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96-72

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Ark. campaign to seek  
 ban on all gambling

By Trennis Henderson

Baptist Press  
 4/25/96

LITTLE ROCK, Ark (BP)--Anti-gambling advocates have worked diligently in recent years to stop the spread of legalized gambling in Arkansas.

Lawsuits, media campaigns and grassroots efforts throughout the state have thwarted attempts to legalize a lottery, casinos and other forms of gambling.

This year, however, gambling supporters are seeking to place up to seven gambling proposals on the November ballot. Leaders of the Christian Civic Action Committee (CCAC), a companion organization of the Arkansas Christian Civic Foundation, have responded by proposing a constitutional amendment to ban all gambling in the state.

The proposed amendment seeks "to prohibit gambling on contests or games of chance or skill, and specifically prohibiting gambling on horse racing and dog racing," according to the initiative petition filed with the attorney general's office.

The seven pro-gambling amendments "would allow 30 casinos, statewide lottery and video poker and wide-open charitable gambling, including electronic gambling devices," explained Larry Page, CCAC executive director.

He warned such proposals, if approved, would make Arkansas "the new gambling mecca of North America."

In response, Page explained, "We determined that the best defense is a good offense; we decided to take them head-on."

Emphasizing gambling proponents have "an insatiable appetite for Arkansans' money," he warned, "They'll never be happy until they have a stranglehold on our state."

Rather than battling each proposal individually, Page explained, "We decided to approach it in a direct way. If we're going to have a referendum on gambling, let's have a full referendum. If we really believe what we say about gambling and that it applies to all gambling, this is the right thing to do and the right time to do it."

Barry King, the CCAC's gambling campaign coordinator, noted the organization's executive committee authorized a study which indicated approximately 80 percent of CCAC's constituents would actively support the gambling ban proposal.

"We are doing this because the people and churches we represent told us to," Page said. "Since it's obvious that gambling supporters will not cease their greedy power grabs, the only course of action we have left is to try to make Arkansas a gambling-free zone.

"We're not going to stop them simply by defending against their proposals," he added. "A ban on gambling in Arkansas would keep gamblers away for the foreseeable future. They would go where they have more likelihood for success."

Page and King said the greatest initial challenge is collecting enough signatures to place the anti-gambling measure on the November ballot. Each proposed constitutional amendment must include the signatures of 71,684 registered voters to qualify for the ballot. CCAC leaders hope to collect up to 125,000 signatures since as many as 30 percent of signatures often are disqualified for various reasons.

Campaign leaders are seeking to gather the required signatures by June 28 in order to submit the petitions to the secretary of state by the July 5 deadline. "We're trying to help people understand it has to be a matter of extreme urgency," King noted. "This is going to be our primary focus and objective."

In an effort to collect sufficient signatures, King said the CCAC is encouraging each church in the state to enlist a specified number of volunteers to collect 25 signatures each. He said the goal is to recruit 5,000 people to collect 25 signatures each in order to reach the overall goal of 125,000 signatures.

King said churches with fewer than 150 members are asked to recruit five people to gather signatures; churches with 150-450 members, 10 volunteers; and churches with more than 450 members, 15 volunteers. Names must be gathered on official initiative petition forms provided by the CCAC, with the completed forms returned to the CCAC by the June 28 deadline.

Acknowledging the effort "is a Herculean task," Page emphasized, "We have to rely on the people in the pew and the pastors in the churches. If it's not comprehensive, it can't be done."

In addition to the volunteer efforts, CCAC leaders would like to collect up to \$2 million to finance the anti-gambling campaign. Noting that would be a tremendous increase over the \$250,000 collected during the group's 1994 anti-gambling drive, Page said, "We concede we may have to operate on less than \$2 million. ... We'll do the best we can with what we're given.

"The key is participation," he insisted. "We have people who can work and pray and give, and if we do that together, we can win."

Individuals interested in additional information about the anti-gambling campaign may contact Page or King at the CCAC office by calling 1-800-665-6883 or (501) 568-0448.

