



L. D. (Bill) Thomas, Jr.

He Couldn't Say 'No'

SEVERAL months ago a prominent Oklahoma City attorney calmly announced that he was leaving his practice to enter the ministry. A few of his friends were shocked. Those who really knew L. D. (Bill) Thomas, Jr., '41ba, '48Law, saw his decision for what it was—the result of years of soul-searching prayer, devotion to his church and faith in his God.

But at times even those closest to this man must wonder what it must be like to possess the inner conviction that made him trade the prosperity of Consolidated Gas Utilities' chief counsel for the modest income and demanding duties of the pastor of Sallisaw's First Methodist Church.

Thomas would be the last to claim that such a decision was easy. For four years he and his wife, the former Harriett Collins, '40mus.ed, '47fa, '48m.mus, struggled with the "call" to preach which came to Bill Thomas at an age when most men are looking ahead to financing college for their children, early retirement, a time when they can ease up and enjoy life.

The obstacles loomed large. Bill Thomas was then 36 with a family to support—a little late to go back to school for a theology degree. He was conditioned to a living standard considerably above average and had numerous financial obligations to meet.

As an influential Methodist layman, he was already giving his church as much time as he gave his job. The contributions he was making in that field were valuable too.

It would have been easy to rationalize, but Bill and Harriett Thomas aren't built that way. The idea wouldn't leave them alone—and finally those insurmountable obstacles began to crumble.

About two years ago Thomas found that his church would allow college graduates to take certain correspondence courses in order to be admitted to the Oklahoma Conference on trial—the same as theological graduates. In two years he could be ordained a deacon, and an elder in four.

With college no longer a problem, the Thomases agreed that if they could save a given amount of money and have certain material possessions before making the move, they would do it. But soon that condition lost its importance too. So with all their other reservations.

They gave themselves two years to tie up the loose ends of their old life—to clear up any debts, to begin study and preparation for assuming a pastorate. In June, 1959, they were ready. With the acceptance of the Methodist Church in his pocket, Rev. Thomas took his family to Sallisaw.

Today Bill Thomas is in his study by 5 or 5:30 a.m., and the light burns far into the night. The comfortable 8-hour day is gone.

Mrs. Thomas is putting her musical training to work for the church. In the short time she has been in Sallisaw, she has organized three new choirs—the Cherubs (4, 5 and 6-year-olds), the Carol Choir of

grade-schoolers, and the Vesper Choir for junior and senior highsters.

There is a special warmth in Bill Thomas' voice when he speaks of his wife.

"I could spend hours raving about how well suited my wife is to be a minister's wife," the minister says. "Of course she has had her ups and downs, just like all of us do, but she's completely dedicated to her Lord and thrilled to death with our new life."

"When I was a lawyer, she was unable to participate actively in my business, but my being a preacher is a joint venture," Rev. Thomas smiles. "We're in this together."

And the rest of the Thomas family? Well, Johnny, 10, and Susan, 6, are far from unhappy at the prospect of being "preacher's kids." The church has been a family affair with them for years. They like Sallisaw and the freedom they can enjoy there.

The Thomases bought Johnny a bicycle, complete with speedometer, last year. In Oklahoma City he succeeded in putting 45 miles on the new bike in 9 months. It took him only 3 months to register over 300 Sallisaw miles.

"It's difficult to put into words my ambitions for my children," Rev. Thomas explains.

"I want them to grow up well-grounded in the basic principles of the Christian faith.

"I want them to be a man and a woman

who have respect for each individual human personality, and above all to know that they are loved and to know how to love others with a 'giving' love instead of a 'getting' love.

"I want them to learn how to pray, so that they can listen to God and find His will in their lives. I am sure God has a purpose for them and a job for them to do, and my ambition for them is that they discover this purpose and this job as early as it is possible for them to do so.

"Of course, this includes a happy married life. In our prayers we quite often pray for the little boy and girl who will someday grow into a man and a woman and will be my Susan's husband and my Johnny's wife."

Thomas himself feels that he came from such a home as he and his wife are creating for Johnny and Susan. As a child in Ringling, where his father, L. D. Thomas, Sr., is in the dry goods business, Bill Thomas used to tell everyone he wanted to be a preacher, but a growing interest in politics soon turned his interest to law.

