

World & Nation

Shortage of subscribers poses financial trouble for CTNA

By Jerry Filteau
Washington (NC) — The Catholic Telecommunications Network of America (CTNA) will continue to be in "serious financial trouble" unless more dioceses sign up to use the network, Archbishop J. Francis Stafford of Denver told the U.S. bishops November 18.

He estimated that at least 400 affiliates will be needed by 1992 to place the Catholic network on an even financial keel. Others have projected that 250 affiliates will be needed by then, he said, but "I think that is conservative and unrealistic."

About 100 dioceses out of 180 in the country have affiliated with the network. Archbishop Stafford cited Catholic institutions such as hospitals and retreat houses as other possible affiliates.

The need for heavy subsidies has made the network an object of criticism. When the bishops formed the network in 1981, it was expected to reach a balanced budget within three years.

Archbishop Stafford was appointed earlier this year to head a bishops' committee to evaluate the network and the Catholic Communication Campaign, a yearly collection in the nation's churches to fund communications projects.

The archbishop urged bishops not yet affiliated to become familiar with the network and its technological aspects so that they will be ready to affiliate with it when his committee's final report is completed in the spring.

If dioceses are not affiliated, he said, it will be difficult to convince other Catholic institutions that it is worth their while to join.

The network operates five days a week with four and a half hours a day of TV programming and three hours of radio. It also operates national teleconferences on Catholic issues and provides live coverage of some major Catholic events, such as meetings of the U.S. bishops and the visit of Pope John Paul II to the United States in September.

Bishop James W. Malone of Youngstown, Ohio, past president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, said that when the bishops decided to form the network "we committed ourselves to be in the midst of the electronic age."

The network has shown substantial improvement since then, but "now that commitment is going to falter and maybe fall unless dioceses make that generous step" of affiliating, he said.



Bob Strawn/NC News
 A report on troubling prospects for the Catholic Telecommunications Network of America was among the issues considered by U.S. bishops during last week's four-day gathering.

From his own experience of affiliating the Youngstown diocese, he said, he came to understand the difficulty of making that kind of commitment and the "reluctance of brother bishops to go on the line."

But he emphasized how much he values the

network, saying the extent of his commitment could be seen in the fact that earlier this year he released one of his own key diocesan officials, Father Bernard R. Bonnot, to head the network.

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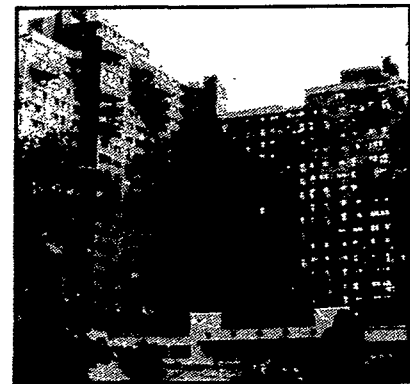
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