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# **CATHOLIC TELECOMMUNICATIONS NETWORK OF AMERICA, INC.: DIOCESAN IMPLICATIONS**

WASYL M. LEW

The Catholic Telecommunications Network of America, Inc. (CTNA), a wholly-owned subsidiary of the United States Catholic Conference, is a for-profit entity created to provide telecommunication services to the dioceses of the United States and to other institutions related to the Church. Before discussing the specific services CTNA provides, it may be beneficial to explain briefly the sensibility behind the use of a satellite system.

Notwithstanding the curvature of the earth, radiowaves travel in straight lines; they travel on a tangent to the earth's surface. Radiowaves can therefore travel, on their straight trajectory, directly to a satellite, where, by use of a device known as a transponder, the signal can be received, reconfigured and transmitted back down to earth in a straight line.

The satellite, because of its location, views virtually an entire hemisphere. It is thus a very powerful tool, for with one uplink transmission a satellite can cover the whole United States, including Alaska and Hawaii, as well as the remainder of the hemisphere. This of course covers a tremendous number of people and institutions: 50 million Catholics, 172 American dioceses, 240 colleges, 640 hospitals, and probably more than 1,000 administrative, residential, and ministerial loci of the religious orders in the United States, in short, a potential network of over 2,000 nodes. That is massive, and that is why a satellite system is necessary.

Turning to the services themselves, CTNA, for example, provides video programming of a moral quality to the bishop to have him do with

it as he will. CTNA also provides him with a package that he can negotiate for distribution with the local distribution functions, such as cable and commercial video. Additional services include radio and teleconferencing. Perhaps by 1984, it will be possible to hold meetings of the diocesan attorneys by teleconference. Each attendee would go to a communications center and view the proceedings. They would be able to ask questions and be able to interact with the speakers. Another service is telelecture, that is, the ability of schools to provide curricula to other schools. Professors can lecture via telecommunication, and teacher-student interaction can be maintained by means of electronic mail or the distribution of printed material. Other possible future services include computer interaction, computer linking, and telephone trunking.

During the first phases of CTNA, distribution most likely will be from the United States Catholic Conference to the dioceses. In later phases, when it becomes economically feasible, distribution and interaction between the various dioceses will be possible.

CTNA was created by the United States Catholic Conference for service to the American Church. It was created by the majority decision of the bishops, but it is still a network in the sense that affiliation is voluntary by each of the individual entities suitable to the affiliation. There is no way that we can foster participation other than through the free enterprise means of marketing these services: by convincing the users that the services are useful. CTNA is a for-profit institution, which in the general environment of not-for-profit Church institutions can be misunderstood. Although CTNA has been capitalized by the Church, to the extent of \$4½ million over 3 years, the Church's intention is that CTNA become fiscally viable. The Church does not intend to provide a continual money supply.

Our intent is to provide services to our Church affiliates at cost, while providing teleconferencing services to entities outside of the Church at a profit. The affiliation fee, which covers the administrative cost of network operation, is \$5,000. Subsequent to affiliation, starting with the second year of membership, there will be an annual membership fee. The structure of the annual membership fee recognizes the size differentials between dioceses; the fee will be charged at a rate of \$5,000 for the largest dioceses, \$3,500 for the medium sized, and \$2,000 for the smallest. The dioceses will receive affiliation, consultive services from the network, and the administration of the total activity.

In addition, with affiliation comes not only a license to procure services from CTNA, but also the ability to acquire the necessary technical equipment at a quantity discount base. An affiliate can acquire through CTNA a fully operational, enhanced downlink, installed, licensed and cleared for operation, and a turn-key operation, operable by a technically literate person, but not necessarily a technologist. The equipment is al-

most as simple to operate as a television set or a video tape recorder.

Finally, the services will be provided at three levels. The full package will be 25 hours per week; the middle package will be 15 hours per week; the minimum package of services will be 7½ hours per week. Those packages will include, respectively, 3 hours per day, 2 hours per day, and 1 hour per day of video programming. This programming is suitable for public redistribution, should the Ordinary of the diocese choose to redistribute. Charges for these service levels also will be on a tiered basis, recognizing the relative size of a diocese and the relative capability to pay for services. Accordingly, the maximum cost to the large dioceses should be no more than \$15,000; for the medium dioceses, in the vicinity of \$13,000; and for the small dioceses, no more than \$11,000. Perhaps those figures sound like a great deal of money, but when you consider that \$15,000 provides 1,300 hours of service annually, the bare figures are a mere \$11.54 per hour of telecommunication service.