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PROFITABLE:  
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► LIST OF NFL TRADES, 6C

**SWIMMER DUSTED  
FOR ILLEGAL STROKE**

KRISTINE QUANCE'S MISTAKE;  
RECORD HOLDERS UPSET, 1.5C

By Tom Strathorn, AP  
Quance: 'I had no idea  
what I'd done,' 5C



**EXPERTS HELP  
READERS WITH  
THEIR TAXING  
QUESTIONS**

ANSWERS FROM HOT LINE, 7B  
► IRS SEEKS NEW WAYS TO  
KEEP TRACK, COLLECT, 1B

**DRUG PURCHASERS  
TURN MEXICO INTO  
'PRESCRIPTION MILL'**

MANY BUY HUGE AMOUNTS, 8D



By Matt Iversen, USA TODAY  
John Updike: Author de-  
scribes new novel, 6D

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# Campus Crusader: Decades of work, a prestigious award

By Lori Sharn  
USA TODAY

Campus Crusade for Christ has quietly grown into the largest evangelical organization in the USA.

Now its founder, Bill Bright, will receive one of the world's most prestigious honors for his 45 years of aggressive evangelism.

On Wednesday, Bright was named the winner of the 1996 Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. The accompanying award of nearly \$1.1 million is intended to be the largest given in any field, exceeding even the Nobel prizes.

Established in 1972 to promote a better understanding of religion, the Templeton Prize will be awarded May 8 at Buckingham Palace in London. Past recipients include Mother Teresa and evangelist Billy Graham.

Bright remains president of the ministry he and his wife, Vonette, started in 1951 by declaring themselves "slaves" of Jesus.

"Overall, there aren't that many differences in our approach today as when we began," says Bright, 74. "We accept (being called aggressive) as a compliment."

But if the approach hasn't changed, Campus Crusade certainly has. Started at the University of California-Los Angeles, the nondenominational group's mission still includes persuading college students to be born again as Christians. The crusade has a presence on more than 650 American university campuses.

The worldwide ministry now has nearly 13,000 full-time employees and 101,000 trained volunteers who run such diverse operations as Athletes in Action, missions to inner cities and an ambitious Jesus Video Project. The movie dramatizing Jesus' life has been translated into 355 languages and viewed, according to Campus Crusade estimates, by 750 million people around the world.

This spring, volunteers in at least 44 cities will offer Americans free copies of the Jesus video. The goal: to reach all 100 million U.S. households by the year 2000.

To support the ventures, donors are giving more money: \$211 million last year, up 21% from 1994.

"The two leading evangelical names in the country are Billy Graham and Bill Bright," says Don Argue, president of the National Association of Evangelicals.

The *NonProfit Times* newspaper last year said Campus Crusade was the largest religious organization with income double that of Focus on



Honored: Bill Bright with wife Vonette after winning the 1996 Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. He will use the money to promote fasting and prayer.

the Family or the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

Despite the success and wealth of Campus Crusade, Bright, unlike some other evangelists, steers clear of partisan politics. He signed a petition urging the GOP to continue opposing abortion in its platform.

"That's not a political issue," Bright says. "That's a moral issue."

"They are pretty much focused like a laser beam on evangelism," says Larry Eskridge of the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals.

Part of Campus Crusade's financial success: All staffers, including the Brights, must raise donations to cover their own salaries.

The Brights live modestly but comfortably in a donated condomini-

um near Campus Crusade headquarters in Orlando, Fla. Their combined income last year (excluding housing) was \$43,402.

But support also comes from huge donations given by young entrepreneurs and wealthy individuals. Texas oil barons Caroline and Nelson Bunker Hunt helped finance the Jesus film in 1978.

The ministry is not without controversy.

Outrage and blistering editorials have accompanied college newspaper ads that advised homosexuals that there is "another way out."

"In this case, we view controversy as our friend," says Stan Oakes, director of Christian Leadership Ministries. "It just made students more interested in what we had to say."