, "The doctors said Ricky is a long way from being fully recovered."

The day after leaving intensive care, tow-headed Ricky is back on the Big Wheels for a slow spin down the hospital corridor. Says Pat, "The thing I felt sure was that God was watching over Ricky, taking care of him. There were prayers: not only here, but in other places." Ricky's still not completely "out of the woods." During the year he faces restrictions: a salt-free diet, no chocolate, no swimming. But to his family, that's a small price. Says Bob, "It's been a long three-and-a-half years—but it's been worth it." And Ricky? He's making plans for his upcoming fourth birthday.

Jeremy's mattress had exploded into flame, leaving the youngster with third degree burns over 60 percent of his body. In the emergency, the Ledbetters needed a place to stay for an extended period. Social workers referred them to Brown House.

At first, doctors didn't offer much hope for Jeremy's survival. But, says his mother, "We put it in God's hands. The doctors now are talking about miracles."

Because she is allergic to soy, an ingredient used frequently in prepared foods and in restaurants, Mrs. Ledbetter was especially thankful to find accommodations in which she could prepare meals.

Pat Thatcher of Fort Benning, Ga., was determined to keep her family together when the youngest member, Ricky, entered the hospital for heart surgery. Robert Thatcher, a sergeant in the U.S. Army, has insurance to pay most hospitalization and surgery costs; yet for living expenses in Birmingham, the Thatchers had to borrow money.

Mrs. Thatcher explored alternatives to the family of five staying in hotel accommodations. Women living in nearby homes sometimes rent a single room for about $6 a night, but often they are reluctant to rent to "anybody other than women." Twenty blocks away, Salvation Army offers dormitory-type housing, with men sleeping on one side, women on the other. A few Birmingham churches, including Episcopal and Presbyterian, have limited housing.

When Mrs. Thatcher found out about Brown House, she called the association office and a few days before Ricky's surgery, the Thatchers checked in. Their three-week stay cost less than a couple of days in a hotel.

Hunter Street Baptist members brought the family food and took the children, Tammy and Bobby, to Vacation Bible School. Brown House offered a place for the children to let off steam; a place for the parents to kick off their shoes and rest between hospital visits.

Birmingham Baptist Association has never solicited volunteer churches since opening the center—the help just comes. Director Washington believes this awareness and involvement in missions also has caused churches to be more generous in support of association work.

"Missions is often vague to many people," he says, "but here we've had more than 400 families from all over the United States. Our Baptists—some for the first time—are involved in missions."

Washington has a file of results from the ministry. At request of a WMU member, the assistant pastor in a volunteering church visited a patient whose family was at Brown House. The patient became a Christian; his wife then rededicated her life.

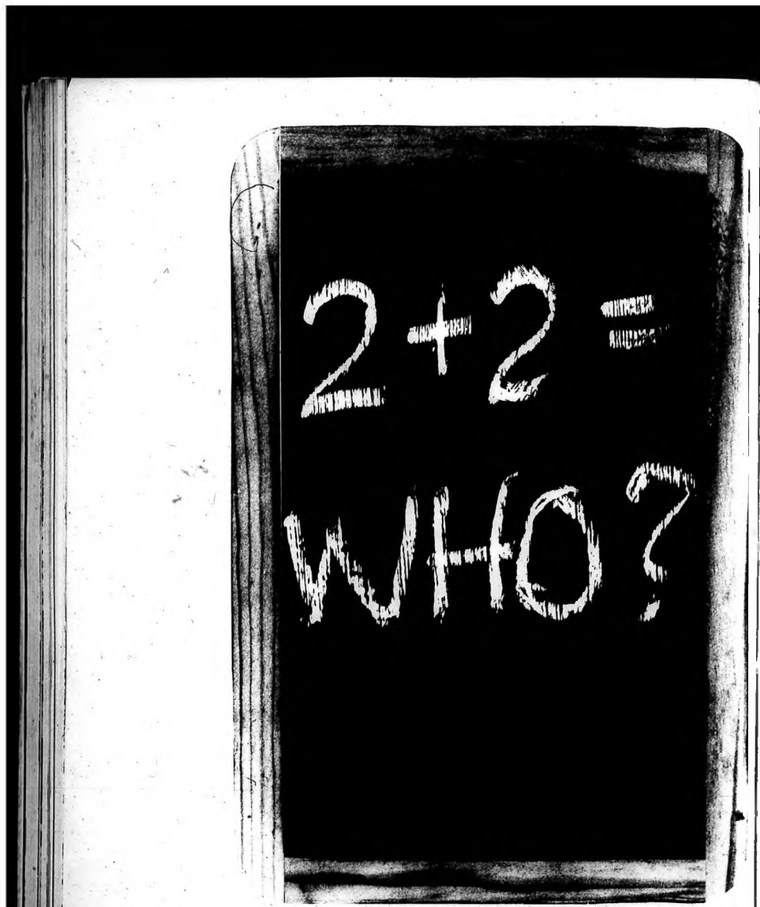
A Christian woman living downstairs in Brown House ministered to others between visits with her husband, who was in critical condition and could be seen for only 10 minutes every two hours. "She listened to problems of the other women, she shared her faith," says Washington. "She led one woman to the Lord."

Response to the ministry also has come from outside the church. Nancy Rhyne, who does Brown House laundry, weekly comes to the laundromat with 8-10 loads of sheets. "People get curious. They begin by saying, 'You have the prettiest sheets—but so *many*.'" Rhyne tells them about Brown House and its ministry.

She says elderly Jewish patrons are particularly impressed to see "Christian people reaching out."

So far out, in fact, the association hopes to provide more space. Several Baptist businessmen are considering acquiring a motel which the association would operate, using half the rooms for regular customers—while about 50 rooms equipped with kitchens would be available for families of patients. Says Rhyne about the proposal, "We need space desperately."

And Washington encourages other associations to offer similar ministry. He advises: "Don't worry about money and resources—just dream." □



The parochial school may prove good for minds. But is it good for missions? And what image does it create in the community?

By David Wilkinson
PHOTOS BY PAUL OBREGON

The bell's long, jangling, familiar ring pierces the morning air, abbreviating conversations and quickening footsteps. America, age six to eighteen, is off to school.

The vast majority of students in elementary and secondary schools are enrolled in public schools. Ten to twelve percent of the nation's school-age children, however, attend non-public schools. And although statistics are hard to come by, maybe 50,000 of those students—a large number in a denomination long known for its support of public education—are enrolled in "Christian schools" supported by Southern Baptist churches.

"Christian schools"—or, more appropriately, church-related schools—are a new venture for Southern Baptists, who have generally considered parochial education to be the domain of Roman Catholics. According to 1976 statistics of the Baptist Sunday School Board (BSSB), 75-80 percent of SBC churches operating schools have been in the business for a decade or less (see related story, page 19). But while their development may be recent, parochial schools are gaining adherents among the denomination's 13-million members.

Bob Couch, church administration consultant in weekday education for the BSSB, believes the number of SBC church-related schools has increased from the 189 of the '76 survey. A "calculated guess," based on church administration department's mailing list, is that such schools now number "in the neighborhood of 300."

In June, during the annual Southern Baptist Convention in Houston, a rally attracted 250 to 300 persons interested in parochial education.

In addition, at the rally, the Southern Baptist Christian School Association was formed. According to Charles Freeman, headmaster of the Second Baptist (Houston) Christian School and chairman of the planning committee for the new association, the organization will give impetus to Baptists' parochial school movement and offer encouragement and training for administrators. The idea, he explained, originated at a BSSB-sponsored seminar earlier this year.

Unity among parochial school administrators may be possible, but unity of support for parochial schools inside the nation's Protestant community —or the SBC itself—may be another matter. Protestant parochial schools have been objects of heated controversy. Debate was most intense in the early 1970s, when such schools dramatically proliferated simultaneously with court-ordered desegregation of public schools.

Critics, charging "segregation academies," argued the schools filled classrooms with children of parents avoiding integration. Advocates, meanwhile, saw parochial schools as the only remedy for an increasingly amoral public school system.

Yet undercurrent has been a genuine, though largely undocumented, struggle of many Christian families grappling with an extremely sensitive area affecting not only their children's future, but also their church's ministry, witness—and image.

An illustration of both the complexity and the sensitivity of the parochial school debate can be found in Memphis, Tenn., where a Southern Baptist church supports the Briarcrest Baptist School System, among the largest parochial elementary and secondary systems in the nation.

Located in an affluent subdivision of east Memphis, the single-story, sandstone-colored Briarcrest complex boasts an enrollment of nearly 4,000 students (including its 10 elementary schools which meet in cooperating Southern Baptist churches). Its facilities are among the best in the country—public or private. The building houses Briarcrest elementary and high school and East Park Baptist Church. Sunday School and parochial school share classrooms and auditorium. Offices for school and church are located in the same area.

Briarcrest Baptist High School opened in 1972, fulfilling a teenage dream of East Park pastor Wayne Allen. Many years before, Allen and fellow teens plan to start a "Christian club" in their Memphis high school was rejected by the principal, who warned the young people about zealous proselyting on campus. "We had been witnessing to Jewish students," Allen explains; "some parents complained."

Allen immediately asked his Southern Baptist pastor why the church could not start a school. Told that Southern Baptists were involved only in higher education, Allen left "extremely disappointed. I couldn't understand. I thought it would be great to have a Christian school where students could be taught the Bible as well as chemistry and math, where you could have freedom to praise the Lord and share witness."

After Allen became pastor of East Park, he asked the church to study the feasibility of starting a school. When the committee's favorable report was "approved overwhelmingly," the church purchased a 14.2-acre site. At a news conference, Allen announced plans for a $6.5 million building project.

Contrary to usual procedure, the church built the high school first, then added lower grades. Within three years, enrollment in grades 1-12 soared to nearly 4,000.

Briarcrest financially has operated in the black each year since the church contributed start-up

Continued

Racism and classism are the factors most churches consider. Is separate equal? Or unequal? And does it matter in matters of missions and ministry?

costs. Despite a high school tuition of $1,250 a year in one of the South's poorest cities, the school has held its own at a time when enrollments at most Memphis public (and private) schools have consistently declined. Even dual use of facilities, a constant headache for many church schools, creates few problems at Briarcrest. Meticulous scheduling, supervised by high school principal Joseph Clayton, even allows the church to host large meetings without disrupting classes.

Briarcrest also excels academically. Whereas many Baptist parochial schools either struggle to earn state accreditation or disdain "governmental control," Briarcrest boasts accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. (Most textbooks are selected from the same list used by public schools.) Briarcrest students consistently test above local and national averages.

"I've gotten more compliments from college professors since I've been at Briarcrest than in all my years in public education," says Clayton.

Despite tremendous costs, the church's involvement in Briarcrest has not adversely affected its growth or giving, adds Wayne Allen. East Park averaged 233 in Sunday School when the school began; total receipts were about $90,000. Today, Allen points out, the church averages 500 in Sunday School and has a budget of $500,000.

Success of Briarcrest, Allen believes, proves the validity of the church school concept, if it is built on "proper foundation": commitment to academic excellence within a Christian context; strong financial support; an open admissions policy; a quality, Christian principal; and a firm belief by the church that "God is in it."

Yet not everyone in Memphis believes in a Briarcrest. Primary dissatisfaction revolves around the issue of segregation. Briarcrest High School opened the same year a court-ordered desegregation plan was implemented in Memphis public schools, a fact many people cannot dismiss as circumstantial. Seven years later, still no black faces are seen among faculty, students or administrators at Briarcrest, even though 60 percent of the school-age population of Memphis is black.

Briarcrest claims it has battled hard to overcome its segregationist image. Says business manager Patricia Allen, "Briarcrest has done all kinds of things to appeal to the black community," including "advertising heavily" and participating in academic and athletic programs with public schools.

In addition, Wayne Allen wrote "about a dozen" black pastors asking for assistance in recruiting minority students. Only one pastor responded, according to Allen; the pastor indicated "the timing was bad" because most blacks hold negative attitudes toward private schools.

Principal Clayton sees no reason why a black student would be uncomfortable at Briarcrest. "They would be accepted totally," he says. "The fact that we talk it [open admissions] a lot has erased the idea we operate a school just for whites."

Absence of black students (Allen calls it "our identity crisis") speaks louder than words to many Memphians. James Jordan, pastor of Beal Street Baptist Church, believes racism exists on both sides of the parochial school issue. "But," he admits, "most of us in the black community see these schools as manifestations of racism. And when they call it 'missions' or 'ministry' we cannot help but see it as hypocrisy."

"Hypocrisy," echoes Rod Spaulding, a former minister who is public information officer for the Memphis school system. Of the 40,000 predominantly white students who have left since court-ordered desegregation, "the overwhelming majority," says Spaulding, "have been from the upper middle class." He adds, "All of a sudden we really got religious. But I just don't think it [the church school] is scriptural at all; I don't think the Bible teaches classism."

Classism and racism were principal factors leading Memphis Second Baptist to reject a proposal to sponsor an elementary school in the Briarcrest system; even though the church, according to pastor James Hatley, had given "serious consideration" earlier to starting a parochial school, even constructing a building "with a school in mind."

"Basically," says Hatley, "the church decided that even though our motives were right, they could never be interpreted as such for two reasons —racism and classism. So we voted no to Briarcrest."

Hatley remains a strong, vocal supporter of public education, recently serving as chairman of a special citizens' review committee to re-evaluate the Memphis busing plan. Even so, he says, he could support a church-sponsored school "if it built in procedures that insure it is racially balanced and is not elitist—if it reflects its community."

Another Memphis pastor, Ken Dean of Prescott Memorial Baptist, argues Baptists' opening parochial schools at the time of court-ordered desegregation was "a flagrant violation of the church ministry" which encouraged mass exodus of whites from the public schools and essentially created "a resegregated, dual school system."

Racially segregated schools, whatever their admissions policy, do nothing to aid racial understanding, comments Kay Andrews, a Southern

Forced busing of children, with all its associated traumas, helped stimulate the parochial school movement.

Baptist vice-principal of a Memphis elementary school. "I have worked with young people and have heard myths and generalizations about blacks that are perpetuated in [parochial] schools. Most white students don't know a black well enough to be able to distinguish between what a black person is and what a whole race is."

"Regardless of the reason for putting a child into a [parochial] school, it cheats the child because it puts him in a cocoon," says Southern Baptist Pat Faudree, who served with Hatley on the bi-racial citizens' review committee. "You isolate him from the majority of Memphians."

Protected, yes; isolated, no, responds Wayne Allen. Most Christian parents, he insists, want a sheltered environment for their children, and the only ways Briarcrest is isolated is in "protecting our students from anti-Christian, anti-God secularism" of public schools. Briarcrest's Christian values teach children to hurdle racism barriers, Allen says.

Replies Hatley, "Learning is relational as well as cognitive. You just cannot have that kind of relational learning in a private segregated school."

In addition, Hatley and others worry "parochial education feeds on misinformation and exaggerated faults in the quality of public education."

"The most non-Christian thing is not establishing schools," adds Dean, "but the propaganda they promote concerning the public school. They depict public schools as citadels of low morals, filled with violence and staffed with non-qualified persons."

Clayton counters Briarcrest officials recognize the need for Christian teachers in the public school system. Although firmly convinced his move to Briarcrest "was right," Clayton admits "a Christian teacher very definitely has more of a challenge there than I have here."

One incident in particular still haunts him:

Shortly after announcing his resignation as principal of Overton High School, Clayton was asked by one of his black students "to reconsider." The student said, "We need you more at Overton as a Christian than they need you at Briarcrest."

"Don't think that hasn't gone through my mind a million times," Clayton admits.

Similar thoughts go through the minds of Chris-

Continued

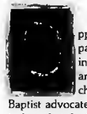
Does the church-related school "cheat the child" because it puts him in a cocoon?

tian teachers who have stayed in the public school system. Many feel their Christian colleagues who moved to the Christian schools abandoned the public schools just when they were needed most. "If you want to really be a witness, then go to the public schools," Andrews admonishes fellow teachers. "How can your light shine if you hide it under a bushel? And I consider teachers in most Christian schools to be hiding under a bushel."