He began political speeches at 13, touring the voting boxes in Jefferson County on behalf of a local candidate. At 17 he was on the National Speakers Bureau for the Democratic Party. But five war years, three of them in combat, dimmed Thomas' political interest and left him anxious only to get into the law itself.

His mother never doubted that he would eventually go back to the "I want to be a

preacher" stage. When Bill and his wife told his parents of his decision early this year, the elder Mrs. Thomas' only comment was, "Well, I have known it all along and just wondered when you were going to tell me."

Some persons may think it strange that Bill Thomas' decision to devote his life to Christ did not come when he faced the greatest of physical dangers on the European battlefields of World War II. As an army officer, he participated in the initial phases of the landings in North Africa, Sicily and Normandy and was decorated both by his country and its allies.

Bill Thomas has a simple explanation. "I refused to open my life to God at that time. I was too wrapped up in myself."

It was not tragic events but a gradual awakening that brought the lawyer to the realization that he needed God. The Thomases became a part of St. Luke's Methodist Church in Oklahoma City and began studying the Bible and praying together regularly.

"If I could tell young married couples only one thing which I thought above everything else would help them find a happy married life, I would tell them this: 'Young folks, start a habit of praying together as man and wife,'" Rev. Thomas says forcefully. "I can truthfully say that since we began this practice, there has been no serious trouble or disagreement between us."

Man's law, to which he had devoted his adult life, didn't cease to interest Bill Thom-

as as it once had, but it did become a secondary interest. As he became engrossed in Christianity, he gradually came to know that he could never be happy out of the pulpit.

Thomas realizes that he was able to reach many people as an active layman that he will not be able to reach as a preacher, but he knows that preaching is what God wants him to do.

"I feel that a person can serve God just as well as a lawyer as he can as a preacher if he sincerely believes that he is in the particular spot where God wants him.

"I am sure that God calls men to be lawyers, doctors, engineers, grocerymen, farmers and laborers as well as preachers," Rev. Thomas concludes. "Elton Trueblood made a very wise statement when he said that in the final analysis God may be more interested in factories than He is in churches, for after all there are more people in factories than there are in churches."

When the decision to enter the ministry was made, Bill Thomas never doubted he could succeed as a pastor—that he would be able to be a channel for God's love and wisdom to the people of his particular community. Whether he will ever hold any large churches is immaterial to the new minister, since there is more work than he feels he can possibly do in Sallisaw alone.

The demanding role he has accepted has generally been what Rev. Thomas expected, except for the detail work and outside commitments which rob him of time for his pastoral work.

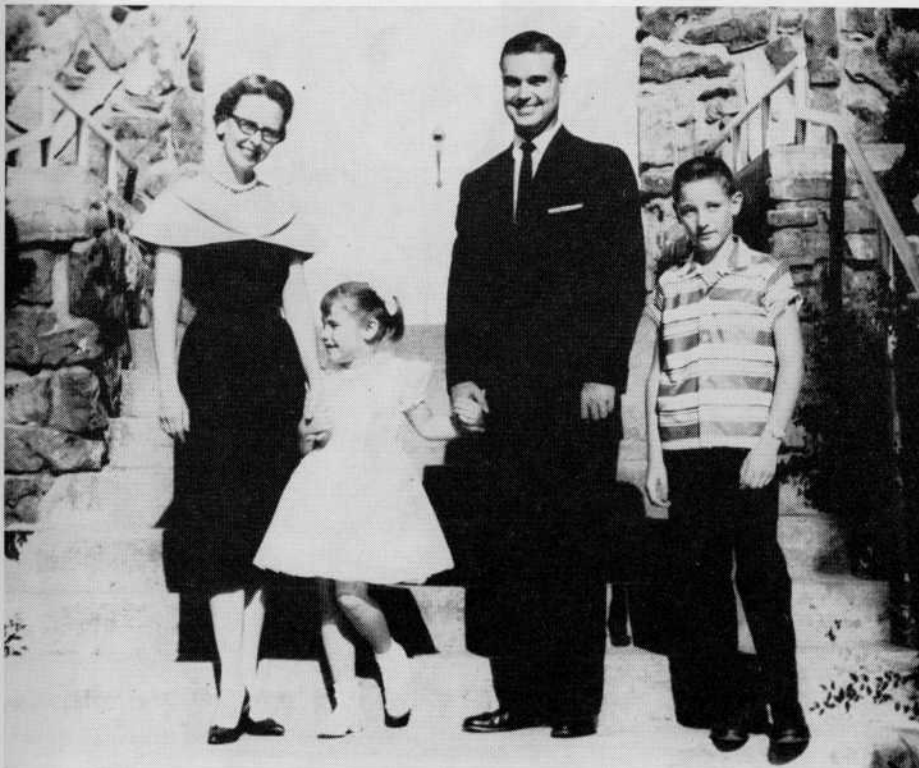
Always having had a private secretary, Lawyer Thomas was accustomed to turning over the details to Peggy Askew, '40ed, for the past five years. But the Sallisaw church cannot afford a secretary for its pastor. Recently Rev. Thomas instituted a voluntary help program to relieve the office task load.

