

*'This Is The Life'*

# TV success story

By PIC FIRMIN  
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The Rev. Richard Hill believes in early morning television, especially on Sundays and Wednesdays.

Those are the days the Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod) now celebrating 20 years on television—airs its successful series of "This Is The Life" on three channels received in the Mid-Delta (8 a.m. Sunday on Channel 6, 9:30 a.m. Sunday on Channel 7 and 6:25 a.m. Wednesday on Channel 3).

The Rev. Hill, pastor of Faith Lutheran Church, 1836 Old Leland Road, is a believer not because the synod contends "Life" is the longest-running syndicated dramatic half-hour in television history, but because of the 50 to 75 letters he receives monthly from viewers in Northwest Mississippi.

It's not the number of letters that impress so much as the content, which tells him that the program does well two of its major aims: to reach those who would not otherwise hear the Gospel message and to present life's problems as they really are and offer some Christian solutions and partial solutions.

"I think these are the main reasons for the

Rev.  
Richard  
Hill



success of the program," Rev. Hill said. "As many of the letters indicate, the programs are watched by working people who get up early. And the programs are about real people with whom they can relate. One of the great failings of so many religious programs is that they are overly sentimental. 'This Is

The Life' is the opposite—it doesn't make life seem plastic or fake. It's real and the viewers appreciate its reality."

This sampling of quotes from recent letters show some of what Rev. Hill means:

"I work many hours in a week and am not able to go to church on Sunday because of my work schedule. 'This Is The Life' has really become part of my life."—Grenada.

"I saw 'This Is The Life' for the first time this Sunday. Thank you for your help."—Greenville.

"Your program is a much-needed service in our world today."—Cary

"I find your program very enlightening. You are to be commended for the thought and effort you use in presenting it."—Indianola.

"I watched your program and today the same things are happening in real life. I know this from experience."—Ita Bena.

"Thank you for your weekly TV program which we look forward to each week. I would like to have a copy of the book 'Hope For Modern Man.'"—Greenville.

"Have watched your show for the last 10 years and have enjoyed the visits from the pastor...please send me the book 'Hope For Modern Man.'"—Cleveland.

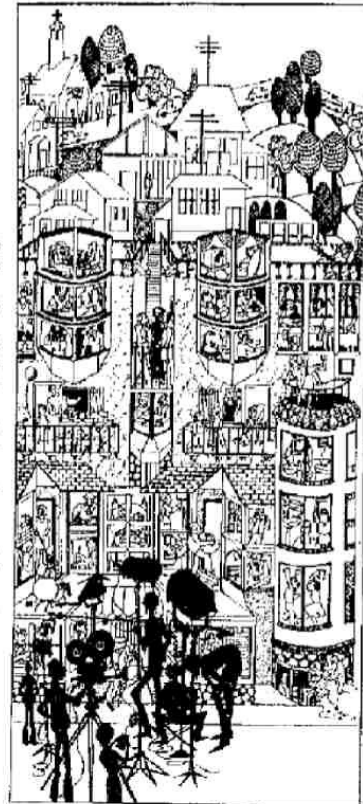
"Your broadcast is the only religious program I watch on Sunday morning because I must go to work. It fills a real need in my life."—Boyle.

The letters, mailed by viewers to program headquarters in St. Louis, are sent to pastors so they may visit the writers. Rev. Hill takes four days off a month to ride his circuit in Northwest Mississippi, from Vicksburg to the Tennessee state line and from Greenville to Grenada.

"It means a lot of extra work for me because we don't have a pastor right now in Grenada to share the visits, but it's worth it," Rev. Hill asserts. "The visits reinforce the letters, which seem to prove that 'This Is The Life' is certainly the most popular religious program on television."

To achieve success in the whimsical world of television, a show has to stay ahead of the game. "This Is The Life" is obviously well ahead of the game. Since it was first aired in 1952, it has been seen on more than 500 stations in the United States and around the world.

And in 1970 Lutheran Television expanded its offerings with "Christmas Is!", a half-hour animated Christmas special seen on over 250 video outlets around the nation. That



An artist's view of the production set of Lutheran Television's "This Is The Life" series.

program drew top ratings in prime time in major cities and smaller markets, and received 75,000 mail responses.

Apparently the 20 years of filming in Hollywood have given Lutheran Television the know-how to keep ahead of the television game.

Dr. Martin J. Neeb Jr., executive director of Lutheran Television, is also confident of the future: "We are constantly exploring new methods of production and new markets for our message. 'Christmas Is!' is a good example. It got the message to prime-time audiences through the children's market and pulled top ratings against tough competition. We can't be content to rest on our laurels...other times are being explored."

Perhaps the best testimony of the success of Lutheran Television is found in this quote that Rev. Dr. Herman Gockel, program religion director, says he heard from an instructor in script-writing:

"If you can write for 'This Is The Life,' you can write down for anything."



David Cassidy (right) of television's "Partridge Family" stars in the recent "This Is The Life" episode "In a Quiet Place," one of a number of well-known actors in the Lutheran Television series.

Special