

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON PERSONAL PARISHES AND PASTORAL CARE OF THE SYRO-MALABAR FAITHFUL

a) What is the Syro-Malabar Church?

The Syro-Malabar Church is the second largest of the 22 Oriental (Eastern Rite) Catholic Churches in full communion with the Church in Rome, and one of four having in common the East Syrian Liturgical tradition. It is a *sui iuris* (i.e. autonomous) Church governed by a Synod of Bishops headed by the Major Archbishop.

b) What are its key characteristics?

Known for its deep-rooted spirituality and high rate of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, the Syro-Malabar Church is perhaps the most vibrant Catholic Church in the world, with over four million believers and a rich and fascinating history. Syro-Malabar Catholics, also called "St. Thomas Christians", trace their origins and faith to the missionary efforts of St. Thomas the Apostle, who landed at Kodungallur in Kerala, India, in 52 AD.

c) What is a parish?

A parish is a definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis in an eparchy (diocese), whose pastoral care is committed to a pastor (parish priest) (*CCEO can. 278*)

d) What is a personal parish?

A personal parish is a parish like any other – but is specifically erected on the basis of language, pastoral need, rite, nationality or ascription to another Church *sui iuris* or even on some other clearly distinguished basis. For example a personal parish is a parish erected only for the faithful of Syro-Malabar Church in a Latin diocese like ours.

“As a general rule, a parish is to be territorial, that is to embrace all Christ’s faithful of a given territory. Where it is useful, however, personal parishes are to be established, determined by reason of the rite, language or nationality of Christ’s faithful of a certain territory, or on some other basis” (CIC can. 518).

“Provision must be made therefore everywhere in the world to protect and advance all these individual churches. For this purpose, each should organize its own parishes and hierarchy, where the spiritual good of the faithful requires it” (Vatican II - *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* no. 4).

It is the right of the diocesan bishop to establish personal parishes in his diocese.

e) Can there be two or more dioceses/parishes in the same territory?

Yes. For example, in 2013, the Eparchy of the Holy Family (“eparchy” is the word for “diocese” in the Eastern Catholic Churches) was erected in London for the Ukrainian Catholic Church.

f) Is there an obligation to take 'membership' in a personal parish?

When a person is baptized or received into the Catholic Church he/she does not become 'a member at large', but is ascribed (enrolled) in one of the twenty-three Churches *sui iuris*, of which the Latin Church is one. He/she cannot opt out of it, but has to live as a member of that Church. Syro-Malabar Catholics, for example, who attend Mass in a parish of the Latin rite, do not lose membership in Syro-Malabar Church nor do they become members of Latin Church.

g) If there is a personal parish established for the faithful of that rite, then do the faithful have an obligation to take 'membership' in the personal parish?

The Parish Priest of the personal parish shall be their proper pastor. Only he will have jurisdiction over the faithful of that Church *sui iuris*.

h) What happens if one does not take 'membership' in a personal parish?

It is an obligation upon the faithful of the Syro-Malabar Church that they take 'membership' in personal parish when it is erected in a particular place. If one does not take 'membership' in personal parish and remains in Latin parish, his or her marriage cannot be blessed by the Latin Parish Priest validly unless he receives the faculty from the Syro-Malabar Parish Priest (CCEO, c. 830 §1)

i) Can a Latin priest baptise children of Syro-Malabar parents?

No, except in case of necessity. Even if baptised by a Latin priest, the child is still ascribed to the Syro-Malabar Church.

j) Can a Latin priest present Syro-Malabar children to the bishop for confirmation?

No, because Syro-Malabar faithful are chrismated (confirmed) at the same time as baptism, as infants.

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