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#### FIRST-PERSON

42-year-old mother's tragedy:  
'Gambling devours people'

By Larry Page

Baptist Press  
4/25/96

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (BP)--The tragedy described in a recent St. Louis Post-Dispatch newspaper article was not unlike so many others I've read in the past several years. The headline alone spoke volumes: "Police Tie Suicide, Gambling: Woman Lost Savings; 'It Was Her Secret.'" The article went on to describe a 42-year-old married mother of two who had a good home in a nice community. She also was a successful manager of an insurance company.

However, without her family's knowledge, she had for some time been sneaking away to a gambling boat. There she squandered her family's savings, most of which had been earmarked for her children's college education. In desperation over the monster that had gripped her and left her utterly helpless, she descended to her basement and there, alone and with seemingly nowhere to turn, she took her life with a .357 magnum revolver.

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The investigating detective put it all into perspective when he reported, "Everything leads us to believe that the cause of death was suicide and that the motive was gambling. ... The family was shocked. They didn't know. It was her secret."

This sad tale and countless others dealing with suicide, spousal and child abuse, divorce, alcohol and other drug addictions, bankruptcies, foreclosures, the loss of businesses and farms and homes are a stark reminder of something we already know. Gambling devours people, it wrecks lives, families, marriages and homes. And, as if that weren't enough, it creates havoc with the economy and pushes our criminal justice system and correctional institutions beyond their limits.

Why would anyone want to bring activities as destructive as lottery and casino gambling into a state? The answer is simple -- greed. Greed and the irrational and insatiable appetite for money is what drives the gambling interests.

They care only about their enrichment and it matters not to them that in the wake of their gambling craze there is left the wounded lives, broken families and devastated businesses.

What, if anything, should the church do about the menace of gambling? After all, there's no prohibition against gambling in the Bible. And, besides, even if there were, the world seems to best tolerate us if we don't start meddling in other people's lives.

When I am asked what we should do, I have a ready answer. We should be about the business of telling the truth and being an advocate and defender of the victims of the vile gambling industry. Are there biblical truths that, when applied to gambling, give us clear direction about how we should respond? Of course, there are.

The Bible emphasizes the sovereignty of God in the direction of human events; gambling looks to chance and luck. The Bible indicates that man is to work creatively and use his possessions for the good of others, but gambling fosters a something-for-nothing attitude. The Bible calls for careful stewardship; gambling calls for reckless abandon.

The Bible condemns covetousness and materialism, but gambling has both at its heart. And the moral thrust of the Bible is love for God and neighbor, while gambling seeks personal gain and pleasure at another person's loss and pain.

If we take seriously the command to love others as ourselves and if we accept what the Bible has to say about the values that are embraced by gambling and if we are aware of the terribly high price of gambling as it devours people, families and the economy, then we will not have to dwell long on what we should do.

We need to boldly proclaim God's truth, so that no one can have the slightest doubt about how his people feel about this evil presence in our land. We need to absolutely and resolutely abstain from any participation in or support for the various forms of gambling. We need to be proactive in opposing all pro-gambling measures that come before us to expand the gambling operations in our state.

We also should support and work for an absolute ban on all gambling in our state. We now have that opportunity.

The Christian Civic Action Committee recently filed a proposed constitutional amendment that, if passed by the voters, would prohibit all gambling. That's right -- all gambling.

The challenge of qualifying our amendment for the ballot is daunting, but for God's people who are inspired and motivated and angry about the vicious nature of gambling, it is easily within reach. The key is for all of us to work in concert with a common goal and with dogged determination.

We need several thousand of our church members who will commit to gather at least 25 signatures on petitions. We need to conduct voter registration drives in our churches and communities. We need help with grassroots activities and with a get-out-the-vote emphasis. We need financial resources; a campaign like this is a costly endeavor. Most importantly, we need your prayers. Please don't overlook this critical aspect of our campaign.