Faudree feels similarly about parents. "If those who opted for private schools had stayed in the public school system and had been vigilant in seeing their children did get a good education, we could have accomplished a lot." The church-related school, she adds, "has been an easy out."

"Every parent has both a right and a responsibility for the education of his children," comments Hatley, "but the Christian parent has an additional responsibility—to want the same for all parents' children. If we are really to be ambassadors for Christ, then the way to achieve that is by being witnesses where we are needed most. And one of the places where we are most needed is the public school system."

The aim of the Christian school is education of "the student for the glory of God."



pposed to Hatley's views, many pastors and denominational leaders in Southern Baptist life agree with arguments for Briarcrest and parochial schools in general. Southern Baptist advocates of parochial education believe, in fact, that the Christian school can, and should, be an integral part of the church's overall ministry. "Church members interested in propagation of the gospel should not object to an arm of the church offering academic education," comments Tommie Hamilton, principal of Houston's Long Point Baptist School. "The aim of Christian schools is education of the student for the glory of God. This should be the ultimate aim of every activity of the church."

When done properly, adds Bob Couch of the BSSB, the advantage of an academically sound prochial school is it offers "total education, education that emphasizes development of the *whole* person, including moral and spiritual growth, which the public school cannot do."

Other Southern Baptist advocates of parochial schools argue they can be effective in increasing membership, as Briarcrest has been for East Park.

Yet not every church uses its school for outreach. Clyde Skidmore of First Southern Baptist Church, Bakersfield, Calif., says his church school "only accepts kids from homes where the parents are in a church and where we receive recommendation from the pastor. We consider this a specialized ministry for Christian parents."

Christian school supporters also see the church-owned, church-operated school as a viable alternative to "morally bankrupt" and "academically sour" public schools. Larry Lewis, pastor of Tower Grove Baptist Church, St. Louis, admits "hesitation" about starting a parochial school. He felt "we should support public schools." But "the thing that changed my mind was a constant flood of people moving to the suburbs because of their extreme dissatisfaction with public schools. Most of what we were trying to achieve in the Christian home was being discounted in the public schools."

Success of the integrated Tower Grove Elementary School, Lewis says, turned him into an "enthusiastic" parochial school supporter. "There was a time when the public school was an extension of values taught in the home," he says. "But in most places that is no longer true."

Former public school teachers now in parochial schools have similar opinions: "We teach traditional methods and we teach traditional values," explains Barbara Manley, fifth-grade teacher at Woodland Hills Baptist Academy in Jackson, Miss., a school accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. "There's no such thing as 'new math' in this school, and parents appreciate a return to basics. We teach children to respect others and to respect property. You know, they don't teach that like they used to."

W.A. Criswell agrees. The fiery pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, which owns and operates First Baptist Academy with 630 students in kindergarten through grade 12, recently told an SBC parochial school rally that the Christian school holds the key to survival for America and for Southern Baptists. "I'd like for the Sunday School Board, I'd like for the Executive Committee . . . to tell me where the great leaders are coming from except from the boys and girls we're training in our Christian schools," he proclaimed. "If we don't train them and guide them in the Christian way, then we have no future as Baptists."

Fundamental, according to Criswell, is the school's purpose of instilling "in the heart of every student the mind of Christ Jesus." The Baptist parochial school, he stresses, represents "the greatest open door churches have today."

Criswell also feels Southern Baptist parochial schools have gained an important ally in the Sunday School Board, but laments "it only recently changed its heart about helping us."

Help from the Sunday School Board comes in two ways—age-graded Bible curriculum and training in administration. Bible curriculum was introduced last year for grades one and two, and, according to Couch, curriculum will expand each year until Bible materials are available for grades one-twelve. Couch said 64 Christian schools in 29 cities in 17 states have purchased curriculum. The board also sponsors seminars and workshops.

Ralph McIntyre, director of Church and Staff Support Division, says BSSB's commitment to serving SBC churches moved the agency into parochial education: "Since the school is under the umbrella of the church, the Sunday School Board feels a responsibility to assist this ministry."

ther Southern Baptist leaders question whether Protestant parochial schools are a "ministry" at all. About the same time Memphis' East Park church voted to begin its parochial school system, a Southern Baptist congregation in Jackson, Miss., also considered starting a parochial school. But Alta Woods Baptist Church concluded it should stay out of parochial education because "too many problems were involved": inadequate facilities which would require major capital outlays for renovation and new construction; insufficient know-how to begin and maintain a school; and difficulties with accreditation procedures and dual use of facilities.

Facts & Figures

How extensive is the parochial school movement among Southern Baptists?

According to three-year-old statistics assembled by the Sunday School Board, 189 schools associated with Southern Baptist churches were operating in 94 associations in 1976. Tennessee reported the highest number of elementary and secondary parochial schools, with 36. Florida and Texas each reported 26, followed by Alabama, 22, and California, 18.

One-half the schools responding to the Research Services Department questionnaire were owned by Southern Baptist churches. Numerous others met in buildings owned or sponsored by SBC churches. Twenty percent of the schools were state accredited. Fourteen were accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the major accreditation agency in the South.

The vast majority of Baptist parochial schools had small enrollments. Just 27 had more than 25 first-grade pupils; 58 percent had faculties of 10 or more; some teachers had only a high school degree. About one in three schools had faculty or administrators with masters degrees, however.

Total enrollment of SBC parochial schools was estimated at 38,000-45,000 students, with less than 1,200 teachers.

Across the United States, there are 18,700 private schools with approximately 5 million students; they represent 10-12 percent of the nation's elementary and secondary school enrolments. □

More importantly, involvement in parochial education would change the church's philosophy.

"Our present purpose," the Alta Woods school committee stated, "is to lead people into a vital contact with God through worship. If we establish a school, the primary task would be to maintain that school. We would in reality become a school that had church on Sunday."

The committee also feared the new "financial burden" would reduce other church emphases, such as missions giving.

But the bottom line, according to the study committee, was the church's "moral obligation to the community and to God to be and do what is right." The committee determined many church members felt it "morally wrong to establish and maintain a school which would divide people on the basis of their ability to pay or on their racial background." Even if race were not a factor, a new school in Jackson "would have that implication."

Is it morally wrong to establish a school which divides people on their ability to pay or their race?

Alta Woods pastor Charles Myers believes the church even more strongly supports that view today. And W.B. Wilmurth, chairman of the committee, adds, "There remain just too many problems" to justify starting a parochial school.

Yet he does not reject the idea of parochial schools. "If all Baptist churches in the association

Continued

People just now admit "our school hasn't been missions at all. It's simply been a service to certain people in our area."

wanted to open a school system—and open it to everybody—then I would favor that because I do support Christian education," Wilmurth says.

So far, that hasn't happened in any association, although moves have been made in that direction. In July 1978, Union Baptist Association in Houston narrowly defeated a proposal from its Christian Education Committee. The committee recommended the association sponsor a private junior/senior high school. Opponents used Alta Woods' conclusion to defeat the proposal: even if the school were open to all races and creeds, many Houston residents would interpret it as an attempt to operate an all-white school.

In other areas, opponents of church-related schools use a more pragmatic argument: parochial schools haven't consistently had positive influence on church life. Despite the lavish praise some pastors heap on their schools, others have found their parochial school to be a millstone weighing heavily on the effectiveness of the church's ministry and restricting its corporate witness.

One SBC pastor, with wounds borne by his congregation "running so deep" he would speak only anonymously, says his school was begun primarily to avoid desegregation of the public schools.

"Christian education was kind of a handle to attract students," he says. However, he adds, "people sincerely felt the school would be a ministry, that they would be able to reach families of the children who attended the school. It has never worked that way. We attracted people to the school who were church people already. The school has never attracted people from outside the church, and it has not been an outreach ministry at all."

What *has* resulted is divisiveness among church members, a steady decline in church attendance and a stained image in the community, he explains.

Sunday School enrollment is half what it was when the school opened eight years ago. Only eight percent of the students attend the church and "91 of the other 92 percent" attend other SBC churches, he says. "I've baptized one teenager [from the school], and the next fall he went to a public school."

The stigma of operating an all-white school hampers outreach efforts, he says. "I'll visit a family that has just moved to town, and the people will say, 'Yes, we've heard about your church's school.' Then a couple of Sundays later I'll hear they joined another church—and I know why."

"People just now will admit our school has not been missions at all; it has simply been a service to certain members of the community."

Another Southern Baptist pastor, also speaking anonymously, says his church's school "went really well" until the church staff "decided to face the real

Looking the problem—or the solution—in the face?

reasons the school was in operation."

"When we looked at the school we discovered it was a white, private school meeting comfortably in the church's facilities with no problems about having to buy or rent property," the pastor says. "We were not really offering Christian education, just quality education we called Christian."

The church eventually dissociated itself from the school—despite heated protests by some.

John Havlik of the Home Mission Board's evangelism section believes few Protestant parochial schools would survive under such careful and honest scrutiny. The majority of Protestant parochial schools, he argues, were established to circumvent public school integration. And even if the school did not begin for that reason, it usually is *perceived* that way, particularly by the black community. Either way, Havlik feels, it compromises New Testament evangelism.

"Here is the Southern Baptist Convention, which has made more inroads into the ethnic population than any other evangelical body, saying, 'We don't want to go to school with you, but we want to start a church in your neighborhood.' That just doesn't do much for the credibility and integrity of our evangelism," Havlik argues.

One serious problem confronting Southern Baptists, he continues, is the denomination's increasing movement toward middle-class status, which isolates it from the poor. The parochial school which segregates on the basis of one's ability to pay, he says, contributes to that upwardly-mobile image.

"If we protect a certain type of culture—in our case, white, middle-class culture—then anytime we think we're reaching different kinds of people, we're mistaken. As for the Christian school, I don't see how it can claim to reach out to poor people, because, simply, they cannot afford it."

"I think the essential question is whether the church is going to be a part of the solution to America's racial problem or whether it is going to perpetuate it," says Emmanuel McCall, director of HMB's department of cooperative ministries with National Baptists. If the parochial school movement gains strength among Southern Baptists, says McCall, "it will have a negative impact on what we're trying to do to evangelize the nation."

McCall says blacks already "question, because of our separateness, whether our white churches are really Christian." The parochial school contributes to this perception. "Blacks wonder whether we're really serious about the gospel message. They doubt our commitment to open fellowship, and the private school thing often becomes an illustration of our insincerity. 'If you're really serious,' they say, 'then what are you going to do about these so-called Christian schools? They see our evangelism in programs like Bold Mission Thrust as a sham.'"

Regardless of churches' intentions, believes McCall, parochial schools "will be judged on the past, and the past does not speak too highly of Southern Baptists' commitment to open fellowship.

"The unfortunate thing is that those trying to establish healthy relationships between the races are lumped with those who start parochial schools. Consequently, the whole denomination is damned as a result of a few."

"The church," adds McCall emphatically, "should contribute to society's redemption, not copout. And so-called Christian schools are a cop-out."

While pros and cons of church-related schools' impact upon Southern Baptist witness is debated within denominational ranks, a "third party" has examined the issue from the perspective of law.

According to Internal Revenue Service, private and parochial schools have freedom to be racially segregated, but not with tax-exempt privileges. A highly controversial IRS plan would yank tax-exempt status from private schools which IRS guidelines indicate practice racially discriminatory policies in enrollment or student registration.

The proposal, which has drawn the ire of religious leaders and the praise of civil rights activists, also polarized two Southern Baptist agencies: James E. Wood Jr., of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs (BJC), a Washington, D.C. agency, denounced the proposed procedure as a "flagrant violation of First Amendment protection of religious liberty. Meanwhile, William H. Elder of the SBC Christian Life Commission (CLC), the denomination's moral concerns agency, praised the ruling, calling accompanying guidelines "sufficiently broad and flexible." Wood, believes the IRS proposal should be judged on the basis of church-state separation; Elder, reiterating the CLC's support of religious liberty, claims the overriding issue is racial discrimination.

When the issue surfaced on the floor of the Southern Baptist Convention in June, a resolution condemning the IRS proposal was overwhelmingly approved by messengers. The resolution, offered by Memphis East Park pastor Wayne Allen and authored by the BJC, replaced a milder statement proposed by the SBC resolutions committee.

Whatever the "right" of the IRS proposal, its instigation evidences outsiders' attitude toward parochial school education as they *believe it is practiced by many churches today.*

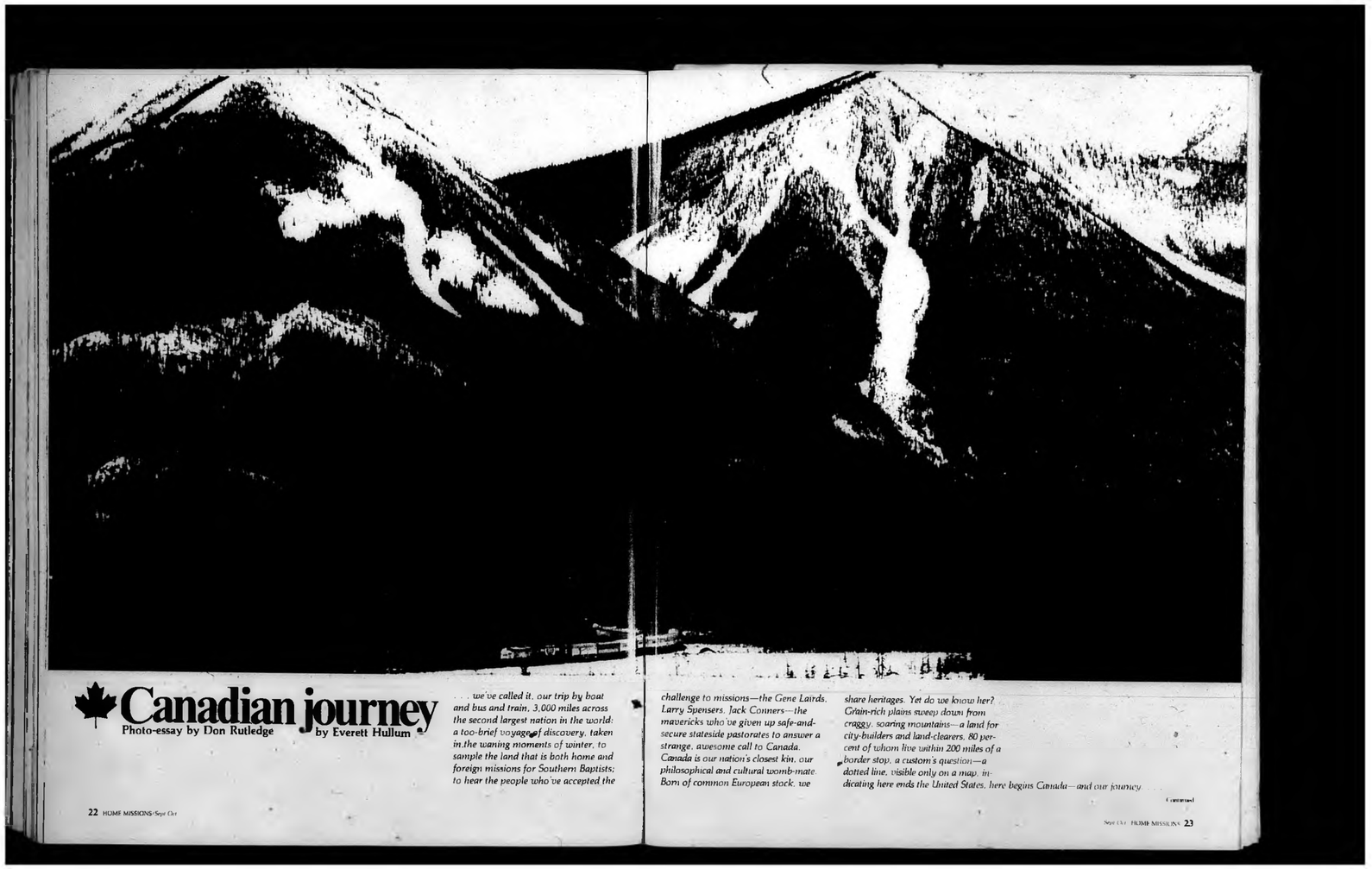
No matter how you add it up, finally comes, for Christians, the gut-level question: how does parochial education for *my child* affect *your child. . . ?*

Despite all such arguments, decisions about parochial school education must ultimately be made by parents, who find it difficult to reach objective conclusions about the subjective futures of their children. The idea of quality academic education offered in a Christian setting from a Christian perspective sounds appealing. Faced with the awesome responsibility of child-rearing in an increasingly secular environment, many Christian parents welcome anything that promises to help them with their tremendous responsibilities or to supplement their best efforts.

