
BUILDING ON AN IDEA:
**CathLINK, the Australian Catholic Library
and Information Network**
*Stuart Whelan, Library Manager, St Patrick's Campus
Australian Catholic University*

- **What is CathLINK?**
- **Inspiration from Hans Arns!**
- **Development Grant from Vice Chancellor's Fund**
- **Profiles of target agencies gathered**
- **Searching possibilities of database**
- **Technical aspects**
- **Future Directions**

What is CathLINK?

The simple answer is that it is a web-based gateway to Australian Catholic libraries and information agencies. It aims to raise awareness of available resources, promote research and facilitate the sharing of information within the Catholic community.

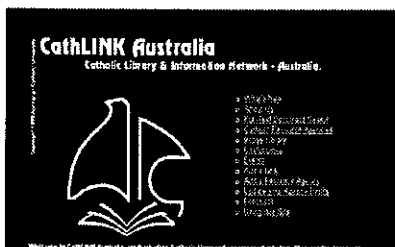
CathLINK is an initiative of Australian Catholic University Library. ACU is a publicly funded university with teaching and research in education, the social sciences, health sciences and theology. It has six campuses located in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Ballarat and Canberra.

CathLINK has been created to assist interested individuals and researchers find information in an increasingly diverse range of Catholic organisations including:

- Diocesan Agencies
- Religious Communities
- Catholic Universities, Colleges and Seminaries
- Counselling and Pastoral Institutes
- Catholic Education Offices

The inspiration for CathLINK came out of *Sharing the Word*, a paper written in 1998 by Hans Arns, the then Librarian of the Catholic Institute of Sydney. In this paper Hans advocated increased co-operation between Catholic resource organisations to facilitate access to what he saw, as valuable, but under utilised resources. His main suggestion to address this issue was for the creation of a central agency to act as a single referral point for those seeking information on any aspect of Catholicism.

While this never came to fruition, the idea did strike a chord with Stephen Oakshott, the library manager of our Sydney campuses. Stephen believed that a website could do what Hans was suggesting, but at a fraction of the cost. Spurred on by both professional and personal interest, Stephen put together a proposal to develop a website and was successful in obtaining \$17,000 from the Vice-Chancellor's Initiative Fund. *Contd. over*



What became known as CathLINK had found support from both within the Library and the University. For ACU Library, it was one of a number of web based initiatives and part of the drive to establish a digital library. For the University, the project had a natural fit within its Strategic Plan, which calls for stronger partnerships with the both the Church and the community.

In May 1999 the CathLINK Team began work with a mail-out to gather information from target organisations. Profiles of 75 information agencies from all over the country were entered into the CathLINK database, with details of their services and collections. The site and web pages were designed and the logo chosen. The CathLINK logo brings together several ideas into a single composite image. The dove symbolises the idea of message and communication and the open book represents the information agencies that have come together to make their resources available.

Since its launch by the Vice-Chancellor, Peter Sheehan in February 2000, CathLINK has undergone further development. With the appointment a Web Development Librarian at the Strathfield campus, the original website has been expanded to improve access to research materials. CathLINK now provides links to the major national and international Catholic web sites.

The CathLINK home page gives access the following features:

The Resource Agency Search

This allows searching of the profiles that have been entered into the database by entering a location, organisation name or subject. Performing a search returns a list that gives the full name of the agencies that meet the criteria and also their location.

By selecting an individual entry the profile of the agency can be viewed. This provides the contact details, an email address and a link to the website. Other information includes the opening hours, a short history of the agency, details of the

collection size, major subject areas and services available to the public.

Full text Document Search

The vast number of religious resources on the Internet has inspired the CathLINK team to create a full-text on-line document search. This recently added feature indexes scholarly sites that provide access to full-text documents via the web. Beginning with Early Christian Studies and Church documents, there are plans to extend the coverage over time.

Useful Links

The Useful Links page provides a subject gateway to a wide range of websites covering what may be of interest to those looking for Catholic information and resources. Arranged by category this section aims to be a comprehensive listing of Australian Catholic websites and includes many major international ones as well.

Image Library

The demand for good quality religious images by educators and students alike has led to the creation of an Image Library. There are 161 optimised on-line images in 15 different categories that can be downloaded and used freely. There are also links to other sites of interest.

TECHNICAL & DESIGN ASPECTS

CathLINK is a dynamic service that needs to adapt constantly to changes in technology and user requirements. This is the only way such a service can remain relevant and viable over time. Consequently the website has undergone considerable development since it was first launched and underlying this has been a concern to make the site easy to use and easy to maintain.

The CathLINK web pages are of a consistent and simple design, with a white background to facilitate printing. There is little or no graphic content to allow faster page transmission. A principle of "two step display" has been adopted throughout, so that any link can be reached within two "clicks" of the home page. There are top and bottom navigation bars to enable users to move about the site with ease.

