

Christian couple 'chosen' to minister to college students

■ The two work on UNL's campus with the Navigators ministry group.

BY SARAH FOX

Susan Fiorino compares her life to a 1970s TV show.

A character in "Charlie's Angels" asked a nun why she had joined a convent though she was young and beautiful.

Said the character in the TV show: "Some hear a call and some are chosen, and I was chosen."

"Chosen" is how Susan and her husband, Joey Fiorino, describe their lives as full-time staff workers with the Navigators, a Christian, nondenominational ministry group at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

UNL has about 21 campus ministries and 53 full-time staff workers, according to the 2000-2001 student directory and infor-

mation from ministry members.

Some of these people never planned to become campus ministers. They majored in English, speech communications or general studies. But their nontraditional jobs with students have "eternal" benefits, they said.

Susan Fiorino came to UNL from Ericson, a town near Burwell in central Nebraska. While she was a student at UNL, Fiorino changed her major and partied a lot — living a life similar to some students.

But during her junior year in 1989, her life took a turn.

"A guy broke up with me, and I had a broken heart. I thought, 'Oh maybe I should do something religious. Maybe that will help me feel better,'" Fiorino said.

Searching, Fiorino got involved with the Navigators. She said she realized Christ had died in her place on the cross for her sins, and she found forgiveness through her faith in Christ. Around the time she graduated in 1994, a

Navigators worker asked her if she would think about working on the staff. At first she wasn't sure, but then she decided to. She started in 1995.

"I really want to have the skills to help someone for the rest of my life. It's about serving someone, not about assuming you know more than younger students," she said.

"It's not like you're at level 15, and a freshman is at level two."

Fiorino mentored women at UNL and at the University of Zambia as part of her Navigators work. She and Joey Fiorino, a 1996 graduate of the University of Missouri-Columbia, met each other in 1999 when he came to UNL. They married in May of this year.

The couple said the work hours, the pay and the results are different from normal, 9-to-5 jobs. They usually use mornings for free time and meet with students in the afternoons and evenings.

"It's like working a second-shift job," Susan Fiorino said. "When your friends call you, you can never return their calls."

Unlike many second-shift jobs, Susan and Joey Fiorino don't have a constant paycheck. They get their salaries from friends and interested churches whom they've told about their work at UNL.

"The whole salary thing is you live by faith," Susan Fiorino said. "Some months your income might be high and other months not so high. Buying clothes is a big deal. You have to plan ahead to buy a CD."

Joey Fiorino said he cut down his budget when he joined the staff. "You eat beans and tuna," he said.

And for the uncertain pay, the couple sees uncertain results.

"You see no product," Susan Fiorino said. "At the end of the day, you think, 'Well, I think God might have let me help someone,

maybe."

However, one person Susan Fiorino has helped is Becky Hyde, a senior economics major. For 2½ years, Hyde has participated in a Bible study Susan led for greek women. When she was a sophomore, Hyde came to a Navigators GreekSide meeting with her roommate from her freshman year, and she met Fiorino.

"I had been feeling spiritually empty," Hyde said. "The very first time (I went), I had mixed feelings, knowing right away this is exactly what I needed to be doing but kind of scared."

Hyde, the president of Alpha Omicron Pi Sorority, said Susan's Bible study taught her to have a relationship with God and to balance her life in her sorority with what will matter eternally.

"I've grown to a greater understanding of what's important," she said.

Young adults work well with college students, said Larry Meyer,

pastor of the Lutheran Center across from Neihardt Residence Center. Meyer, 53, gets an intern almost every year from a Lutheran seminary.

"At the Lutheran Center, I'm kind of a dad. If they want to talk to someone who's a brother or sister, they'll talk to the intern," he said.

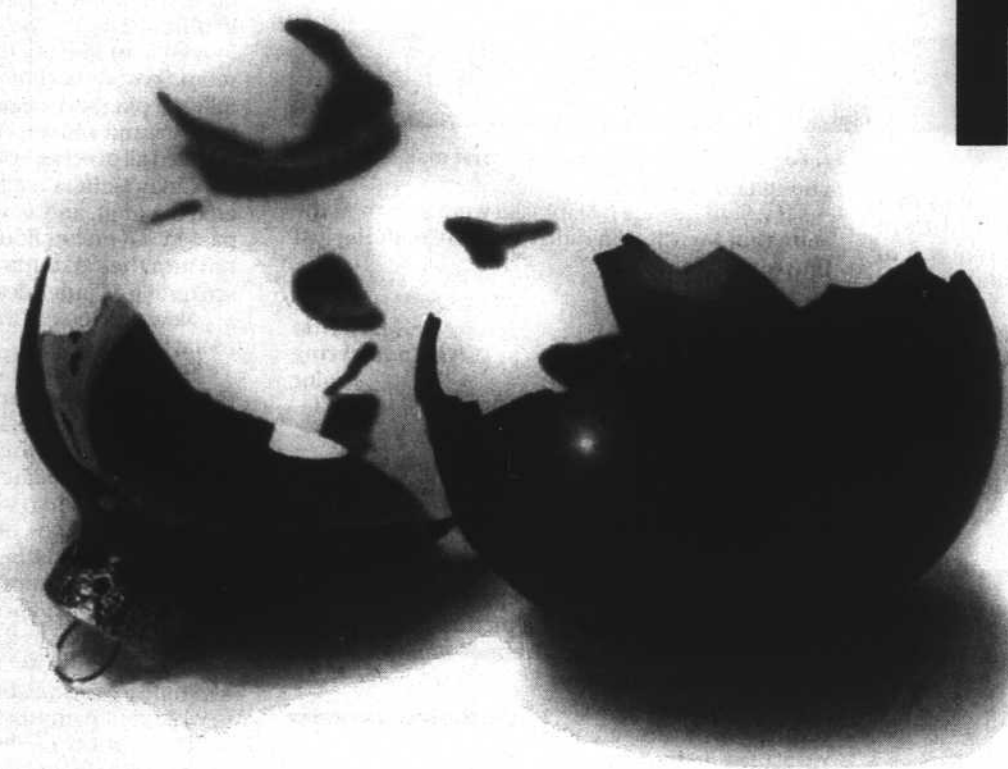
Meyer said successful Christian workers must genuinely like people. "Not everyone likes young adults," he said.

He also said interns must know campus and pop culture.

"They've got to have some idea of the greek system's about. If we had an intern who didn't know any music since Beethoven, we'd be in trouble," he said.

Meyer said he's never regretted becoming a campus minister.

"On Sunday mornings, there's a special energy young people have that you don't get very often in a regular church. You're talking to someone who doesn't know there's disadvantages."



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