Yet Christian parents also must consider the impact of their decision on the poor and the black communities: on a personal, gut level, how does parochial school education for *my* child affect *your* child—and the integrity of my Christian witness?

The choice may become, as one parent expressed it, "the hardest decision we as a family . . . a Christian family . . . ever have made."

Wilkinson is press representative of the SBC Christian Life Commission.



Canadian journey

Photo-essay by Don Rutledge by Everett Hullum

. . . we've called it, our trip by boat and bus and train, 3,000 miles across the second largest nation in the world: a too-brief voyage of discovery, taken in the waning moments of winter, to sample the land that is both home and foreign missions for Southern Baptists; to hear the people who've accepted the challenge to missions—the Gene Lairds, Larry Spensers, Jack Conners—the mavericks who've given up safe-and-secure stateside pastorates to answer a strange, awesome call to Canada. Canada is our nation's closest kin, our philosophical and cultural womb-mate. Born of common European stock, we share heritages. Yet do we know her? Grain-rich plains sweep down from craggy, soaring mountains—a land for city-builders and land-clearers, 80 percent of whom live within 200 miles of a border stop, a custom's question—a dotted line, visible only on a map, indicating here ends the United States, here begins Canada—and our journey.

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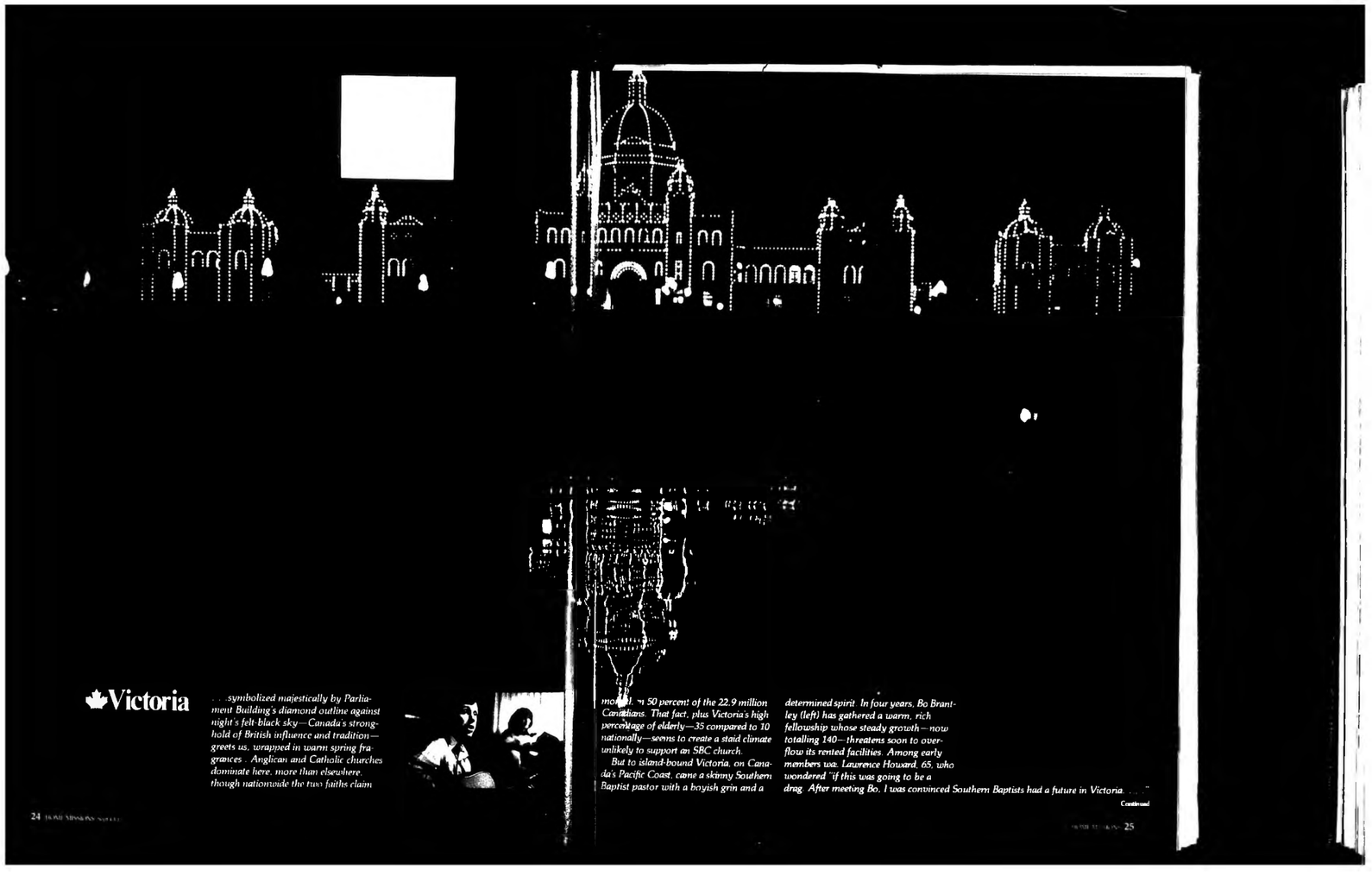

Victoria

. . . symbolized majestically by Parliament Building's diamond outline against night's felt-black sky—Canada's stronghold of British influence and tradition—greets us, wrapped in warm spring fragrances. Anglican and Catholic churches dominate here, more than elsewhere, though nationwide the two faiths claim

more than 50 percent of the 22.9 million Canadians. That fact, plus Victoria's high percentage of elderly—35 compared to 10 nationally—seems to create a staid climate unlikely to support an SBC church.

But to island-bound Victoria, on Canada's Pacific Coast, came a skinny Southern Baptist pastor with a boyish grin and a determined spirit. In four years, Bo Brantley (left) has gathered a warm, rich fellowship whose steady growth—now totalling 140—threatens soon to overflow its rented facilities. Among early members was Laurence Howard, 65, who wondered "if this was going to be a drag. After meeting Bo, I was convinced Southern Baptists had a future in Victoria. . . ."

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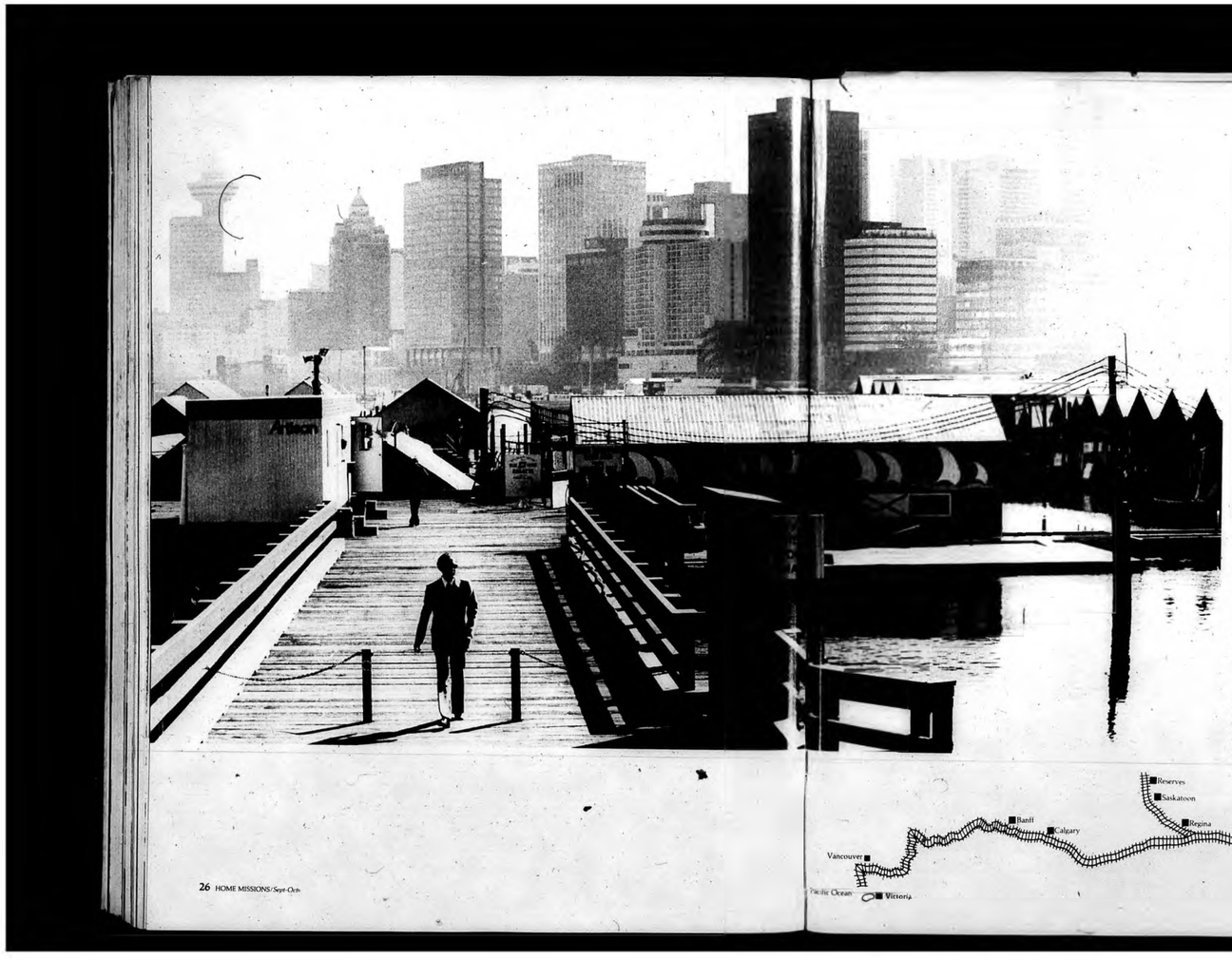

Vancouver

. . . lies ahead. The ferry sails over jade-green sea. Wispy morning mist hugs fir-studded islands. Passengers eat, knit, read newspapers and gossip magazines. The light is pure, brilliant; the air clean.

Southern Baptist work in Canada began in Vancouver, a towering city of 1.5 million. In the early '50s, a group petitioned the Northwest Baptist Convention for help in forming a church. When NW Baptists accepted the Canadian request, the action shattered tradition, for the SBC had no direct work in Canada. "It was a mistake to restrict Southern Baptists from Canada," says Canadian layman Desmond Price. "Our call is to the world." In 1977, the Convention agreed, freeing its agencies to enter into Canadian work.

Today all Canadian SBC churches affiliate with the NW Convention. Two of Vancouver's churches—Royal Heights, pastored by pragmatic Allan Schmidt, and First Chinese, led by energetic Jonathan Cheung—are among the NW's largest. Yet growth has not been easy. Explains Canadian bivocational pastor Jim Yoder: "It's slow, because our people have to work their way through three decisions: first, the conversion itself; then, especially for those from non-evangelical backgrounds who experienced infant baptism—and that's almost everybody—baptism becomes a hurdle; finally, getting them to commit themselves to membership in a local church is difficult. And all the cliches a Southern Baptist preacher may rattle off don't have much meaning to them."

The denomination must be more aggressive than United of Christ—largest Protestant group—warns 74-year-old Marian Lee, an original Canadian Southern Baptist: "We've got to get back to that old get-up-and-go spirit. We're so thrilled to get help directly now.

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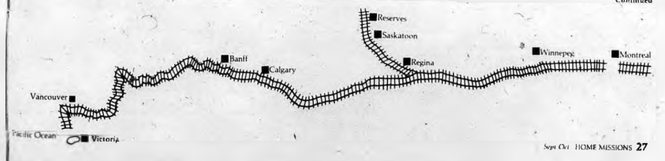

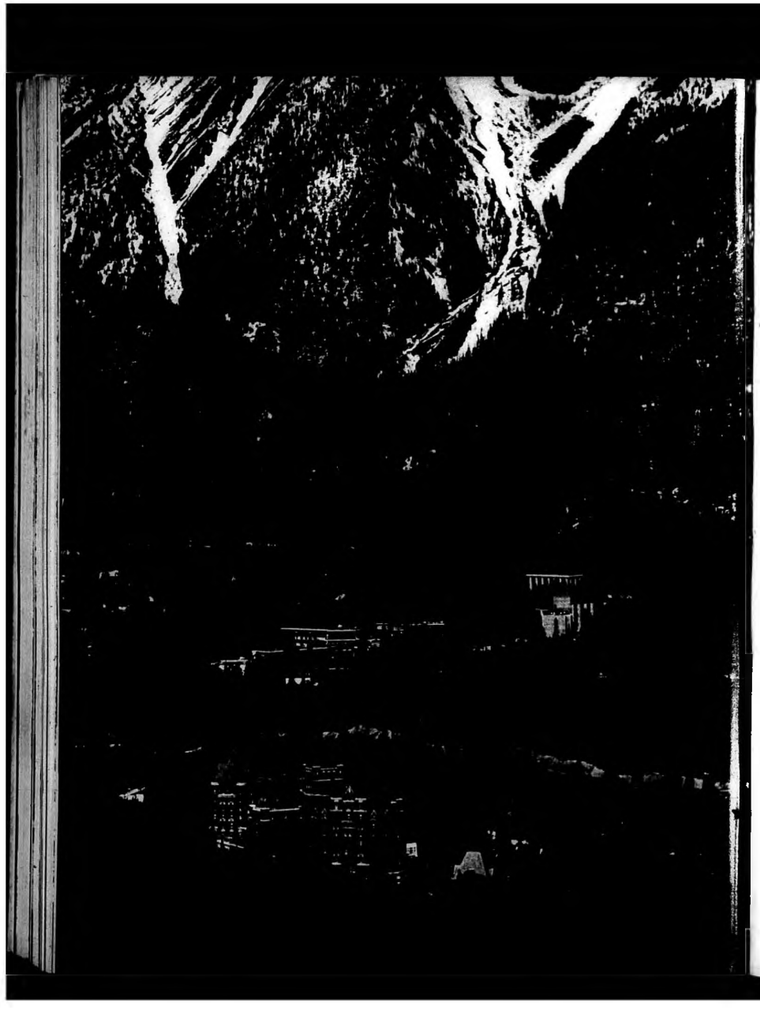

Banff/Calgary

. . . the mountain resort serves as playground for the boom city of the plain. 24 hours ago the train chugged out of Vancouver, sun bleeding on jagged skyline. Kids on bikes waved; a river shimmering and shadowed, guided us into snowy mountains blued by moonlight.

On steel lips, the train curves through mountains capped with diamonds sparkling in morning sun, before descending onto plain. Midafternoon, we pull into John Cunningham's *Calgary. A 20-year resident, he's proud of his city, his skill in "curling" (above), a popular ice-sport, and most of all, his church, 200-member Cambrian Heights, where he's pastored 16 years while starting a couple of missions, including one for Chinese of the city. Southern Baptists, transferred north by oil companies exploring the province's rich fields, helped start the work. But today it, as most Canadian SBC churches, is primarily indigenous.*

Fastest growing work is Willow Park, where Bob Meekin baptized 105 in '78. "We've got freedom," Meekin explains his success. "Our church has no traditions to break; no past to live up to; we're not afraid to do anything . . .