The heavy speaking schedule, which started when Thomas was one of his denomination's outstanding laymen, has grown even heavier now that he is a minister.

But his work is also proving more rewarding than Rev. Thomas expected.

"The people here have been very gracious and cordial," he explains. "Attendances at the Sunday services have been exceptionally good and have continued to climb each Sunday. This is reward enough."

The most valued gift the Thomas family has received from well-wishing friends



HARRIETT, SUSAN, BILL and JOHNNY THOMAS—"We're in this together."

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came from the more than 200 members of the young married couples Sunday School class Bill Thomas taught in Oklahoma City for several years.

One Sunday morning a few weeks after exchanging his law books for a pulpit, Rev. L. D. (Bill) Thomas, Jr., stepped to the front of his Sallisaw church and surveyed the congregation as usual. But there was something unusual about this particular congregation—in the form of his class of Oklahoma Citizens who had chartered a bus to hear this man who was doing the Lord's work and wouldn't settle for half measures.

Miss Judith Ann Lahr, '59, Bellaire, Texas, and Charles Guinn, '58, Prairie Village, Kansas, were married March 28 in the Bellaire Presbyterian Church. The couple is living in Amarillo, Texas.

Miss Joyce Louise Foster, '59ba, Oklahoma City, and Allen Dean Dayton, '57eng, Lawton, were married June 20 in Crown Heights Christian Church, Oklahoma City. Dayton is working toward a master's degree at O. U.

Miss Grace Wieszorek, '59ba, and Richard F. Dudley, Jr., '59eng, were married June 6 in University Methodist Church, Tulsa. They are living in Seattle, Washington, where Dudley is an ensign serving with the Coast and Geodetic Survey Corps.

Miss Jackie Lee Douglas, '59bus, Dallas, Texas, and Jake Elcanic McClure, Jr., '59geol, Oklahoma City, were married August 1 in Perkins chapel of Southern Methodist University, Dallas. The McClures will live in Norman while he is attending the O. U. law school.

Miss Mary Beth Webb, '59h.ec, Norman, and Grover C. Ozmun, III, '59bus, Oklahoma City, were married August 1 in the Church of Christ, Norman. They have established a home at Fort Lee, Virginia, where he is a lieutenant in the U. S. Army quartermaster corps.

Miss Lee Marcene Morrison, '59, and Turner Odies Primrose, '55bus, '56Law, both of Norman, were married August 2 in the First Baptist Church, Norman. Primrose is an attorney in Norman.

Miss Montella Fant, '59, Durant, and Jesse J. Horner, Dallas, were married February 21 in the First Methodist Church, Durant. Horner is a graduate of the University of Texas. The couple has established a home in Dallas.

Miss Heidi Elizabeth Ochsner, '59bs, Hales Corners, Wisconsin, and Henry C. Mugler, Jr., '59ba, Lake Charles, Louisiana, were married June 20 in St. James Episcopal Church, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The Muglers are living in Hartford, Connecticut.