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If we will do these things, we will not be diverted or distracted from our witness. In fact, our witness will be greatly enhanced by this very clear demonstration of what Christ meant in Matthew 5:13-16. As "salt and light," we will glorify our Father in heaven as we care for our neighbors who are at risk from the devastating effects of gambling.

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Page is executive director of the Christian Civic Action Committee for the Arkansas Baptist State Convention.

Center for Biblical Revival  
gets Midwestern trustee OK

By James A. Smith Sr.

Baptist Press  
4/25/96

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--Fresh on the heels of presidential inauguration ceremonies, trustees of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary approved several new initiatives and elected three faculty members, as well as board officers.

The celebratory atmosphere of the two-day inauguration continued through the board's April 22-23 meeting, with nearly every decision receiving unanimous trustee approval.

"Something great is coming our way," President Mark Coppenger said in his report to the trustees. "It's as if God is telling us, 'Get the nursery ready and I'll send the blessing.' We're on track and by God's grace we'll get there."

Trustees approved creation of the Midwestern Center for Biblical Revival, intended to extend Coppenger's advocacy of "prairie fire" revival. The center will organize workshops, seminars and conferences on the theme of biblical revival on the seminary campus.

James Elliff, an itinerant Bible teacher, writer and conference leader from North Little Rock, Ark., was appointed as the center's resident consultant.

In this nonsalaried position, Elliff will continue his itinerant ministry, called Christian Communications Worldwide, moving its headquarters to Midwestern's Kansas City, Mo., campus.

"Jim Elliff is both an exponent and exemplar of biblical, personal revival," Coppenger said in presenting Elliff to the trustees. "He is the kind of man we need to have on our campus."

Trustees also approved creation of a new academic extension center based in Chicago. Coppenger said one of his visions for Midwestern was to fulfill the intentions of the Southern Baptist Convention in its establishment of a seminary which would reach the regions north of Kansas City.

The extension program will begin this fall with credit courses leading to a master of divinity degree and will be hosted by the Chicago Metropolitan Baptist Association. Coppenger also told trustees the program will permit Midwestern to establish an urban studies program.

Trustees approved a pilot project which could lead to a stand-alone diploma program for students who do not have an undergraduate degree. Accrediting agencies allow diploma students to take classes with master's-level students; however, guidelines stipulate they cannot account for more than 10 percent of any class. Lamar Cooper, academic dean, said this limitation has left 43 potential diploma students on waiting lists, unable to gain access to Midwestern classes.

The one-year pilot program will be coordinated by Tony Preston, who was elected a visiting professor of pastoral ministries. Preston, presently teaching preaching courses at Midwestern, holds the doctor of ministry degree from Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Miss.

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Cooper shared a report from one of the school's accrediting agency's, the Association of Theological Schools. The ATS Commission on Accrediting expressed concerns in 1994 over the school's "institutional governance and climate." Midwestern's new administration addressed the stated concerns in a lengthy report submitted in November 1995 and was commended by ATS for "concrete evidence of the (seminary's) efforts to address" the items cited. The commission voted to "not request that the Seminary show cause why it should not be placed on probation." Although the commission did not remove two of the four notations, Midwestern was asked to complete projects in progress to address the concerns after which ATS will consider a request for removal of the remaining notations.

The board unanimously elected three faculty:

-- Ben Awbrey was elected assistant professor of preaching. Awbrey holds the doctor of theology degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and is currently adjunct professor of preaching at the Master's Seminary, Sun Valley, Calif. At Master's, founded by Bible teacher John McArthur Jr., Awbrey teaches all the preaching courses. Coppenger and Cooper stressed Awbrey's commitment to teaching exegetical, expository preaching, which he demonstrated by presenting an impromptu sermon on Matthew 11:25-30 at the request of a trustee. Awbrey will begin teaching during the summer semester.

-- Mark DeVine was elected assistant professor of Christian theology. DeVine holds a Ph.D. from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky. He has served on Midwestern's faculty since 1994 as visiting professor of Christian theology.