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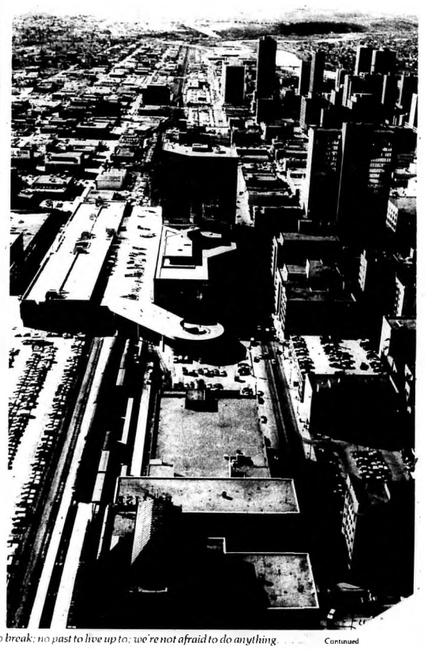

Regina

. . . crowns treeless plain. Calgary's rolling hills have melted into vast tabletop farmlands—a magnetic breadbasket 2,000 miles wide, pulling to its fertile soil Slav and Russian immigrants who built its heritage, from religion to perogies (below), doughballs of cheese and potatoes, popular even at the Baptist church.

Yes, there is a Baptist church, plucked from this tightknit, reserved people by a "gentle man with strength and bulldog nature," as a friend describes Larry Spenser, pastor of Discovery church—a surprising log building in a "fine middle-class suburb—doing great." Says Lou Brhelle, who shed Slavic tradition to join, "This church satisfies my needs. It has a fellowship I'd never felt before."

That Spenser is even in Regina is among those miracles common to Canadian work. A successful Arkansas pastor, Spenser visited Regina at invitation of Henry Blackaby, one of Canada's visionary pastors. Blackaby's challenge to begin an SBC witness tormented Spenser, who finally prayed, "Lord, whatever you want. But if it's Canada, let me hear soon." That night a U.S. pastor, working volunteer in Regina, phoned: "Hey, I'm up here and I'm told you're going to be the first pastor. What do you want me to do?"

Other "signs" convinced Spenser to pack up. The family struggled for two years before Spenser found, like earth at spring thaw, what God promised: "an openness and interest that's unparalleled."

On Christmas Eve last year, Discovery's 50 members sang Silent Night in six languages. And Larry Spenser realized once again he'd come to the right place.

Continued

Saskatoon

. . . north from Regina, is heartland—brown wheat stubble pokes through final patches of snow; powerlines, telephone webs, concrete ribbon-roads, create umbilical cords linking tiny, scattered clusters of houses and silos.

Summer sun boils, winter blizzards freeze. Chill-factored temperatures dive to 120° below. Winds howl all seasons. The first explorer, it's said, described the region as "fit only for wild animals and savages." Early farmers, the story goes, nailed logging chains to fence posts. Each morning they looked out their windows: if the chains flew horizontal to the ground, wind was too high to go out. The system worked, they say, until the posts blew away. And then, darned if the post-holes didn't blow away, too.

If this is land of legends, Southern Baptists' contribution to them is a joyful, charismatic Canadian, Henry Blackaby, whose name has become almost synonymous with missions. Blackaby, pastor of Faith Baptist Church from days its membership could meet comfortably in a closet and its budget fit neatly into a communion cup—"Money has never been a problem; we've never had more than we've needed, but we've always had all we needed"—Blackaby has been largely responsible for:

- beginning a seminary-extension type school to train young men and women for Christian missions; about 40 attend.
- starting 10-12 missions, as far as 170 miles away; three are now churches. Faith church responds to every request.
- stabilizing Faith, enlarging its congregation to more than 100, not counting missions. Including everyone Faith and its missions touches each week, the figure soars to 1,500-2,000.
- bringing to Canada such men as Spenser and Jack Conner. The quiet-spoken Conner, with an excellent record of church growth in California, suffered years of frustration in Prince Albert before breaking through cold indifference, family traditions and staid religious attitudes to draw about 50. For the first time, feels Conner, "People are hungry for spiritual nourishment."
- recognizing the need for work on college campuses. Robert Cannon, giving up a large stateside BSU directorship to come to Canada, says, "Our goal is to win the nation, so we place high priority on students." With their approach geared to "helping the churches, not siphoning off leaders," BSU workers find students "not apathetic, just more into marks and study and getting a job," says Dan Fishley of University of Victoria, one of five schools with full-time work. Still, Fishley draws "up to 75-100 with special events," and U.S.-er Kim Deniston, at University of Calgary, reports similar numbers.

Not only are students assuming leadership, adds Cannon (left), 45 have now enrolled in SBC seminaries—17 from Faith church alone. "Most weren't even Christians before our work began."

Recently, first of these to graduate, Henry Strauss (below) returned to Saskatoon to pastor one of Faith's missions. Despite lures of stateside churches, "It was easy to come back; from the beginning that's what I assumed I'd do."

"We continue to see new places," says Blackaby, smiling, "and God continues to affirm all that we're trying to do."

Continued

Reserves

. . . are known in the U.S. as reservations. In a nation of 250,000 Indians of 566 separate tribes, boxed into 2,200 reserves, the first Canadians suffer indignities of poverty and alcoholism.

"I am truly sorry," the letter reads, "for what happens and hope you'll all understand. . . . I've prayed for the Lord to forgive me, too, and that all of you would be with him. . . . I'm asking you my people to stop drinking, live the life God wanted, and be proud to be Indian."

The young Indian penned that letter, posted it for friends, then—in the ultimate act of protest against reserve conditions—committed suicide.

Loren Klassen and Gerry Taillon (above, with Mrs. Ida Bigears and her great granddaughter) believe such despair can turn to hope. Both work out of Faith church on province reserves. Both Canadians, both students of Blackaby's, Klassen and Taillon express "genuine, loving concern."

Taillon, in his second year, is an humble yet innovative leader, able to break down barriers and encourage Indians to accept more active roles in the church. "I'm working with people who trust me," he explains, "but it's all an experiment—I don't preach to them, but we talk together. It all seems to be working. God's been so good to me."

Continued

Winnepeg . . . thaws from its worst winter—113 days of below freezing. Snow water puddles streets; the city's 570,000 residents splash to work, school, play—and occasionally, to church. One is Friendship Baptist, which recently on high-attendance Sunday had 357 attend, setting a Canadian SBC record.

The church, averaging 180, has two missions: one—Garden Park, pastored by lanky Ray Cooper, a collector of Studebakers (most of which barely run); the other—by Colin Noden, a French/English bilingual Canadian (above).

Noden's conversion from ancestral Catholicism was one of many miracles at Friendship, says Gene Laird, whose six-year pastorate has seen many peaks and valleys—and one nosedive: during its building program, the church came up $15,000 short. In utter despair, Laird (left) prayed. That evening, when he opened the mail, a letter said: "I don't know why I'm doing this. I don't know why I've picked this amount, but I believe you need it now." Out of the letter fell a check for $15,000.

Continued

Montreal

. . . our final stop, is ahead. No Southern Baptist work remains along the route. At dinner—as happens often in train dining cars—we're joined by two Canadians. Conversation turns to Canada's problems, from inflation to crime.

"What's to be done?" asks the woman.

"You've got to start with morals, don't you?" replies the businessman returning from a skiing holiday.

The woman, a nurse going to visit relatives, sighs. "Certainly church attendance has declined alarmingly, especially among the middle class, so you can't count on its influence in daily life."

"Yes." The man puffs his pipe. "And that's the pity."

Outside our window, dark firs and glacier lakes, bathed in moonlight, stealthily pass. Train tracks aren't like modern highways, whose wide swaths push the world beyond their barricades. Trains are intimate; they cut, but never an; ntate countryside—a narrow gash that heals as the smoke disappears.

So it is easy, lulled by the train's clickety-clack heartbeat, to feel close to Canada. And to remember another conversation, months earlier, held while driving in the rain with Cecil Sims, shortly after he had been appointed coordinator of SBC work in Canada. A Northwest pastor for 25 years, Sims told how knowing Canada had changed his opinion of Southern Baptist involvement here. "I was one of those who felt our efforts for a limited number of people were out of proportion to our resources," he confides.

Now Sims believes differently. "In the next decades, you'll see work in Canada reflect a greater proportion of growth than work in the States. And I believe Canada will become a focal point of challenge for our churches all across the Southern Baptist Convention."

Canada has 35 SBC churches and missions with, at most, 4,000 members. Already its growth rates double those of Northwest convention churches, whose percentage of increase, in turn, exceeds overall SBC averages.

Of course Sims acknowledges handicaps: lack of leadership, money and personnel; need to develop new techniques that stress "long-term, cultivative evangelism rather than short-term programs," he feels, "and one-to-one rather than mass, crusade-type approaches."

Certainly there are pitfalls. "We've got to make it clear we're not out to sell them an American bill of goods, not out to make Southern Baptists out of everybody, but to put Christ first."

People who come to Canada on this basis, says Sims, will find "a unique opportunity" for serving on one of Southern Baptists' "greatest possible mission fields, yet one which has very few language and cultural barriers."

However, a few remain: We'd watched a BSU group from Texas just a few days before—students on a mission tour, giving a puppet show for some three dozen youngsters.

The M.C. asked: "Y'all like puppets?"

No response.

Twice more he tried—still to stony silence— before the correct words dawned: "Do you like puppets?"

Cheers nearly tore down the house.

So cultural differences exist—differences that make Canadians proud, independent, and loyal to their heritage. But as Sims also observed, "So far, I've noticed that underneath, people are people, wherever they are."

And, as a couple dozen people from Victoria to Winnepeg pointed out, cultural differences, whether Canadian-American, or, within Canada itself, English-speaking vs. French-speaking, can be overcome.

Colin Noden of Winnepeg first attended Friendship church because he was dating the pastor's daughter. He stayed for himself. "In the shower, actually it was, God and I cleared some things away." When Noden became Baptist, his parents exploded. He lived on vitamins and toast for months before they reconciled. Yet he's never doubted the "divine imperative" he feels to the ministry. At Ile des Chenese, a Francophone village 40 miles fr m Winnepeg, he pastors "the second church"—the first one is an old Catholic cainedral. "We're here to serve," he says. "My goal is to have God's spirit working in both churches. Our church cannot satisfy everyone; but everyone needs Christ. . . ." □

Death of a cotton-string culture

But in dying comes birth, and for Laotian refugees, new hope, new life, in a new land.

A yellow tempera-paint drawing of the largest Buddhist temple in Laos adorns the outside of the red-brick meeting hall in Des Moines, Iowa. Above it, gently flapping in the spring breeze, a white banner blazing with large hand-drawn, red letters stretches across the building.

The slashes of red seem an odd mixture of Phoenician alphabet and Chinese cuneiform. But to the crowd of about 350—themselves a mixture of two worlds—the bright slashes hold a clear message. They tell of transplanted people groping for recognition and identity in a new country, while they attempt to preserve old-country customs and values.

The banner's letters spell APPLE, an acronym for Association for Positive Promotion of Lao Ethnics, a political/cultural fellowship of 3,000 Laotian refugees in Iowa, part of the 20,000 Laotians who have immigrated to the United States since their war-ravaged nation was overrun in 1975.

Inside the building, electronic sound instruments mingle with traditional trappings for the Buddhist ritual of *basi*. One wall holds banners of Buddhist proverbs. Gold rimmed red candles, shaped like three-headed elephants, adorn a cloth-draped table. The three-headed elephant, symbol of Laos, also appears on the old Laotian national flag above the table. Centered on an aging rug are flowers, ordered from Hawaii because the blooms hold special significance for Buddhists.

The ancient ceremony, honoring souls of the spirit world, has lost religious importance; yet passed from generation to generation, it continues to be widely practiced by Laotian Buddhists at weddings, births or, as in this instance, New Year's celebrations.

Continued

By Judy Touchton
Photography by Ken Touchton

Strings and hands move slowly, from person to person, 'til they reach Vang

In Laos people went to the temple and asked Buddhist monks for blessings. In the United States, the immigrants bring blessings to each other. With hands folded in prayer, men and women sit circling the flowers. One by one, they pull from the centerpiece its interwoven cotton strings.

Mumbling a prayer in Bali, the Buddhist language, each ties the little white string around the wrist of another, wishing good luck for the coming year.

Strings and hands move slowly, from devout elder Buddhist to young child. Best wishes follow softly spoken prayers.

Joshua Vang, a board member of APPLE, watches quietly, his face showing no emotion . . . until a woman moves toward him, a cotton string in her outstretched hands.

Vang politely refuses the gesture. And in so doing, Vang transcends culture in a symbolic commitment to his Christian faith. For as leader of the 20,000 Christians in Laos before immigrating to the United States, and as unofficial religious godfather of the estimated 5,000 Laotian Christians in the United States, Vang bridges cultures of Laos and America as a home missionary for Southern Baptists.

More than 13 Laotian congregations are affiliated with Southern Baptists. Vang expects 11 others to affiliate. They hesitate, he says, because most refugees, often financially dependent on sponsoring churches, fear offending their benefactors by aligning with another denomination.

Those 24-25 SBC-oriented Laotian congregations represent 60 percent of the 5,000 Laotian Christians in this country.

To many of these Laotian Christian congregations, Vang has given encouragement and guidance. The Laotian Evangelical Baptist Church in Providence, R.I., which now has about 300 members, gives an example of Vang's leadership.

A Laotian in Providence had a brother in Des Moines, where Vang was based. The brothers decided Vang should visit Providence to help a few Laotian Christians meeting in a home.

Vang found them a better place to meet and helped them attract more Laotians; he also gained support for them from Providence Baptist Church, pastored by home missionary Marion Hayes. Fifty-one charter members constituted into a separate SBC church in 1978. And, at its present growth rate, the Laotian congregation will soon outnumber the Anglo church, which has 81 resident members.

Other Laotian congregations match Providence in strength. The Des Moines Lao Baptist Church, begun in 1977, and pastored by Vang until his relocation to Atlanta in summer 1979, boasts 200 members.

A Laotian group in Murfreesboro, Tenn., just outside Nashville, lists 40 members and 65 attending. First Baptist Church's Anglo members spend several hours each week teaching English and helping immigrants learn the routine chores of industrialized society: telephoning, driving an auto, budgeting and handling money, selecting appliances, purchasing.

Vang also helps overcome problems experienced by Laotian Christian groups. In Decatur, Ga., a woman immigrant began Laotian work at Columbia Drive Baptist Church. When Bee Phosai, a refugee who'd escaped to Thailand by swimming a river with her baby on her back, rented an apartment from a member of Columbia Drive church, she was invited to worship. Through Phosai's family, contact with other Laotians began. Soon 57 Laotians attended Sunday services.

But few spoke more than broken English. A crash course in English taught by Mildred Blankenship, HMB literacy specialist, was started. Others in the church helped the Laotians search want ads and businesses for jobs.

Yet it was not until Joshua Vang visited the refugees that Columbia Drive church members discovered most of the refugees had become Christians already. During four days at the church, Vang counseled with each refugee. Ten expressed decisions for Christ; one family joined by statement.

Vang was especially pleased at Columbia Drive's acceptance of the family by statement, he explains; many Laotian Christians are insulted when Baptist groups insist they be baptized (re-baptized, in effect) because the refugees believe their original baptism in their Laotian church is acceptable to God.

