

Tippett receives medal for creating, hosting radio show about faith

by [Sarah Pulliam Bailey](#) in the [September 3, 2014](#) issue

On September 11, 2001, Krista Tippett was in Washington on her way to meet with potential funders to help her create a radio show focused on faith. As the day unfolded with attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the meeting was canceled.

“Unfortunately, the case for religion as a force in the world was made for me,” Tippett said.

Eventually, with help from the Pew Charitable Trusts and Minnesota Public Radio/American Public Media, Tippett launched *Speaking of Faith* in 2003, which eventually became *On Being*, a one-hour broadcast that airs on 334 radio stations across the country.

President Obama recently honored the show’s host with a 2013 National Humanities Medal. The citation said Tippett’s show “avoids easy answers, embracing complexity and inviting people of all faiths, no faith, and every background to join the conversation.”

Her guests have ranged from retired Anglican archbishop Desmond Tutu to Focus on the Family president Jim Daly.

Before creating the show, Tippett was a journalist and also special assistant to the U.S. ambassador to West Germany before the Berlin Wall fell. She studied history at Brown University before going to Bonn in 1983 on a Fulbright scholarship to study the politics of cold war Europe.

She had grown up in a Southern Baptist family but lost interest in religion during college. While living in Europe she returned to religion, joining an Anglican church. She then pursued a master of divinity degree from Yale University and is now an Episcopalian.

Tippett’s show has broadened since its conception to address questions such as: What does it mean to be human? How do we want to live? The interviews are

focused less on religion news or theological topics and more on a spiritual discussion. Recent topics, for instance, included mindfulness, mysticism, and the inner life.

“We have a scary amount of silence,” Tippett said about the show. “We can create something that has a contemplative space to it.”

Radio, said the 53-year-old mother of two, is both individual and communal.

“There is an amazing intimacy about radio that lends itself to talking about intimate things, talking about spiritual things, or talking about what it means to be human,” Tippett said. “The medium of radio creates space for the spiritual and religious life, tapping into the reflective part of us.” —RNS