The logo features on all of the pages to give identification, no matter at which point one enters. It also works as a "back to home" button.

The site has been registered with 16 popular Internet search engines to increase the chances of CathLINK being retrieved in a search. The URL for the home page has been submitted along with a suggestion for the categories under which it might be included. The goal is for CathLINK to be displayed at the top of the page of search results.

To ensure that the site is easy to find and to enable discovery, an extensive list of keywords relating to its purpose and content has been included in the metadata in the HTML header for all of the pages.

CathLINK is hosted on its own dedicated NT server and uses a Microsoft Access Database. The information search and retrieval capability is provided through ASP or Active Server Page programming. This is a scripting language that is used to provide interactivity within a web page and to run database queries. The ASP programming for CathLINK is contracted out.

So that the focus of work on CathLINK is on developing content, routine maintenance has been simplified as much as possible. Through ASP there is the facility for agencies to update their profile in the CathLINK database online and in real time, using the password protected update option. New agencies can submit a profile online that will be added on approval.

Use of the site is monitored with a service called LiveStats, which provides analytical reports on usage. This enables the CathLINK Team to ascertain what kind of use is being made of the site and from where. Daily, weekly, monthly and yearly reporting is available on such aspects as:

- The number of visits to the site
- The number of pages accessed per session
- The most and least commonly accessed page in ranked order

- The breakdown of the location of users by continent

Much of this information can be viewed graphically according to a user specified time period. Use of this service enables the re-evaluation of pages in light of their demonstrated usefulness.

Websites can change often and even disappear. Dead links are particularly frustrating for users and can devalue the service. Periodic manual verification of each link on every page is time consuming. To ease the demands of this task and to ensure that CathLINK is kept up to date the link checking service LinkHorizon from Nodeworks is used. This service automatically checks all of the links and then emails a report that gives details of any that are broken. This service is purchased by quota and charged per number of unique links checked. The monitoring, which involves multiple passes, can be done at any user specified interval.

Making the service more responsive to community needs and expectations is important to the CathLINK Team, so a feedback form is provided for user input.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Looking to the future of CathLINK there are a number of projects underway which extend the range of services and resources available through the site.

Web hosting and web development

In wanting to improve access to Catholic Resources, the CathLINK Team is making its skills and facility available to information agencies that would otherwise not have a web presence. The pilot for this is the creation and hosting of the website for the Sisters of Mercy at Singleton in New South Wales. This site enables the Sisters to make the library catalogue of the Convent Collection of some 7,500 items available through the web. It also includes information about the history of different parts of the collection, information for visitors and photographs of the Convent and other places of interest.

The creation of a web searchable catalogue involved the conversion of data from a previous database into Microsoft Access format. With ASP programming there is author, title, subject and keyword searching.

Costs associated with this project were kept to a minimum, with the Sisters paying less than \$1000. This has been a very successful venture and the CathLINK Team would be happy to speak to anyone who would like to attempt something similar.

Australian Catholic Church History Project

At this point in time many institutions are taking increasing advantage of digital technology to preserve and facilitate better access to rare and important resources. The Catholic Church in Australia is yet to take real advantage of this technology to help tell its own story. The inclusion of a collection of digitised Australian Catholic Church resources therefore represents a logical and very timely

extension to the range of services offered by CathLINK.

This project is being developed in partnership with the Veech Library at the Catholic Institute of Sydney. It is envisaged that this will be a self-contained resource, which will include a short history of the Catholic Church in Australia, from which there will be links to relevant digitised documents and photographs. These will initially be drawn from the collection held at the Catholic Institute. The participation of other Catholic agencies from around Australia will also be sought.

Building on the idea, CathLINK has grown and is developing beyond its original start. Stephen Oakshott and the Team look forward to further practical engagement with all of the information agencies involved. An important next step is the formation of a user group to facilitate greater levels of co-operation. If you have any ideas or suggestions Stephen would be happy to discuss these with you.

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The President's Page contd. from p.4

Lynn was first appointed as editor in 1987 until 1993, and then again from 1996 until this year. We have a nomination for editor from the South Australian chapter.

Thanks are also due to Tony McCumstie for on-going work in producing a new edition of **AULOTS**. I understand that it is well on the way and scheduled for production this year.

Philip Harvey has once again run a very successful Pettee Users group workshop and a cataloguing workshop prior to the Conference proper. Philip, we are grateful for your skills in this area, and your willingness to share your expertise.

Following an inward-looking year as we

have worked to sort out a new management structure for the Association, I believe that it is time to start looking outwards, and to improve on our 'marketing' the benefits of membership to others.

This may be a task that is better achieved by local chapters – what about the many church and theology libraries that have little or no connection with the Association, and also the College and university libraries which have theology departments. Chapters – this is your challenge for the coming year.

Finally, I would like to thank the membership for their support during the year.

Judith Bright
President

July 2002