



DAVID CASSIDY
This Is The Life Guest Actor

'Earthy' Facts on Religious TV

By **DICK KLEINER**

HOLLYWOOD (NEA) — This is the 23rd season for a television show that millions of Americans have never seen.

This Is The Life is the longest-running half-hour dramatic show on the air. It is produced by Lutheran Television, the communications arm of the International Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. In most cities, it is aired early every Sunday morning, that largely-unwatched hour which Dr. Martin Neeb, the executive producer, calls "TV's religion ghetto."

Neeb is an ordained Lutheran pastor who is based in St. Louis, the home of the Missouri Synod. But he has his doctorate in communications from Northwestern university and, several times a year, he comes to Hollywood to supervise filming the show, together with his production execu-

utive, another pastor named Aldon Albrecht.

This Is The Life is unique among TV's religious shows in that it comes to grips with some pretty earthy matters. In dramatized form, it has considered things like drugs, alcoholism, promiscuity, sex and, next season, will have a show about homosexuality.

Considering the fact that the Missouri Synod is, in theological matters, extremely conservative this is somewhat surprising.

"The church is paradoxical about this," Neeb says. "We are conservative yet we've put around \$15 million into TV in 23 years. I think we're progressive in our use of communications."

Neeb says the church's basic philosophy is that, today, TV is essential to reach the public.

"The church used to be able to

go out and knock on doors," he says, "and say, 'Welcome, come to our church.' You can't do that any more. The more complex society becomes the less churches can go into that place."

TV is the next best thing to a personal visit. And Lutheran Television is using TV wisely. It isn't a peachy show but it does get its message across. It uses many fine actors — people like David Cassidy, Paul Winfield, John Forsythe have done shows — and top script-writers and directors.

They have a script committee, a St. Louis group made up of clergymen, housewives, psychiatrists and teachers who sift through the material and serve as kind of a story editor. There is always a religious message tacked on but they are very careful to keep it non-denomina-

tional. Any ministers or churches shown are never identified as to sect.

The aim of the shows, Neeb says, is not to convert but to give "a gospel message." But he adds, with a grin, "if they decide to go to a Lutheran church after they see the show that's OK with us."

On Church Staff

A member of the First Christian church has joined the church staff at 5th and Lafayette as assistant organist.

Marvin Miller, son of Mr. and Mrs. Chadwick Miller of 1504 Grand, was graduated last spring from Ball State university at Muncie with a bachelor of science degree in music education with piano as his primary instrument.