Although his efforts contributed much to Columbia Drive's efforts, Vang realizes Laotian work there—and elsewhere in the States—cannot make as much progress as he would like because of Laotians' scattered resettlement patterns. "If we were all in one

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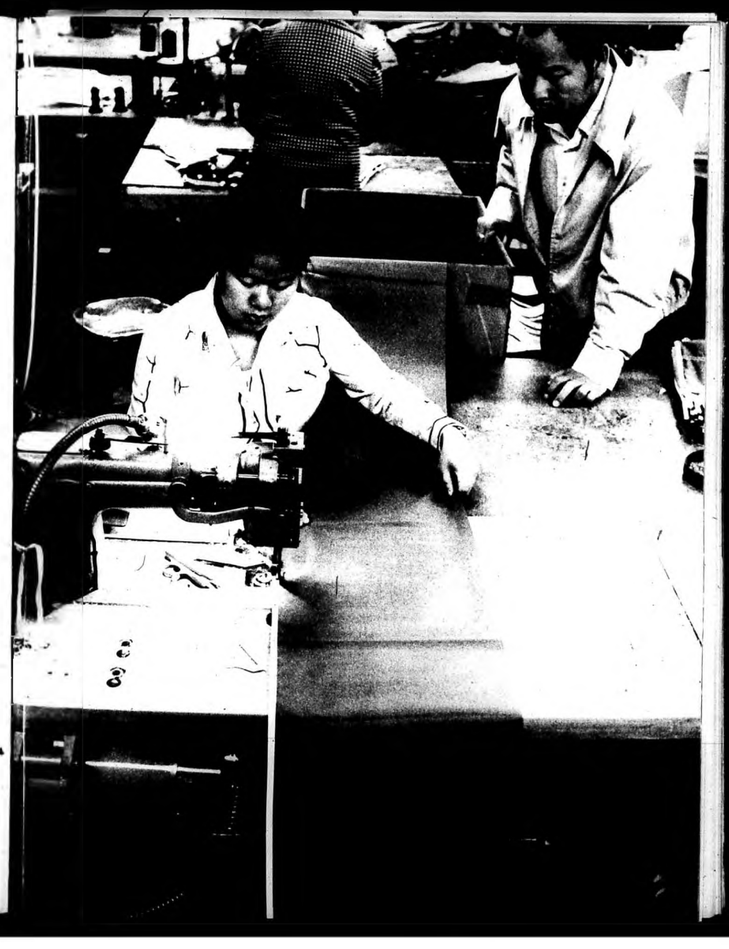
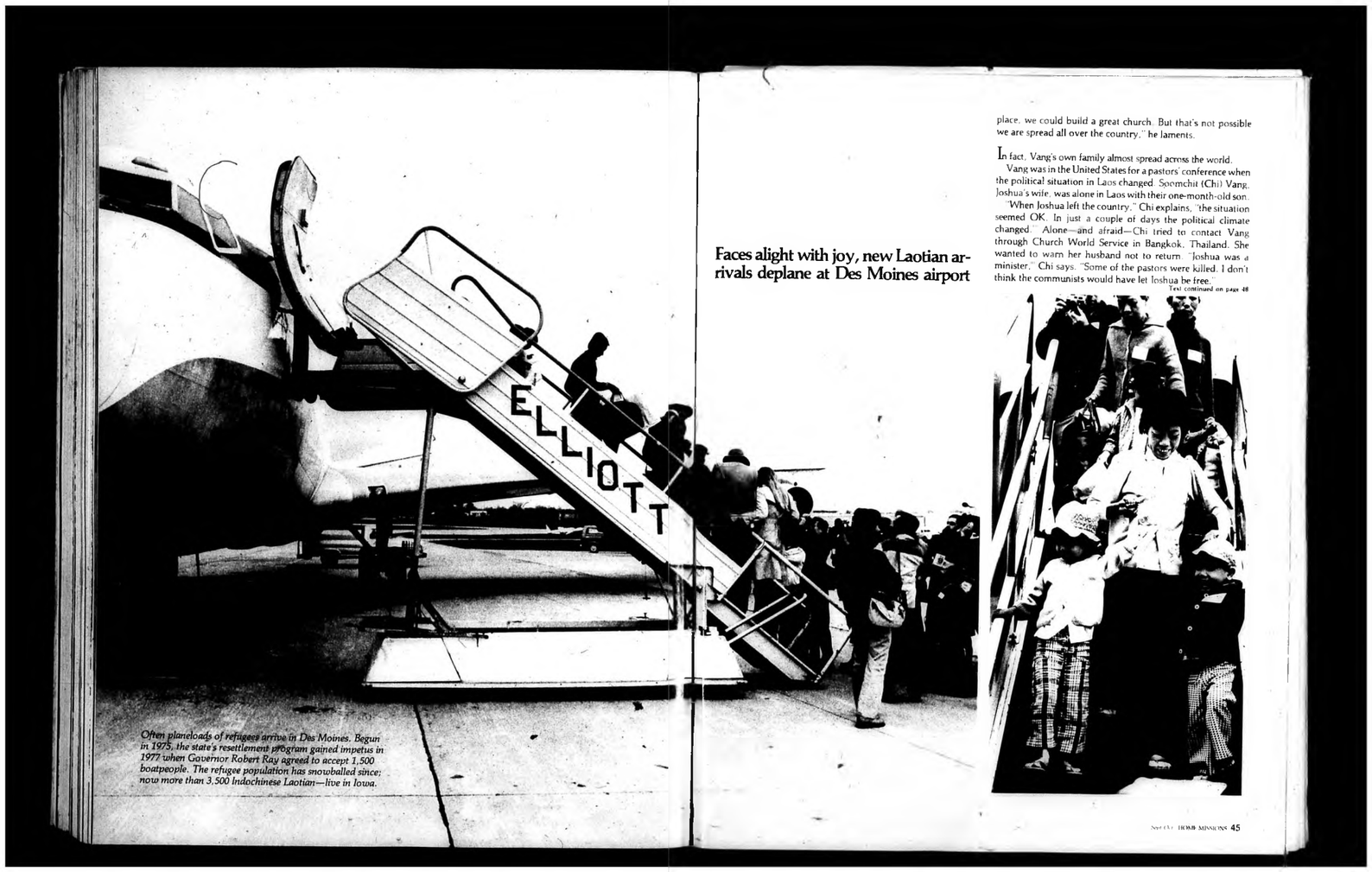


As part of his ministry to Des Moines Laotians, Joshua Vang (left photo) often finds jobs for newcomers, then drops by their work (right) to make sure they are able to get along.



Often planeloads of refugees arrive in Des Moines. Begun in 1975, the state's resettlement program gained impetus in 1977 when Governor Robert Ray agreed to accept 1,500 boatpeople. The refugee population has snowballed since; now more than 3,500 Indochinese Laotian—live in Iowa.

Faces alight with joy, new Laotian arrivals deplane at Des Moines airport

place, we could build a great church. But that's not possible we are spread all over the country," he laments.

In fact, Vang's own family almost spread across the world.

Vang was in the United States for a pastors' conference when the political situation in Laos changed. Soemchit (Chi) Vang, Joshua's wife, was alone in Laos with their one-month-old son.

"When Joshua left the country," Chi explains, "the situation seemed OK. In just a couple of days the political climate changed." Alone—and afraid—Chi tried to contact Vang through Church World Service in Bangkok, Thailand. She wanted to warn her husband not to return. "Joshua was a minister," Chi says. "Some of the pastors were killed. I don't think the communists would have let Joshua be free."

Text continued on page 48

Something happened in my heart

and Joshua Vang's life changed that day in Laos in a way that began to prepare him for a drastically different future.

Joshua Vang is Laotian. And very proud of his heritage. Yet as a Christian, he also expresses discontent with cultural adaptations of Buddhist rituals that permeate his nation's traditions. Not only do such practices clash with his faith, they also surface the painful emotional and physical struggles he suffered in the confrontation between the Christianity of his father and the religion of his homeland.

In the late 1880s missionaries from Thailand came into northern Laos; consequently, many Khamou tribespeople accepted Christianity. About 1940, Khamou—one of about 52 tribal groups in Laos—entered the village of Vang's family. Vang's father became an early convert from Buddhism.

Vang's father moved his family from the mountains to the capital of the small Indochinese country.

In Vientiane, Vang had opportunities not available to children of mountain tribes. He attended school. But school for Vang turned into a persecution instead of a privilege.

Buddhism, official religion of the country, had been disavowed by his father. Yet every morning and every afternoon at school, children were forced to bow before Buddha. Vang refused—but not for his own convictions. He knew if someone told his father he had worshipped Buddha, he would be beaten. The alternative, however, was little better. As punishment for his rebellion, school officials forced the young Vang to kneel for hours with heavy stones on his hands.

Vang became a casualty in the war between his father's and his country's faiths: "I never thought I would become a Christian," Vang recalls. "I thought religion was for old people. My own aim was to be educated and have a family and a job. When I get old, I think about religion.

"Even though I was raised a Christian," Vang adds, "I had not accepted Jesus Christ. I only accept by mouth for my father's sake."

Vang's confusion and frustration grew as his father abandoned practices allowed by his Buddhist faith, including a lucrative opium trade.

Problems that followed Vang blamed on Christianity: "If he stayed a Buddhist, we wouldn't be poor and he could support me to get an education."

In the early '50s, war ripped Laos. Forced by the fighting to abandon their home in Vientiane, for two years the family lived in caves in north Laos.

After the war, the family began again only to have revolution erupt in 1962. Again the family fled, this time living in the jungle for four years. During this exile, Vang's grandparents died of water disease. Their bloated stomachs and punchy-fat faces evidenced their starvation on a diet consisting totally of drinking water. What little rice the family had was used in puddings to keep babies quiet so the communists would not find them.

All about were horrors and agony. "I saw young people and children die in fighting. I saw a woman carrying a baby who delivered another child beside the road before being killed.

"Even so," Vang remembers, "my father does not stop his belief. He still prays and reads the Bible."

In 1963, Vang became sick while in military training. "Almost died," he maintains. "Death," he discovered, "was something for everybody . . . not just the old." After months in bed recuperating, he had to learn to walk again. One day in 1965, about Easter, while out walking, he went to church and heard Chaptau Souban, a Christian from southern Laos.

"That moment something happened in my heart," Vang says. He returned to his room where he "knelt and read the Bible and prayed for the Holy Spirit to enter my heart."

Vang began to pray every night. "I would ask the Lord to open a way for me to go to another country to learn the Word and see what other Christians believe." He prayed for one year before receiving a scholarship to the Thailand Theological Seminary.

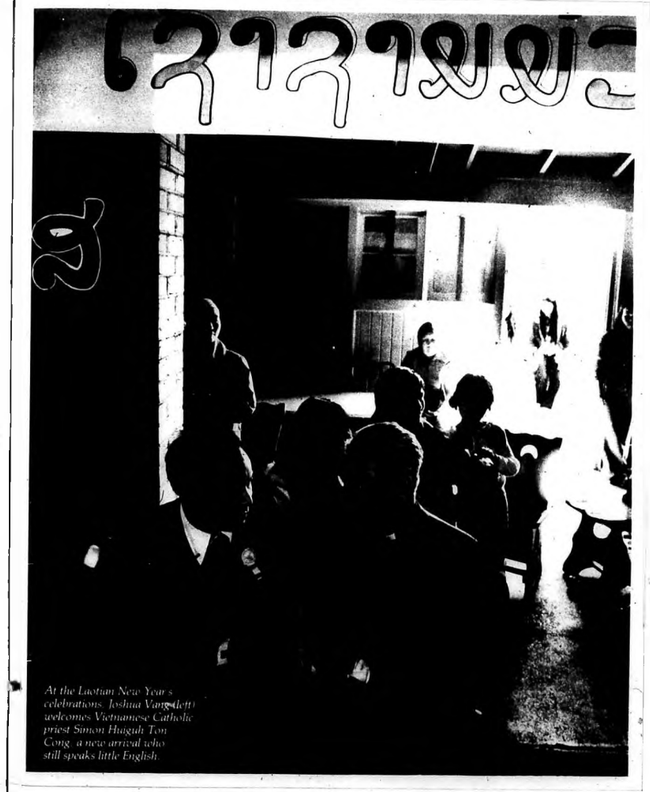
After his Thailand experience, Vang wanted next to study "what the white, European people believe."

Again Vang prayed—this time for two years—for leadership to a European Bible school. He wrote many, finally being given a scholarship to New Zealand Bible College.

In 1972, at age 26, Vang felt ready to enter the ministry.

That year, the Laos Evangelical Church, in its national meeting, elected Vang its general secretary. From 1972 to 1975, when he immigrated, Vang headed Laos' official Christian church while also serving as pastor of a church in the capital city.

During those years, Vang worked seven days a week, lecturing, performing administrative responsibilities and preaching and conducting worship services in five languages. The demanding schedule prepared Vang for the ministry he would practice after widespread upheaval in Southeast Asia—following capitulation of Vietnam—forced him and hundreds of his countrymen in 1975 to immigrate to the United States. □



At the Laotian New Year's celebrations, Joshua Vang (left) welcomes Vietnamese Catholic priest Simon Huigui Ton Cong, a new arrival who still speaks little English.

Feeling "called to be a minister, not furniture maker," Vang moved to Iowa

Despite danger to her own life, Chi was afraid to flee for fear she would lose contact with Vang.

Finally Chi reached Vang, who had arrived in Bangkok. Then she and the baby, leaving everything behind in their brand-new home, hurried for the Thailand border. "If you came to the border with empty hands, they let you go," she recalls.

After a frantic year of relocation, Vang, with help of a Methodist bishop he'd met in Laos, united his family—parents, brothers, sisters—and settled in Louisville, the first and only Laotian family to settle there for several years.

As Vang held one after another menial job, his depression increased. "I was called to be a minister, not a furniture builder," he says. So when a fellow Laotian immigrant asked him to come to Des Moines to lead the large Laotian group of Open Bible Church, Vang accepted eagerly.

But "theological differences with Open Bible doctrine," especially instructions to teach "speaking in tongues," gave Vang no comfort in his ministry. He began praying for a way to leave Open Bible Church and still remain a pastor full-time.

Meanwhile, Imogene Pipes, an active Baptist in Des Moines, had begun a Bible study for Laotian refugees.

Pipes' early efforts succeeded "largely because she loves people," explains Mike Roberts, Iowa Southern Baptist Fellowship language missions director.

But soon Pipes' lack of experience caused difficulties. "We just couldn't reach the people because of the language barrier," Pipes says. "I began praying for God to send me a man to lead the work." Finally, Pipes convinced David Bunch, then director of the Iowa fellowship, now at the HMB, to contact Vang, whom she had met through a Laotian member of her Bible study.

Vang was quizzed by association pastors about his teachings, his baptism, his ordination. The pastors found him "Baptist" in his beliefs; Vang began working with Southern Baptists.

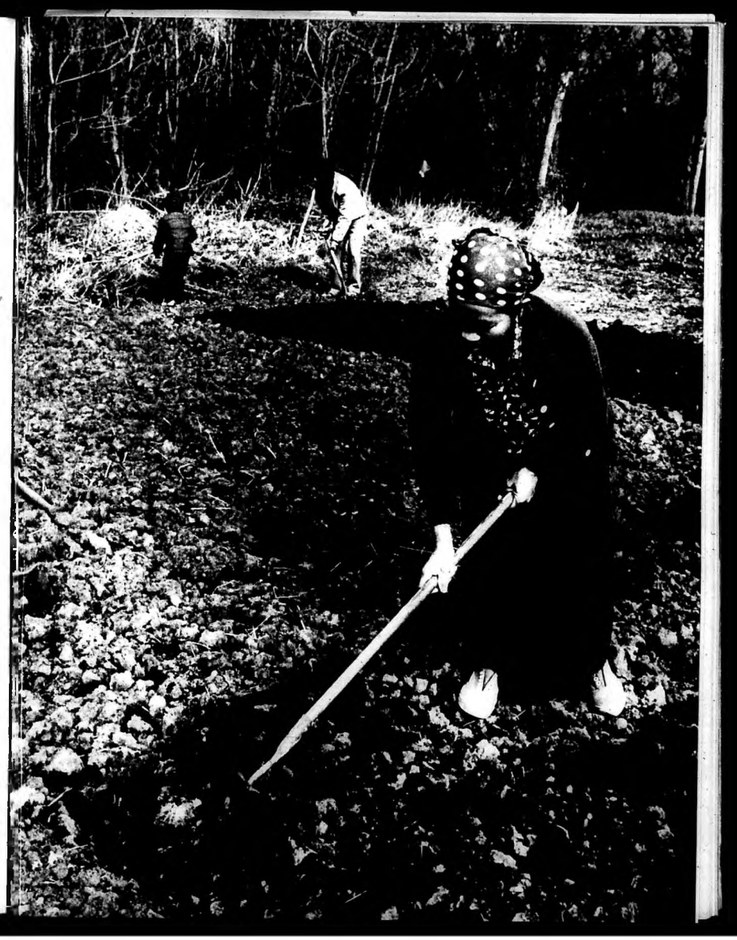
Mike Roberts, who directed Vang's work until his relocation in Atlanta, says, "Joshua learns quickly. He knows how to control himself and work around people and situations . . . and his real strong point is he speaks a whole handful of languages."

