

Long-lasting 'Christopher Closeup' show to end its 55-year run

NEW YORK - "Christopher Closeup," the television show sponsored by the organization that says it's better to light one candle than to curse the darkness, will no longer be broadcast after the end of the summer.

"Christopher Closeup" enjoyed a 55-year run on TV - exceeded only by CBS' evening newscast, NBC's "Meet the Press" and "Today," and the CBS soap opera "Guiding Light."

"It was a very difficult decision," said a statement by Christophers president and CEO Dennis Heaney, the show's host, "but given the evolving media landscape, we think it's the right opportunity to focus our resources on emerging technologies like podcasts and webcasts, as well as reinforcing our presence on broadcast and satellite radio."

Heaney added, "We take pride in the fact that we had such an outstanding run in a fickle TV universe where 10 years is considered a long time."

In its heyday in the 1970s, "Christopher Closeup," a syndicated half-hour public affairs program, reached 200-300 TV stations, including the ABC affiliate in New York City and five-days-a-week airings in Washington.

Today, it's available in 166 countries through the Armed Forces Network, but its U.S. presence is limited to about 70 individual broadcast and satellite TV stations and cable outlets, according to Christophers spokesman David DiCerto.

Over thousands of installments, the show played host to politicians, celebrities, sports figures, journalists, scientists, social activists and Nobel Peace Prize winners. Among its guests were Elie Wiesel, Arthur Ashe, Ed Bradley, Dorothy Day, Pete Seeger, Charles Osgood, Hugh Downs, Jim Henson, Ralph Nader, Tim Russert, Cesar Chavez, Bob and Dolores Hope, Mike Wallace, Alex Haley, Ken Burns, Bill Moyers, Fred Rogers and Sister Helen Prejean, a Sister of St. Joseph of Medaille.

Each head of the Christophers has done double duty as the show's host, from Maryknoll Father James Keller, the Christophers' founder, to Fathers Richard Armstrong, Tom McSweeney and John Catoir, Monsignor Jim Lisante and now Heaney, the show's first lay host. Father Armstrong had a lay co-host, Jeanne Davis Glynn.

The name “Christopher Closeup” won’t be consigned to the dustbin. A radio version of the show, on the air since the 1970s, will continue to carry the name, and DiCerto told Catholic News Service the Christophers are looking at expanding it to the half-hour format the TV show used over six decades. The radio show is carried by the Sirius satellite radio network as well as on some local stations.

DiCerto said discussions were taking place on whether to use the “Christopher Closeup” name for its podcast and webcast applications.