-- Bruce Merrick was elected assistant professor of religious education. Merrick, who has a Ph.D. from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, began teaching at Midwestern as visiting professor in January. He has served churches in Missouri, Texas and Oklahoma as minister of education and minister of youth.

In board elections, Ronnie Rogers, pastor of Lakeside Baptist Church, Hot Springs, Ark., was elected chairman. Robert Lilly, pastor of Catonsville Baptist Church, Baltimore, was elected first vice chairman, and Robert Collins, senior pastor of Plaza Heights Baptist Church, Blue Springs, Mo., was elected second vice chairman. The board's new secretary-treasurer is Carl Weiser, pastor of Hyland Heights Baptist Church, Lynchburg, Va.

In other business, seminary trustees:

-- approved a \$4 million 1996-97 budget, a 1 percent increase over the current budget.

-- passed a resolution opposing President Clinton's "unwise and ungodly veto" of the Partial-birth Abortion Ban Act.

-- agreed to take steps to dissolve the school's subsidiary housing corporation.

-- approved formation of a committee to study Midwestern's bylaws and authorized the executive committee to work toward developing a campus plan for submission at the board's October 1996 meeting.

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Martin King contributed to this story. The full text of the trustees' Partial-birth Abortion Act resolution is available in Midwestern's library on SBCNet, General Ministry B section.

SBC legal counsel recommends  
continuing closed ITF meetings By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press  
4/25/96

NORFOLK, Va. (BP)--The meetings of the Implementation Task Force, the group coordinating the restructuring of the Southern Baptist Convention, will remain closed to the public, according to Bob Reccord, ITF chairman and pastor of First Baptist Church, Norfolk, Va.

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Reccord said legal counsel and other issues were the basis for the unanimous decision of the 10-member committee appointed last year by the SBC Executive Committee. An explanation of the committee's decision came in a April 24 letter to Bill Webb, president of the Association of State Baptist Papers. Webb is editor of the Word & Way, newsjournal of the Missouri Baptist Convention.

The ASBP, in a resolution approved at its annual meeting in February, had urged the ITF to open its meetings to the press. Reccord spoke to the editors at that meeting and cited sensitive legal and personnel issues for the closure but said he would take the resolution to the ITF for its consideration.

"The ITF has decided that its meetings must remain closed to the public in order to successfully accomplish the charge given the task force by the Executive Committee," Reccord told Baptist Press. "The ITF is dealing with complex and sensitive legal and personnel issues. Its meetings are lengthy and intense and involve not only the task force members but legal counsel who have advised the ITF that legal counsel needs to be offered privately. In addition, chief executive officers, state executives and others are invited into these meetings from time to time and they must be conducted in an atmosphere in which those persons may speak candidly to the ITF without fear of harming anyone."

Because of the intricacies of restructuring and its effect on many individuals, Reccord said, the ITF is sensitive to the reporting of incomplete information. Also, the ITF must operate in an environment in which its members can explore all options and choose from among those options without anxiety that unchosen options will be reported as chosen ones, or without creating discomfort caused by divulging the discussion of options which will not finally be employed, Reccord said.

"Secrets are not going to be kept from the Baptist public. But the ITF must guard against harming any individuals as well as compromising the success of the restructuring by premature public reports.

"While the ITF believes it can best serve Southern Baptists by not conducting its meetings publicly, it will certainly continue to communicate its activities, progress and decisions through Baptist Press," Reccord said. "It is hoped that the state Baptist papers will carry those reports immediately and in their entirety so that Southern Baptists will remain timely and fully informed."

The restructuring plan of the denomination, approved by the SBC in 1995 and called the "Covenant for a New Century," will, among other things, reduce the number of SBC agencies and institutions from 19 to 12 through mergers and dissolutions. A final vote on SBC Bylaw 15 will be taken at this year's annual meeting in June in New Orleans.

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**Ancient manuscript research  
stirs listeners' attention**

**Baptist Press  
4/25/96**

CARY, N.C. (BP)--When Baptist preacher Dean Mattern travels, he's always happy to tell people what he does for a living.