In addition, Van understands cultural distinctions of this tribe, the Hmong, and the other two major Laotian tribes, the Thai Dom and the Lao—important because of inbred rivalries.

Oscar Romo, language missions director for the Home Mis-

Continued

Right: *As they have for years, the Blong Vang family—Joshua's cousins—till the soil by hand. Almost every Laotian has a garden.*
Below: *In the home of new immigrants he's helped resettle, Vang explains medical immunization programs necessary for the children.*



Vang tells refugees: I'm not rich, but what I have is yours. Do not despair

Jane Poole teaches English at First Baptist, Murfreesboro, Tenn.

sion Board, expects the newly appointed Vang to "help us locate Laotians, start new work, discover and train leaders and develop materials. We want him to interpret Southern Baptists to the Laotian Christians," Romo says, "but we also want him to interpret Laotians to Southern Baptists."

"There is a great need among the refugee people and by helping them, some become Christians," Vang explains.

But methods must be adjusted to culture. "The old people are too conservative, too old to win. It is foo difficult to wash their brains to become Christians," Vang says. He prefers "to win the young people first because they would be our future, " but in Laotian culture, children do not "teach the parents." Therefore, Vang feels, Baptists must concentrate on "the whole family," or "parents will stop children from going to church. If you win head of the family first, other members will follow."

Vang contends one reason for separating Laotian congregations from Anglos, apart from language, is "since the children become acculturated before parents, one way to stop acculturation is to get the young people into a Laotian church." And for Vang, with his pride of heritage, "starting a church for Laotian people is not only for religion but for their identity and language. A group without culture cannot live."

"In Laos we were almost dominated by missionaries who wanted to Americanize us. In Laos, even if we become Christian, we do not necessarily become American," Vang insists. "To become a Christian, we must stop worshipping the devil and idols. But we don't have to stop our own customs." In the U.S., Vang discovers "many sponsors who try to teach refugees to be like Americans. But how can we be just like you?"

Adjusting to American civilization is not easy. Many refugees must be taught to drive, to use a checking account, to fill out forms, to get children immunized, to dial a telephone, even to open and close a car door.

"Back in our country," Vang explains, "people are poor in physical ways but they are happy inside. They may not have a fancy house or electricity but they never worry that at the end of the month they must pay all the bills. They have freedom.

"Everybody feels sorry they have to leave their country but they had no choice. Even myself, I love my country."

Vang, learning from his own experience, attempts to make new immigrants feel less pressure after their arrival in this strange land. During a visit to a government housing project near downtown Des Moines, he listened as a teenage son played Lao folk songs on an electric guitar. On a stucco wall above him, a map of Indochina hung like a priceless painting. The youngest child, a round-faced elf with a brand-new Superman T-shirt, ran in and out, banging the screened door.

The father, Lao Thai Vang (no relation to Joshua), sat on a battered couch. He wore a new pair of Army surplus boots; the rest of his clothes were hand-me-downs. Yet in Laos he was mayor of a city. "Back home I am a leader," he explains. "But when I come to this country, I don't speak English, I am just like the deaf and dumb. You have to have someone to lead you like with a bridle. Because you need the young people—they don't need you—it's hard to keep their respect.

"We're not used to dressing in used clothes," he continues. "But here we have to take whatever the sponsor gives.

"America is a great country . . . like Superman . . . a great nation, but I wish for a chance to begin again. Back home, people would give up if faced with this kind of life. . . ."

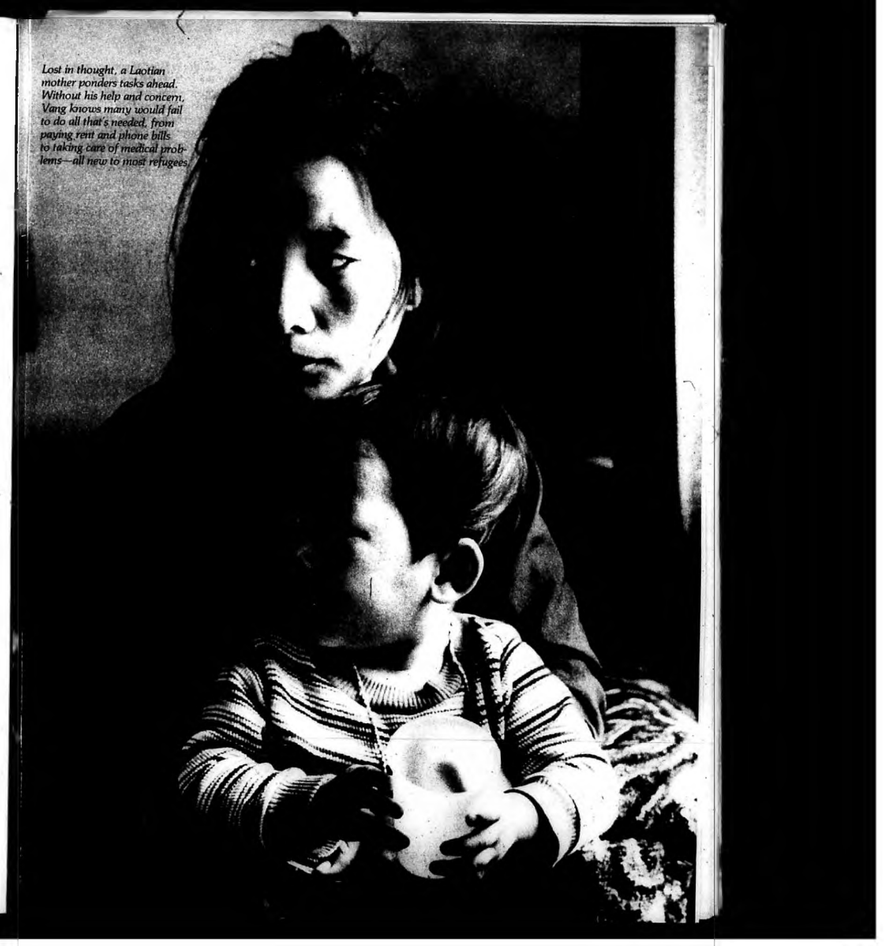
The father, with tears in his eyes and a voice so low Vang strained to hear him, had been in the States 10 months. No American had ever visited him.

Vang identifies with the father. He also faced severe adjustments: "Immediately you change your whole life from a high position of leadership in the national church. . . . I feel very much depressed myself for a while. I cry many times.

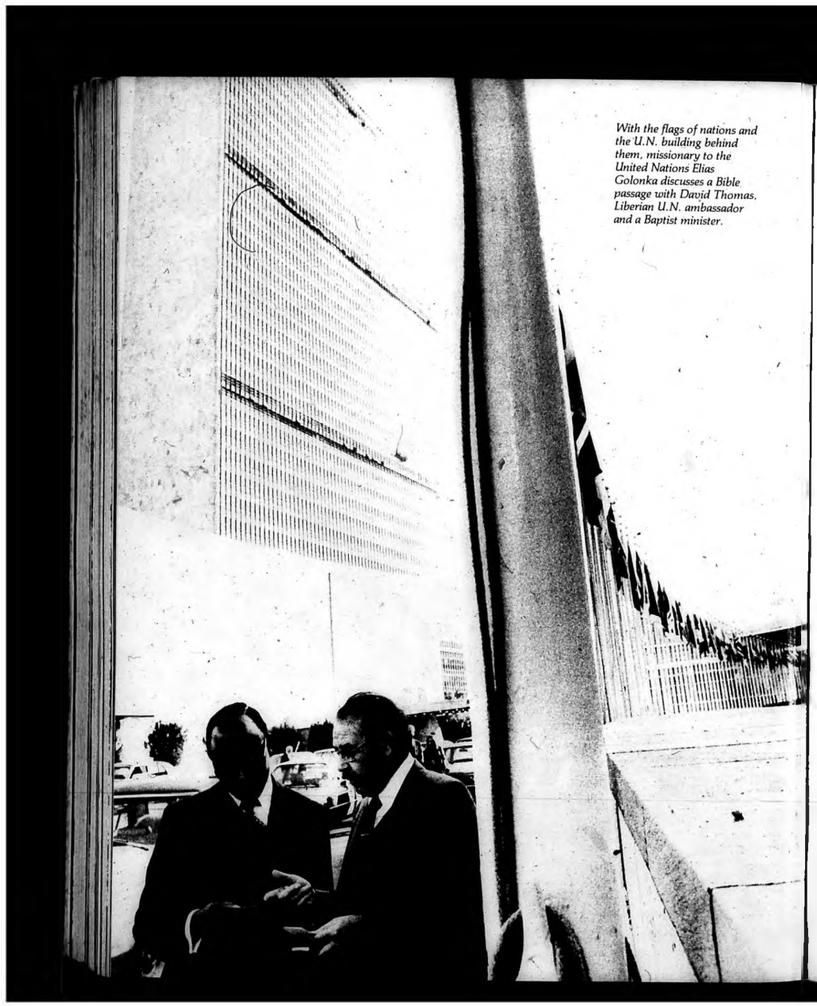
"For a long time after I arrived in the United States I didn't want to go out and give my testimony and preach. I didn't think I had anything to be thankful for," Vang confesses. "Now I see that I can share with other refugees. I can say, 'I am a refugee just like you. I am not wealthy but what I have is yours.' I can say I had the same trouble. I say, 'Don't be discouraged. You must be ready to accept whatever comes.'

"Some refugees feel America owes them a new life.

"I don't feel America owes me. If I come to this country, I must teach communism is no good; Christianity is good." □



Lost in thought, a Laotian mother ponders tasks ahead. Without his help and concern, Vang knows many would fail to do all that's needed, from paying rent and phone bills to taking care of medical problems—all new to most refugees.



With the flags of nations and the U.N. building behind them, missionary to the United Nations Elias Golonka discusses a Bible passage with David Thomas, Liberian U.N. ambassador and a Baptist minister.

OUR MAN AT THE UN

By Elaine Furlow
Photography by Don Rutledge

There he was on the front page of the Sunday *New York Times*, right behind five Russian dissidents: Elias Golonka, the Home Mission Board's man at the United Nations, suddenly in the spotlight as translator, aide, welcoming committee and friend to Russian Baptist dissident Georgi Vins, one of the five who faced reporters in New York just hours after being exchanged for two Soviet spies.

Meeting the exiled Vins was emotional: "I just told him who I was, welcome to the United States, and we embraced."

"I feel at home now," responded Vins, "to be greeted by a Baptist, in Russian."

Golonka met Vins that April Saturday through Olin Robison, chairman of a Presidental commission on international communication. Robison, a Baptist, knew Golonka's U.N. work. "Russian-speaking Baptists are hard to find," says Robison. "I was glad to have him along."

And the situation had its irony. Months earlier, Golonka had talked to the two convicted spies who were traded for Vins and other prisoners.

"I'm a minister," Golonka told the two at their trial in New Jersey.

"We're not religious."

"I come as a friend," Golonka said, telling the two former employees of the Soviet mission that he follows Jesus' teaching: "I was hungry and ye fed me, in prison and ye visited me." Later he gave them Russian Bibles.

Dealing with spies and participating in

Continued

international news events are unusual, of course. But as a home missionary to the U.N., Golonka is no stranger to the world of diplomats and different cultures. Since 1974 he has been "building bridges of understanding" between Baptists and visiting citizens of other nations. About 28,000 "internationals" relate to the U.N. and consulates in New York City. "We want them to know we're glad to have them here; we want them to have a good experience in this country, have friends here," says Golonka, who himself immigrated to the United States in 1950.

To meet staff members, Golonka follows diplomatic protocol, writing or calling for permission. In his welcoming letter, he points out Southern Baptists are like the U.N.: "multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural."

"I would like to know you," he offers.

About one-third of the diplomats agree.

Recalls David Thomas, former U.N. ambassador from Liberia, "I was glad to know of someone who cared, and we developed a very close friendship."

Golonka seems ideally qualified for his job. He speaks Russian, Polish, German, Ukrainian, Czech and Belorussian, and is conversant in Bulgarian and Serbo-Croatian. Born in Poland near the Russian border, the 63-year-old missionary has studied 16 languages, finding none particularly difficult except Chinese—"I tried it two weeks but it gave me such a headache I quit."

Yet knowing other languages and wearing pin-striped suits are not enough to allow him to travel in diplomatic circles. He traces that ability to his eastern European upbringing:

"I grew up in this [United Nations] sort of environment. My grandfather was manager of the Russian czar's hunting property and my father and brother hunted with dignitaries. So, I picked it up.

"To do this work, you need to feel secure around diplomats, to know when to call one 'your excellence,'" he grins; "or 'your eminence.' Also I have to be constantly aware for cultural nuances. To eat like this is in Europe to be a peasant."

The visiting Russian asked, "Elias, what does it mean to be a born-again Christian?"

The U.N. has 151 countries represented. When Golonka started, he made two lists: "the ones I knew about—Germany, Switzerland, Sweden and so forth—and the ones I didn't. Then I started reading." Some, like Guyana, were unfamiliar. "The Third World is new to me."

When looking for a house, Golonka and his wife Nancy, a writer, found an inexpensive one they liked 45 miles from New York City. But, aware that Soviet diplomats are restricted to a 25-mile radius of Times Square, the Golonkas switched to another, more costly home just 15 miles from the city.

The decision proved wise: About two-thirds of the ambassadors and staff live in Manhattan and Queens, Golonka estimates. "They are *anxious* to get out of town." He often invites them to his home.

Away from New York's gray skyscrapers, past New Jersey's smoggy refineries and into the suburbs they go, their visits to the Golonka home a placid and welcome change from city pressures: "The first time I take a diplomat's family out here, they are amazed—Look there *are* clean places in New York!' they say."

A large map of the world covers one wall of Golonka's den; a fat globe revolves in a corner. In a case are gifts from visitors: scriptures in Polish on birch bark, pictures from Russia, a miniature samovar, Ukrainian vases. Even—uncased—a large Siberian cat, Luba ("darling" in Russian), a present from Evgeny Romanov, press attache for the USSR U.N. mission.

At home, Golonka stresses fellowship. "We don't talk shop. We find many other things. But yes, sometimes we talk religion—they are interested in religion."

Oleg Yermishkin, a former Soviet press attache, brought his family for a weekend one December. His wife, Nelli, brought *borscht*, a Russian soup. The Yermishkin family had never had a Christmas tree, so they helped put up the Golonkas'. Then Yermishkin asked, "Elias, what does Jimmy Carter mean when he says he is a 'born-again Christian'?"

"That opened the door," recalls Golonka.

For he is up-front about being a minister. Even with communists—*especially* with communists—Golonka gives honest, straightforward answers.

"If you look at a map, communist countries go from Peking to Warsaw," he says. "If we neglect the communists, we neglect half the world's people." To those who consider communists enemies not to be dealt with, Golonka answers in the words of Christ: "Love your enemies, pray for them."

"We still have to obey that commandment," he says. "Have you prayed for Kosygin and Breshnev? I do. I ask God to find a way to speak to their hearts."