Miss Carole Sue Cross, Freeport, Ohio, and Brian E. Ausburn, '59eng, Tulsa, were married June 5 in the Methodist Church, New Concord, Ohio. Mrs. Ausburn is a graduate of Muskingum College at New Concord.

Miss Anne Edgerton, '59, San Antonio, Texas, and Markham Connolly, '59, Oklahoma City, were married June 6 in Christ Episcopal Church, San Antonio, Texas. They plan to live in Norman.

Miss Anita McCullough, '59ed, Oklahoma City, and James E. White, '59ba, Norman, were married

June 3 in St. Luke's Methodist Church, Oklahoma City. The Whites spent the summer in Eagles Nest, New Mexico, where they were recreation directors in the community. They are now living in New Haven, Connecticut, while White is attending the divinity school at Yale University on a Rockefeller Fellowship.

Miss Shirley Ann Smith and Billy L. Jones, '59eng, both of Kingfisher, were married June 6 in the First Methodist Church, Kingfisher. They have established a home in Richland, Washington.

Miss Jo Ellen Lata, '59med, Oklahoma City, and Capt. William K. Sellars, Travis Air Force Base, California, were married June 6 in the First Baptist Church Chapel, Oklahoma City. They plan to live at Travis Air Force Base.

Miss Johnece Houghlin, '59, Pauls Valley, and Richard Norman Ryerson, '59, Alva, were married June 12 in the First Methodist Church, Pauls Valley. The Ryersons are living in Norman while he is enrolled at O.U.

Miss Kay Lee, '59journ, and Charles W. Hickman, both of Norman, were married June 12 in the First Christian Church, Norman. They have established a residence in Oklahoma City.

Miss Dorothy L. Wasik, Oklahoma City, and Richard G. Manley, '59eng, Silver Lake, were married June 6 in Sacred Heart Church, Oklahoma City. They are living in Oklahoma City.

Miss Rochelle Guthrie, '59, Durant, and Edward Lauderdale, Maysville, were married January 31 in the First Baptist Church, Durant. They are living in Norman.

Miss Brenda Lou Smith, '59, and Thomas Lloyd Kingery, '59, both of Oklahoma City, were married February 28 in the Watchorn chapel of St. Luke's Methodist Church, Oklahoma City.

Miss Mary Nell Newsom, '59, Oklahoma City, and James M. Clark, Tulsa, were married June 14 in Christ the King Church, Oklahoma City. The Clarks are living in Oklahoma City.

Miss Mary Jane Brashears, '59, and Joseph Victor McKinsey, both of Clinton, were married June 16 in the Clinton First Baptist Church. McKinsey is a student at Southwestern State College.

Miss Kay Ardith Blake, '59, Oklahoma City, and Michael Ray Watson, '59, Norman, were married June 1 in the First Presbyterian Church Chapel, Oklahoma City. The Watsons will live in Denver, Colorado.

Miss Nancy Denner, '59fa, Alva, and Lt. Michael McGowan, '57bus, Edmond, were married May 16 in the First Presbyterian Church, Alva. The couple has established a home at Fredericksburg, Virginia. Lieutenant McGowan is stationed at the marine base at Quantico, Virginia.

Miss Zoe Jane Rodgers, '59ed, Tulsa, and John Otto Nuernberger, '59ba, Centralia, Illinois, were married May 29 in Trinity Methodist Church, Tulsa. The couple is living in Tulsa.

Miss Harriett Moffett Gannaway, '59, and William Herman Schmees, Oklahoma City, were married May 29 in Christ the King Church, Tulsa. Schmees is a graduate of Oklahoma City University.

Anita Nichols, Norman, and Jack Cloyd Schilling, '59bus, Sweetwater, Texas, were married May 30 in the Goodrich Memorial Church, Norman.

DEATHS: Jerry Drew Gardner, '59, died March 17 when his Air National Guard F-86 Sabrejet exploded northeast of El Reno. Gardner, a junior electrical engineering major, is survived by his wife and three children. He was a pilot in the U. S. Air Force for seven years prior to entering O. U. in September, 1956.

Allen Bilinski, '59, was killed December 19 in a traffic accident near Glen Rock, Wyoming. Bolinski, a resident of Calgary, Alberta, was a junior majoring in geological engineering at O.U.

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