"I tell them the truth -- I'm an ancient manuscripts researcher," says the pastor of New Haven Baptist Church, Cary, N.C.

"A group of people pay me to research these texts and give an oral report of my findings once a week."

In hotel lobbies and airports, Mattern then tells those listening how these texts -- all 66 of them -- are "thousands of years old and full of incredibly wild adventure stories, not to mention timeless principles about how to relate to the visible and invisible realms."

"People are shocked when I say these texts have been translated into English and anyone can read them," Mattern says. "By this time, I usually have a dozen people mesmerized by what I'm saying.

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"When I tell them these works make up the Bible, many say, 'I've never thought of it that way before.' My goal is to witness in a way that will make people seek more."

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Reprinted from SBC LIFE.

Chaplain to address  
response to change

Baptist Press  
4/25/96

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--How to manage corporate change will be discussed during the Southern Baptist Chaplains Convocation June 10 at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Eugene Huffstutler, director of pastor care at Mercy Baptist Hospital in New Orleans, will lead the discussion. The hospital where he serves is the result of a 1994 merger of a Catholic and Baptist hospital. Talking to staff during the transition, Huffstutler concluded that "institutionalism is one of the chief forms of idolatry in our society. People put their faith and trust in an institution and think if they're loyal and devoted, the organization will take care of them. It's become painfully obvious that this is a false god. Our real security always rests with God."

The program will begin at 10 a.m., followed by a lunch with Don Hammonds, Home Mission Board interim vice president for ministry, as the guest speaker. There is no cost for the convocation, but participants are asked to register by calling the Home Mission Board chaplaincy office at (770) 410-6495 or (770) 410-6492.

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Ski-slope missionary  
is mountainside witness

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press  
4/25/96

GATLINBURG, Tenn. (BP)--Home missionary Debbie Wohler has heard people promise God a lot of things on the ski slopes.

"People promise God that if he'll just get them down the mountain they'll do anything he wants," said Wohler, who ministers in Lake Tahoe, Calif. "They say, 'I'll tithe. I'll even teach Sunday school, God, if you'll just get me off this mountain.'"

Wohler and others hold Sunday mountainside services at the ski area. To initiate conversations before and after the services, they help skiers having difficulties. "You should see the look on their faces when we ski up with our badges that say 'ski chaplain.' They think God is there to collect on that promise they just made."

Wohler talked about her work in resort missions during the national resort and leisure ministries conference, April 20-24. She also witnesses while riding with skiers on chair lifts. "When they are 20 to 50 feet up in the air, where can they go?"

Her ministries parallel those of many other resort area ministers, with a mix of services for guests as well as employees and residents. All activities are designed to meet needs and build relationships so the love of Christ can be shared, she said.

Lake Tahoe has 12 million visitors annually, and First Baptist Church of Tahoe City works to meet this mission field, she said. "Jesus said in the Great Commission that we're to go and tell, but sometimes we in the church act as if he said go and sit."

First Baptist provides a variety of children's ministries. Among them: before- and after-school care and a Parents Night Out, when members offer child care so parents can spend quality time together.

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While the church averages about 80 people on Sunday, more than 100 children often hear about Jesus through puppets, Bible stories and music at the Parents Night Out, Wohler said. "We don't have to be a big church to do big things for God. We've seen kids and moms and dads come to know Jesus just because we're there to meet needs."

Wohler has been in resort missions 17 years. She credits the Cooperative Program with allowing her to concentrate on ministry rather than financing. "I don't have to go out and ask for money all the time. I have full-time ability to minister because of what Southern Baptists do."

She illustrates the power of cooperation through a label-gathering campaign for her church to get a new van for the children's ministries. The church needs 1 million labels from Campbell food products to get the van, but after a year, members have collected only 68,000.

By appealing to Baptists in other states, they collected another 200,000 in just four months. "We can accomplish so much more if we work together." Anyone wishing to send labels can mail them to Wohler at P.O. Box 7452, Tahoe City, CA 96145.