Of his personal friendships with communists, Golonka says, "No missionary is permitted into communist countries, but here we have *direct* access."

His openness also protects his friends. Party officials and Golonka "have reached a level of trust. They know I am a religious worker, that I give out Bibles. If they wanted to stop [me] they could. They would not invite us to see *them*. On the contrary, our circle of friends is enlarging."

That circle includes internationals from non-communist countries as well. Cecil Mahendraath, accountant for the Guyana Mission, arrived two years ago "knowing almost no one in New York. It's just you and your apartment—it's sort of lonely," he recalls. "The people are . . . ," he pauses. "The people are not easily hospitable to you."

However, Mahendraath, who had become a Christian through Southern Baptist foreign missions, soon heard from Elias Golonka. "You work hard, you worry about what is happening at home," says Mahendraath. "After I talk to Elias, I come back with new strength."

Mahendraath introduced Golonka to Guyana's U.N. ambassador, Noel Sinclair. Later, Golonka presented a modern English Bible to the ambassador.

Southern Baptist missionaries are not allowed in Guyana, but Golonka hopes this will change: "I'm reassuring the ambassador, an open-minded, intelligent man, that our missionaries are not CIA or anything, only religious workers."

Working with Candlewood Baptist Church in Danbury, Conn., about 50 miles from New York City, Golonka arranged for 10 families from the Guyana mission to have a potluck dinner and an evening of conversation with families in the United States. He'd like to do more of that sort of thing, but there are only two small Southern Baptist churches in Manhattan, and few others nearby.

Yet, because he's "in touch with the whole world," he considers helping Southern Baptists "develop a global awareness" one of his tasks.

Last year he spoke to a number of SBC groups, among them 650 Alabama deacons. Some were "not at all convinced" his association with communists "was a good idea." Golonka quoted John 3:16: "For God so loved the world he gave his only begotten son . . ." adding, "We forget the

Continued

WHERE TO PARK AND HOW TO PASS?

Two persistent problems handicap Golonka's work at the United Nations. The first has to do with office space, the other with accreditation.

Golonka's office is 35 blocks from the U.N., making it impossible for him to invite diplomats "over to eat lunch and have a Bible study." The higher rental costs on the East Side, where the United Nations building is located, prohibit his moving, at least for now.

The more vexing problem relates to his inability to get a pass as an NGO (non-governmental organization) representative, even though two such passes are issued to the Southern Baptist Convention. A pass is necessary to provide freedom of movement within the U.N. An ordinary visitor—Golonka's "official" status—has limited access to places and persons.

Both U.N. passes reside with the Christian Life Commission, whose SBC-directed program statement lists relationships with the U.N. among its tasks. One of the two passes remains in Nashville, with plans to use it "once a month at least" as CLC staffer Bill Elder works on specific issues like world hunger. The other pass is held by a minister of the chapel at the Church Center for the United Nations, a Methodist organization.

The CLC has expressed its willingness to share the second pass with Golonka, but so far that has not been possible, as Golonka's busy come-and-go schedule seldom meshes with the other ministers. Meanwhile Golonka, docking SBC bureaucratic red tape, continues his unique ministry. □

Golonka keeps current on Russian life by reading newspapers from the USSR.

The Baptist pastor wondered why young Golonka laughed. "I am a socialist, an athetist"

whole world means Moscow, too."

Golonka also is pleased "to tell diplomats who we Southern Baptists are. Some have never heard of Baptists, some think we are a fanatic sect. We have changed their image and definitely created a friendly attitude." Also, says Golonka, "I've shared the scripture with them."

Golonka emphasizes scripture distribution because, he says, "I myself believe in the objective power of the word of God."

Growing up in Poland, Golonka attended a Catholic church. "But young people were looking for solutions," Golonka recalls. "I started reading Lenin and Marx."

His parents, "shocked and disappointed," forced him to attend mass. At one service, Golonka says, the priest exhorted: "Some strange, crazy people called Baptists came to our town. They read the Bible and say they are Christians. But they are heretics." The priest warned parishioners not to listen to the new sect.

But young Golonka decided to investigate by attending a service. Afterwards, the pastor asked Golonka, "Why have you been laughing while we are praying and singing?"

"I am a socialist, an atheist."

The pastor's wife handed Golonka a small New Testament. "Young man, take this book," she said. "I'm sure you won't read it now, but when you come to a crisis in your life, you will. I will pray for you."

Three months passed before Golonka, during his first reading of a Bible, "discovered a sense of God. I felt in the presence of somebody who was greater than Karl Marx and the rest of us. A tremendous guilt came over me. In the morning I ran to the pastor and told him about my experience."

Golonka often presents Bibles to U.N. workers—such as guide Edyta Drozdowski and her boss, Takashi Endo.

At a New Year's Eve watch-night service, the Baptist pastor challenged his congregants "to begin a new life for Jesus," recalls Golonka. "When we arose from our knees about 12:15, January 1, 1932, I was a new creature in Christ."

He was 16 years old.

His parents, again disillusioned, preferred he not return home. In Catholic Poland, "Baptists were an unknown people, new, despised. To become a Baptist was to betray your nationality."

The young man moved in with the pastor. He became a *colporteur* (distributor), taking Bibles from town to town. He was beaten and arrested "for making communist propaganda."

In 1937, he became pastor of a church in eastern Poland. The next year, he was drafted into the Polish military. On the western front in March 1939, his division was "nearly destroyed" and Golonka was made a prisoner of war.

By 1940 Golonka had escaped his POW camp and entered Germany to attend seminary; the Gestapo monitored his presence, but he was permitted to study in Hamburg. Upon graduation he pastored; after the war, he served as chaplain to displaced persons in refugee camps.

One day Golonka's routine was broken by a call from the American consul: "Your visa to the United States is ready."

Golonka hadn't applied for one.

Puzzled, he went to the office. "To whom it may concern," his papers began. "This is to certify that the Minnesota Baptist congregation has a seven-room parsonage for the occupancy of Rev. Golonko [*sic*] and family, and said congregation has called . . . Rev. E. Golonko to take up his duties as pastor. . . ."

It was news to Golonka.

Believing it a sign from God, however, Golonka came to the United States. (He later discovered fellow chaplains had recommended him.) In 1957, he became a U.S. citizen.

Continued

Golonka "sensitized us and gave us a better understanding of missions to Europeans"

PHOTO COURTESY PEOPLE magazine

Translator Golonka stands behind Georgi Vins, Russian dissident, during a news conference shortly after Vins arrived in the U.S.

By 1963, the Home Mission Board had become aware of Golonka's work. The agency asked Golonka to help it minister among European immigrants in the northeast. For 10 years he canvassed the territory, starting ethnic churches where others said it couldn't be done.

"He sensitized us, gave us a better understanding of Europeans," says Oscar Romo, director of language missions.

In 1972, Golonka went to Washington, D.C., to begin a doctorate of ministries degree program; his major project was a Christian-Marxist dialogue between Baptists and representatives of six communist embassies. His report, including suggestions for witness to communists and other internationals, excited Board missions strategists. When the HMB and New York Baptist Convention created such a position, Golonka was logical choice for the job.

"The U.N. presents a unique opportunity to present a positive witness to diplomats," says Romo, "an influence we hope they will carry back home."

In starting the new work in 1974, Golonka asked his Washington diplomat friends to call their New York acquaintances. "Immediately," says Golonka, "I had a high level of trust."

Golonka still keeps up with his Washington friends. Recently, in the home of one—Alexander Mietelkin, cultural attache of the Soviet embassy—Golonka had a chance to witness:

The Russians, having read Psalms, asked Golonka, "Does God care like this?"

"I have experienced his care in my own life," Golonka responded. "When I was a refugee pastor, we had 10 or 11 other refugees sleeping in the living room, on the floor, everywhere. The night before, we had eaten everything we had and my wife said, 'What will we do about tomorrow?' because there was no food and little way to get it.

"About 4 a.m. we heard a knock on the door; it was a neighbor. 'I had a terrible dream, pastor,' she told me. 'You were pale and sick and you had nothing to eat. I woke up my husband and he said, "We have only these 20 pounds of potatoes, but take half to the pastor."'

"There are many examples of this, how in my personal life, I have experienced the care of the Lord," concluded Golonka.

He has no illusions about the effect of such talks on loyal communist party members. "But," Golonka adds seriously, "I know people, even communists, do listen. And I am becoming convinced that some of them, deep in their own hearts are starting to believe." □

Furlow, former HMB book editor, is a free-lance writer living in Washington, D.C.

The Blue-Collar Worker

By Phyllis Faulkenbury-Thompson

Statistics reveal persons of lower occupational levels are most likely to be committed to belief in God and resurrection of Christ. Yet, like Pat—a hard-working man of 40—in growing numbers they reject church.

"Hypocrite! D----- hypocrite!" He hurled the words. "That's all you are!"

Pat's outburst—more angry sounding than truly angry—was directed toward a woman relative who'd just bragged, "You better come to our church, it's the only one with true salvation."

But in another sense, Pat's bitterness was aimed at just about every Christian he'd ever known.

For Pat, a tall, lean man with weathered skin and intense eyes, has in his lifetime met many who claimed to be Christians. But most conducted their lives in a way so contrary to the teachings he read in his old Bible, he'd long-since been disgusted "by the whole lot of them."

He's seen them "driving their big cars, living in their big houses, building their big churches," while he faced the world hungry and alone.

And it's not that he hasn't tried church; he's been more than once—though not recently. Because he remembers the looks he got before. "I'm not interested in impressing anybody with my clothes or my haircut or the way I talk," Pat explains. "I don't look at how others dress, how their wives dress.

"If I go to church, it's for one reason: to be with God."

But he found it difficult to worship God under stares of church members. "I ain't too stupid," he says. "I can pick up when a guy is lookin' down his nose at me."

Says a friend, "Pat may be wrong about some things, but he'll never be dishonest. He'll tell you exactly what he thinks." And what Pat thinks about Christians is he's tired of being "judged by them."

Pat's black hair is combed straight back; tattoos adorn each forearm. His one concession to *haute couture*—at least weekdays—is a silver arrowhead on a silver chain around his neck. His homemade shirt and faded jeans are grease-stained, his fingers grimy and his nails dirty—all the result of his job, not his lifestyle: after a succession of menial jobs and hard work, Pat bought his own business.

"It ain't much," he admits. But he and the finance company own it: "Automobile air conditioners repaired and rebuilt," says the sign.

A blunt, yet likable man, Pat has come a long way since his birth in Oregon in 1939, where his father, a carpetbagger/migrant, had unloaded the family for one more odd job.

There were eight kids; in the '40s all were baptized as Jehovah's Witnesses. But religious ties were broken five years later when his family moved to Washington. Other moves followed, until his dad was arrested for shooting a man in Texas. His mother and sisters moved to California, leaving Pat with relatives who didn't want him. By age 11, Pat was completely on his own.

Now, looking back on the hard times, one thing stands out. "Not once did anybody offer to help. There were churches all around, and they never did nothin'. Of course I don't know if I'd of accepted. That goes against what I believe. Just the same, it would have been nice to know they cared."

"Christians" and church members sometimes noticed him, he remembers, but usually just to criticize his lifestyle. "'You're goin' straight to hell,'" Pat recalls a woman in Utah telling him. "'You don't go to church, you don't have a family, you don't reproduce. You don't contribute nothin'!'"

Pat shrugged. "Well, if I'm goin' to hell for that, then I'm goin' to hell."

His first marriage lasted only a year; although his next marriage has lasted almost 20 years, it too began on rocky ground. "I was struggling, really struggling, everything was going hard." His wife became pregnant and when his first son was born, the baby had a rare blood disease; about the same time Pat was laid off. "Things didn't get no better for a long while," he remembers. "But I managed to plow through, and I paid every dime to everybody I ever made a debt to."

From those hard times, Pat believes, came his "own religion—anybody gets hungry, I'm the man they're lookin' for; you see people drunk out in the street, I pick 'em up. I don't guess I'm saved, at least not in the way Christians talk about. I haven't confessed to the Almighty. But to myself I know what is right."

Pat pauses, collecting his thoughts, undisturbed by the hammering of the mechanic under the hood of the car just outside his open office door: "What I mean by right is this: The Bible says not to defraud your brother, and it's not talkin' about just your brother. We're talkin' about mankind, talkin' about not defrauding anybody."

"Not defrauding" carries many implications. To Pat, it includes fairness on the job; living a decent life that hurts no one; but most important, he says, "it means helping everybody who needs help."

Pat has fed as many as 15 people in a week. He recently picked up a "wetback" (from Mexico) hitchhiking along the road outside Oklahoma City. The lad barely spoke English; Pat took him home

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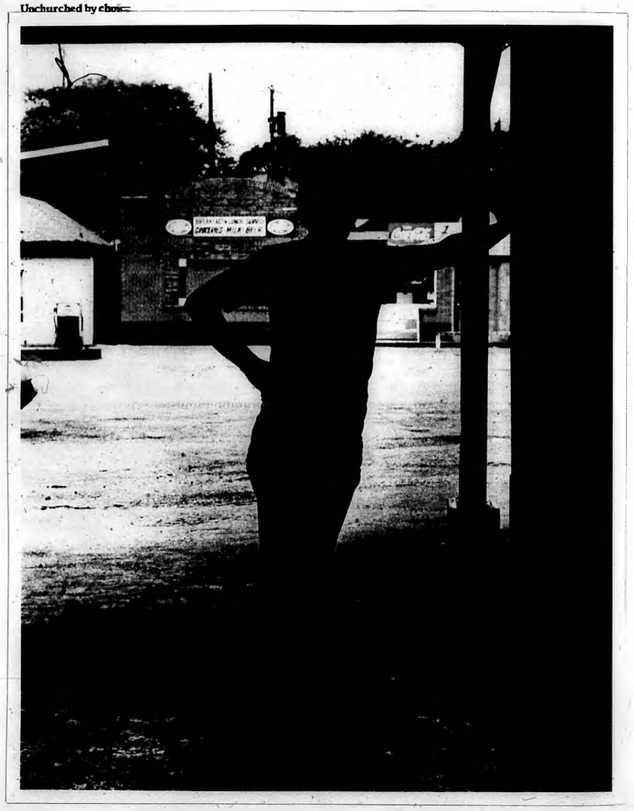

Of the 62 million adult Americans who are unchurched, a growing percentage, perhaps as many as 50 percent, are in the "blue-collar working class." Some experts believe the manual laborer, who reports religion "very important" to his life, does not attend church because mainline denominations reflect a strong middle-class bias. Evangelism strategists at the Home Mission Board echo this, warning that many Southern Baptist churches, too, are excluding the nation's *Pats* from their outreach efforts.

fed him supper, let him sleep on the couch. Next day, he found the young man a job.

A neighbor who learned of the incident was appalled: "He could have robbed you for everything you had."

"Yeah, but he didn't."

Perhaps because of his own background, Pat is attuned to the needy—even when church people aren't.

A minister of a large Oklahoma City church was standing in his garage recently, getting an estimate on repairs, when a young man with his pregnant wife came in. As Pat talked to the couple, he discovered the young man needed work. But more immediate, both needed food. Transients, they had no money. Pat told the pastor he'd be back, walked the couple to a restaurant next door. After paying their bill, he returned to find the pastor angered by the delay.

"He never saw their needs," Pat recalls, still amazed. "But that's what he's getting paid for, isn't it? Well. . . ?"

And churches that "focus on money and things" also incur his wrath. "I went into this one church, and the building cost a million dollars," he says. "The kitchen cost $100,000. I thought of all the starving people they could feed. And you know what they used that kitchen for—picnics for their own rich members!"

Pat grows impatient as he remembers other oversights of Christians he's known. "I hadn't been to church in 10 or 15 years and just recently I went to see a film on missions in New Guinea. The film showed all these starving people; the only halfway nourished person was the one Christian.

"You know what those good church members said? They didn't notice the starving people." Pat insists. "They praised the missionary for baptizing 20 converts!"

Christians should help people. "You'd never see church members pick up the drunk in the street. . . or anybody else, even if they wasn't drunk, just hurt."

Some time ago, Pat was driving behind a man he knew to "profess to be a *real* Christian." A woman on crutches, trying to cross the street, fell. "That guy in his air-conditioned car, he just blew his horn. That's what kind of hurry he was in."

Pat got out and helped the woman to the sidewalk, then got mad at people in a nearby store who wouldn't lend him a chair for her to rest in.

"Christians, too," he growls. The word becomes almost an expletive.

Yet Pat will admit—when pressed—that not all church members, or all churches, are "self-centered," though most "concentrate on the wrong things." Recently he tried another: "Do you know they took up the offering, counted it, and said that isn't enough. They wanted to buy a new air conditioner."

Pat was appalled. "That's a luxury," he says.

Pat doesn't have air conditioning at home. "It's one way," he explains, "me, my wife and my two sons [ages 16 and 14] conserve."

The family also buys no meat, eggs or bread, but raises cows and chickens. Pat's wife makes bread from flour and sugar they buy in 100-pound sacks; with the skill of a professional seamstress, she also makes many clothes on her treadle sewing machine.

Pat's family lives in an old farmhouse built in the 1930s a dozen miles outside Oklahoma City. They remodeled it themselves.

Two years ago, he opened the air conditioner shop. Even now, income is sporadic, especially in winter.

"But I don't worry when I don't make money one day," Pat says. "It's not money that's important, but how you get it. I never did beat nobody out of nothin'.

"If somebody comes here, wantin' me to fix somethin' on their car that don't need to be fixed, why I just tell 'em it don't need to be fixed."

Because Pat is honest, he expects honesty from everyone—especially "religious" people. But he doesn't always find it: "I promised this church I'd help tear down a building in exchange for lumber, windows and $500. I did the work, went for the salvage and found they'd sold all 28 windows to a member of the church. I couldn't believe a church would cheat me.

"They're all after financial gain," he says fiercely. "They don't worship God; they're too concerned with size, with *things*.

"Church today is just not my kind of religion," Pat concludes. He plans to continue reading his Bible, helping the hungry, the homeless, and obeying his sense of "what's right and wrong."

"I don't think I should be criticized. Religion to me is not by general consensus. You got your own and I got mine." He pauses, staring absentmindedly at the toes of his scuffed, black work boots. "Besides, a real Christian wouldn't tell another person his religion is wrong. Because a real Christian knows that if he does, he ain't nothin' but a hypocrite.

"That's what I told my sister-in-law." He glares. "An' that's how I believe." □

Volunteer serendipity

By Walker L. Knight

It comes as a by-product, not actually planned. Serendipity. Like happiness. One works at what are considered the more important tasks of mission work, and along comes this extra benefit.

I'm writing about the friendships formed, the knowledge gained, the close ties established between Southern Baptists in one area of the nation with those in another as they undertake common tasks. In its own way, it is part of the glue which binds the denomination together.

In the past, this most often occurred when ministers moved from church to church, went to other areas for revivals, conferences or similar meetings. Laity moving from one state to another for education, business, recreation or retirement also became acquainted with the likes and differences of Southern Baptists in more than one area.

Nothing in the past, however, matches what is taking place today. Thousands of volunteers are going from one state to another to help with mission work. This year more than 22,000 were assigned by personnel of the Home Mission Board. They were part of such units as Mission Service Corps (MSC), student summer missions, Christian Service Corps (CSC), Sojourners, adult and youth work groups, seminary interns in church extension, National Evangelism Support Teams (NEST), interfaith witness associates and many others. This does not include the hundreds of campers on mission and additional scores of persons who went their own way without contacting anyone except the church to which they were going.

The pairing of churches, associations and state conventions as part of Bold Mission Thrust generates this by-product of friendship. Relationships develop over longer periods and produce reciprocal feelings: both parties usually visit the other's home turf.

Maryland and North Carolina Baptists provide an outstanding example of the pairing relationship their state conventions have encouraged. I saw some results of the churches/association's match-up in the small Potomac Baptist Association in Southern Maryland.

Potomac Association embraces three counties: Calvert, Charles and St. Mary's, with a population of 160,000. Baptists have only 16 churches and missions serving the area, which is experiencing a population explosion held in check only by limited sewerage and other services.

William Barkley Jr., director of missions, likes to describe the area by its contasts. It embraces the landing place for the first settlers, as well as one of the nation's leading "planned cities." Amish people drive horses and buggies past the world's largest naval air test center. Near the cliffs of Calvert, with their 25 million-year-old fossils, sits a nuclear power plant.

Barkley said, "It was a forgotten land until 40 years ago, but now the tri-county area is becoming an integral part of metropolitan Washington."

With its people oriented to Roman Catholicism, area SBC work has grown slowly—mostly in the decades following World War II. Today, the 16 churches and missions are small.

Potomac Association teamed with Mecklenburg Association, one of North Carolina's largest (including the Charlotte metro area). Eleven Potomac churches and missions requesting pairing were matched with sister churches, and projects were assigned to other interested North Carolina churches.

As might be expected, most activity centered in the Potomac Association as groups moved in for concerts, back-yard Bible clubs, carnivals, revivals, VBSs, surveys, construction and special conferences or retreats.

Potomac churches also planned to travel to Charlotte for projects.

One significant result of the first year's work was that the Potomac association enrolled 1,000 in back-yard Bible clubs, most conducted by teams from Mecklenburg.

Assistance for new work may be among the most important that will come from the pairing, as teams continue to visit for special projects designed to start missions. Financial assistance has come monthly for some work, and strong prayer support has been established. One church provided a piano for a mission. The RAs of another church raised funds for a baptistry. And the WMU of a church sent money to brick veneer a building.

Mecklenburg churches find firsthand mission experiences bring rewards. More than one church reports its young people, seeing mission needs close-up, have made decisions to enter Christian vocations.

Multiply these experiences by the thousands who have participated throughout the nation this year, and you begin to understand the new dimension of Bold Mission Thrust. There is a stronger glue binding Southern Baptists because of it—the glue of friendship and camaraderie from doing God's work together. □

It would not be, we knew, an easy assignment: any family whose child faced major corrective heart surgery would naturally be tense, nervous. Yet we felt photographing the "right" family would best convey to you the significance of Birmingham Baptists' "Brown House" medical ministry.

So we waited. Almost a year.

Finally Jack Washington, who directs the ministry, called: "A family's agreed."

Even with the Thatchers' cooperation—and approval from hospital administration—the assignment required an especially sensitive writer/photographer team. Fortunately, HM has one in Celeste Loucks and Paul Obregon.

The pair practically moved in with the family during the critical week. Quickly they were filled with the same tensions that permeated the Thatchers' moods. And things grew more anxious when the doctor, who'd given permission early, abruptly withdrew it, limiting photography. The family, despite Obregon's unobtrusive manner, began to have misgivings.

Then, only a few days later—Loucks said it felt like months—surgery was over and the mood melted into happiness and joy: the child was okay!

When Obregon went back to Birmingham to photograph the Thatchers leaving Brown House, he experienced a combination prodigal's return/family reunion. "We'd shared a painful time, and we'd come through it sort of together," he recalls. "Seeing them again, especially Ricky, was great. We hugged and laughed."

It wasn't easy, that assignment. But the happy ending made it worthwhile for all the participants. We hope you had that reaction, too.

The Thatchers' kindnesses to HM remind us again of the dozens of people, seldom credited, who make it possible for articles to appear. So many coverages are opened to us through cooperation and consideration of dozens of people. We are constantly grateful to them for sharing their time, their lives with us—with you. We can't name them all but again we offer our thanks to all you special folks. We won't forget. . .

Finally, a note for readers who've enjoyed the writing of Phyllis Faulkenbury. Her style's not changed, but her byline has. It's now Phyllis Thompson. Our congratulations. □

Issue not liquor but biased laws

Let me thank you for the fine article about me (Feb. '79 HM). Except on the liquor issue and the time frame on the El Dorado Program the article was factually accurate and always empathetic.

I have never supported or campaigned for liquor by the drink, but I did state publicly that I favored the poor having as much access to liquor as the wealthy did in their private clubs. A big push at the time to expand the privileges of private clubs and make them exempt from local liquor laws prompted me to take this stand. I was attacking the injustice of such inequities and the general bias of the law in favor of the rich.

On another occasion, while supporting a tax increase for the benefit of public schools, I preached that poor public education, as I had observed it, damaged children more than freely available alcohol, since children are forced to drink the education but not the alcohol.

Don B. Harbuck
El Dorado, Ark.

America mood

Your July issue—fantastic. . . those little sentences inside the blotted lines in Mood of America get my top vote!

Leonard Hill
Nashville, Tenn.

• . . . excellent reporting, thought provoking. I also look forward to more of "Unchurched by Choice." I hurt we are not doing more for "people needs."

Hoyt R. Wilson
Birmingham, Ala.

• . . . the feel of "Mood" capsuled America and the American church.

Emmett Solomon
Dallas, Tex.

Transracial sins?

Cancel my subscription. I've concluded I'm in the wrong pew. I don't care to read any more of such articles as "Coping with Change" [June HM].

When Messrs. Barber and Wheeler [of the HMB staff] say no biblical texts oppose interracial dating, I say they're wrong. It's humbug philosophy. La-de-da-de-da. In their eyes, such marriages may not be doomed to failure. But I think their conclusions are ludicrous. The whole tone of the article seems more like Hollywood than a group of baptized believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Kathryn E. York
Dallas, Tex.

More on TV

One paragraph ("The Gospel According to TV," May '79 HM) overstated the area of the PTL Total Living Center by 170 square miles. Our billions of dollars poured into edifices that remain idle for most of the time, do not entitle us to criticize TV studios that operate 24 hours every day, 168 hours per week, fulfilling Christ's command to go into all the world, not only to those that come to our churches.

The Gospel according to TV reaches more in one hour than lived on the earth in Jesus' time. Dare we criticize?

Myrtle Gregory Possiel
Miami, Fla.

• "When failure was victory" (May '79 HM) emphasized Baptist strength: the unity forged in the Cooperative Program. Congratulations!

. . . but I was intensely humiliated [by your comments about Jim Bakker of PTL Club]. HM is a useful denominational publication which generally leaves off criticism of others and blows Southern Baptist horns; it devotes words and pictures to reports of Cooperative Program achievements and challenges.

I am not going to stop my support of the Cooperative Program, nor am I going to drop any cause I feel led to support. I call upon you to direct a retraction. . . with an apology to all [mentioned in "Gospel According to TV"].

Walter R. Barfield
Sierra Vista, Ariz.

• . . . excellent. No doubt CBN and PTL, etc., are good, but there *are* dangers as you brought out. Much of our financial support for the local church is being "milked" away.

Dan Bates
Weatherford, Tex.

• Since most religious TV programs mentioned have large followings, I was concerned that the facts be presented as clearly and objectively as possible, so that people are informed of the problems and weaknesses of the "Electronic Church." . . . and because HOME MISSIONS is read by people outside of our Convention, I felt we should carefully avoid, even it if is unintentional, anything that might be used to misrepresent Southern Baptists and our work for Christ. When dealing with such emotional and controversial issues, I guess we must make sure we go the extra mile.

Gayle L. Clifton
Louisville, Ky.

Church-size vs. heart-size

By William G. Tanner

He was a big man, but there was no hint of malice in his soft voice. Merely a hesitant questioning.

"Now you tell me if I'm wrong," he said, "but it's my belief we have enough people here already. I don't think we have jobs or gas or anything to go around now; I don't see how we have room for any more people from Indochina. . . ."

The woman before him had heard the argument before. As she has done so often, she replied quickly, also without malice, but in a voice crackling with intensity: "That's not the issue," she said. "We haven't been asked to vote whether to bring over any more refugees. That's been decided for us. The United States Congress has already said we would bring over 100,000 this year.

"The question for Christians—for Southern Baptists—is what are we going to do about it. We can turn our backs and do nothing—let the non-Christians sponsor them. And they may not even become good citizens, much less know about Jesus Christ.

"Or we can get involved. If Christians are who they say they are, then the refugees at least will be taught good, clean, moral lives. Even if they don't accept Christ—and not all will—they'll be better able to function in our country. And they'll be better citizens."

The man studied the face before him: sparkling were the deep-set eyes with the crow's feet at the corners; determined were the lips that formed the words so logically he could only respond: "Oh, I never thought of it that way before. . . ."

The speaker who changed the mind of that pastor from Missouri was Fern Powers, a small, energetic woman of 48—mother of five, grandmother of three—who is among the most remarkable Christians in our Convention.

I first learned of Fern's work—and was impressed by her presence—through the Home Mission Board movie, *Bold Sharing*. At that time her appeal was for Southern Baptists to become involved in ministries for seamen. Since that time, I've learned much more about Fern Powers—and she's added the refugee ministry to others she performs as a volunteer worker in Lacey, Wash.

Fern, over the past three years, has become Southern Baptists' leading refugee resettler. When the Home Mission Board has a difficult-to-place case, we turn to Fern; when other resettlement agencies have problems with sponsorships, they turn to Fern.

Fern Powers and her small First Baptist Church of Lacey—with the total support of its kind and dedicated pastor, Harry Hannah—shame the rest of the Convention with their overwhelming concern, expressed in unparalleled action.

As you have already read, the Home Mission Board is deeply committed to resettlement; we urge Southern Baptists to resettle at least 1,000 refugee families this fall—only one per association!

Can Southern Baptists do that much? Look at the example of Fern Powers and try to say no.

Fern says she has three obligations in resettlement: "First is to get the people out of the camps and here safe; second is to teach them all they need to know to lead happy, responsible lives in the States; third is to share Jesus Christ with them. Not necessarily in that order.

"If they don't accept Jesus Christ, I'm not less obligated to those first two, and that continues, as long as it's necessary."

About 50 refugees attend Fern's international Sunday school class; a dozen or so have been baptized. But all have gotten Fern's help.

She rents them an apartment (often using her own money as deposit); she finds them clothes and furniture (our church has given all it can—now we make the garage sales"); she greets them at the airport and immediately begins getting them social security cards, getting them into jobs programs, benefits programs; she teaches nutrition, cooking, budgeting—even how to drive a car. And, most basic, puts them into English-language classes (Fern knows only a few words of Cambodian and Vietnamese).

"It's simple," Fern says, of the process. Resettlement demands a commitment of time, but not much money, she explains. Fern uses the federally funded Indochinese resettlement program. Those funds begin after three days in the country and last the refugee for two years; they can be extended in cases of need.

No church should use lack of money as an excuse, Fern says. "The federal government isn't asking churches or individuals to give their money; it's asking only for moral and emotional support."

For Christians who have problems with the biblical concept of unconditional love, even moral support may, at times, prove difficult. But Fern is one of those rare people who practices love as Christ commanded; in so doing, she's been used, abused.

Calls come late in the night: "Mom, I need help. . . ." She always responds. She's bailed refugees out of jail; she—with pastor Hannah—has been marriage counselor more than once she's rescued children or wives from violent husbands. Anyway, maybe you get the picture of Fern's selflessness.

Now get the numbers: In the past three years, Fern Powers and her small, 300-member church in Lacey have resettled more than 250 refugees. *And that is more than the total resettled by the 10 largest churches in the Southern Baptist Convention, whose combined membership is more than 107,000.*

Why? I asked Fern. What makes you do this extraordinary thing?

"I am a Christian," Fern said, clearly puzzled by the question.

And I remembered the "other" obligation Fern told me she felt: "My responsibility is to love them, to love them all the time, as soon as I get their names from the resettlement office. I begin to love and pray for them."

That's wrapped in everything we do. Of all the things I learned from observing Fern Powers, I think that is the most obvious. □

Churches wishing more information should contact Gene Tunnell at the HMB (404 873 4001).

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