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FamilyNet to telecast  
'Concert of Prayer'

By C.G. Risenhoover

Baptist Press  
4/25/96

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The annual "Concert of Prayer" will be telecast on FamilyNet May 2 from 8-11 p.m. (ET).

The concert of prayer is held in conjunction with the National Day of Prayer.

FamilyNet is the broadcast television service of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission that reaches into more than 33 million homes nationwide through more than 115 affiliates.

The Concert of Prayer program, emphasizing spiritual revival and the advancement of Christ's kingdom, will originate from Hylton Memorial Chapel in Woodbridge, Va., a 3,600-seat state-of-the-art worship center near Washington.

Organizers say the program will be highly participatory. Scriptures and words to songs will appear on screens in the worship center and significant blocks of time will be committed for congregational praying.

Some of the most-recognized names in Christendom are expected to be at the service, including Bill and Vonette Bright, Campus Crusade for Christ; James and Shirley Dobson, Focus on the Family; Bill McCartney, Promise Keepers founder; Lloyd Ogilvie, chaplain of the U.S. Senate; Evelyn Christenson, United Prayer Ministries; Kay Arthur, Precept Ministries; and Avery Willis of the Southern Baptist Convention Foreign Mission Board.

"We are delighted to once again telecast the Concert of Prayer on FamilyNet," said Deborah Key, RTVC vice president of network operations and general manager of the broadcast service. "This is always a meaningful program because of the emphasis on prayer. The program calls our nation back to its roots, back to its spiritual foundation."

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Teen cancer victim's needs  
open door for church's care

Baptist Press  
4/25/96

PUEBLO, Colo. (BP)--Walter "Bud" Doerr Jr. was only 17 when he died just after last Christmas of cancer, not many years for the lifetime of inspiration he was to his friends and community.

After doctors told him there was nothing more they could do for him, he began planning his own funeral, a service for which there was no money.

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Shaun Gutierrez, Bud's best friend and a leukemia victim, opened a fund to help pay Bud's funeral expenses with \$500 of his own money. The local newspaper ran a brief story, and two women from New Heights Baptist Church in Pueblo, Colo., Claudette Venturi and Doreen Rinn, began to feel they should do more for the Doerr family.

"We went to the men's breakfast with our husbands and shared the story about Bud," said Venturi. "Our hearts melted and the men were deeply moved."

Gene Clopton recommended the church do a project on Bud's behalf, probably a dinner at the church.

That project, though, soon grew to touch the heart of the entire community.

"As the days went on and the word spread, the hand of God was obvious," said Rinn. She and husband Scott soon had a garage full of food donated by vendors.

"At our next planning meeting, the church realized the response was greater than our capacity to accomplish," Venturi said. "It was so apparent that God was leading in the project."

New Heights is located near Centennial High School, so they approached the school district about moving the event there. The administration and principal Frank Latino gave their approval within days.

Centennial's Spirit Club got involved in promoting the project, passing out fliers and helping serve meals. They also decided to pass out purple ribbons to help raise awareness of Bud's plight and the dinner.

New Heights pastor Walt Gragert was invited to visit Bud in his home, and led the youngster to the Lord.

Soon, a local radio station was promoting the event, a local printing company donated the fliers and volunteers pulled the entire thing together.

The dinner raised \$1,150, and other community projects brought in more than \$5,000.

Bud Doerr died on Dec. 28, 1995. His funeral was exactly as he had planned, and his gravestone is designed to depict one of his pencil sketches.

"You never know what you can do until you try, especially when God is at work," said Gragert. "We have tried for years to witness to the high school students, who are just across the street. God used two obedient servants to open our eyes."

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EDITORS' NOTE: A photo of astronaut Shannon Lucid to accompany (BP) story titled, "Astronaut made lengthy commute for Baptist worship in Moscow," dated 4/24/96, may be obtained from Christine McDonough in NASA's Astronaut Office in Houston, phone: (713) 244-8871, fax: (713) 244-8873.

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