

# Charter of the Youth Apostolate

of the Saint Thomas SyroMalabar Catholic Diocese of Chicago USA

*“Lord our God, may the adorable name of Your most Holy Trinity be always praised and glorified, adored and exalted in heaven and on earth.”*

*-Order of the SyroMalabar Qurbana*

## Section I: Mission of the Youth Apostolate

As the young people of the Saint Thomas SyroMalabar Catholic Diocese of Chicago USA, we recognize that our faith life and ecclesial tradition is rooted in the faith experience of St. Thomas the Apostle, our father in faith. Disillusioned after the crucifixion and struggling with doubt, Thomas' encounter with the resurrected Lord marked the end of a search and the beginning of a journey. As a conversion experience that inspired generation after generation of the Malabar Coast in India, we also look to this model as the basis for our mission as an Eastern Catholic Church in North America. As the SyroMalabar Major Archiepiscopal Church, we are in communion with the Universal Catholic Church of Christ through the Bishop of Rome, the Pope. Within this community, we are called by our Lord Jesus Christ to be a renewed generation that seeks His Presence and serves His People. ***The mission of the St. Thomas Diocesan Youth Apostolate - a communion of youth groups, initiatives and ministries - is to unite all young people of the Diocese in response to the Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ by encouraging the formation of a deep interior life that overflows into genuine service to the Church and to the world.***

## Section II: The Soul and Principles of the Diocesan Youth Apostolate

### Soul of the Apostolate

God is infinite love and love seeks nothing but to *give itself* freely. Jesus Christ manifested this generous love for us in Scripture when He humbly “emptied himself” to be born in a manger and to die on a cross (Philippians 2:7). His entire life modeled the essence of humble love. With the same humble love we aspire to empty ourselves of worldly characteristics such as pride and ambition to become perfect instruments to do His work in His church. Even after His death, the apostles experienced this generous love in the presence of the risen Lord. Despite denying Him, doubting Him, and abandoning Him during His humiliating passion and death, they encountered Christ on Easter Sunday not as a vengeful presence, but a forgiving presence. Christ's love, experienced as forgiveness, inflamed the hearts of the apostles and led to a profound conversion where they experienced the fullness of life. Experiencing a love beyond the bounds of human reciprocity, Thomas could not but exclaim, “My Lord and My God!” (John 20:28). This apostolic flame, constantly nourished by the sacramental presence of Christ and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, spread to the ends of the earth and formed the Church, a new people of God.

As the Youth Apostolate of the St. Thomas Diocese, we are each called to seek this loving presence of Christ in His Word, His sacraments and His Church in order to bring his presence of peace and love to our families, to our communities, and to our world. This is *the soul of our apostolate*: through the love of those rooted in Him, others come to experience the path to salvation and the joy of abundant life. This abundant life in Christ strengthens us in mind, body, and spirit to live in hopeful expectation of God's unfolding plan. As an apostolate, therefore, we are called to be co-workers with Christ, serving one another through a deep interior life united with Him. Like the apostles, it is in Christ that we also experience the end of our search for truth and the beginning of our journey in faith.

### **Principles of the Apostolate**

**1. Communion.** This soul of our apostolate, therefore, unites all of us as a communion of youth groups and diverse ministries. Despite stretching across North America, we are united through a common faith heritage and future vision. As a principle of the apostolate, *communion* not only prioritizes authentic relationship over organization and task, but also emphasizes the mutual necessity to love both God and neighbor, one is simultaneously expressed through the other. As the first letter of John states, "for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20). Furthermore, communion emphasizes the harmonious collaboration of distinct charisms, talents, perspectives, and visions without competition and without vain ambition. This principle applies both within and between local youth groups, diverse ministries, regional teams, the national team, and the hierarchy in union with the Magisterium of the Church. Such diversity is united through the Holy Spirit for the sake of enabling a deeper encounter with Christ, both for ourselves and others.

**2. Disciples of Christ.** The youth apostolate is to both be empowered and to empower others to live as *disciples of Christ*. Discipleship marks the difference between grasping and receiving our identity. To grasp who we are is to be locked in constant comparison with others through rivalry, jealousy, and envy. It is to assume that despite our human limitations, we have everything figured out. To grasp is to reveal a closed heart. To receive who we are, however, is to be confident that although "we are God's children now... it does not yet appear what we shall be." Yet "we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him" (1 John 3:2). This passage reveals that our identity is given to us as part of a becoming that we cannot grasp. Who we are as SyroMalabar Catholics is slowly realized only by sitting at the foot of our Lord and learning from Him through prayer and imitation. Empowered by Christ and by those whom Christ sends to teach us, we are also called to walk with others and lead them to a more profound experience of our Lord. We are all in the process of healing, leading others to the Source of Healing. Pope Francis reminds us that "Jesus speaks in the silence of the mystery of the Eucharist and reminds us each time that following him means going out of ourselves and making our lives not something we 'possess,' but a gift to him and to others." Discipleship makes it possible for young people to experience the new life described by the Gospel. This new life promises the freedom to not only come as we are but to become what we were always meant to be.

**3. Holistic Growth.** As the Diocesan Youth Apostolate, we recognize that the universal call to holiness is a call to live life in its fullness. In response to this call, we desire the holistic growth of each person and every community with regard to the following components:

Advocacy: Engaging the Church to examine its priorities and practices to determine how well young people are integrated into the life, mission, and work of the Catholic community.

Catechesis: Echoing the Word of God. Sharing one's faith and passing on the gift of faith to others so that they can grow and mature in their faith.

Community Life: "We love because He first loved us." - John 4:19. Emulating Christ' work, our community life is centered in the source and summit of the Church: the Most Holy Eucharist. Specifically for the SyroMalabar Church, community life is centered in the Holy Qurbana. Drawing life from the presence of Christ in the Most Holy Eucharist, we aspire to create an atmosphere that is welcoming, comfortable, safe and predictable; one in which all know that their presence is welcomed, their energy is appreciated, and their contributions are valued.

Evangelization: Bringing the good news of Jesus to every community and seeking to transform individuals and society by being the Good News. Answering the call of Jesus to "go and make disciples."

Justice & Service: The call to work for justice; to serve those in need; to pursue peace; and to defend the life, dignity and rights of all our sisters and brothers. Following the example of Blessed Kunjachen, we desire to embody the preferential option for the poor.

Leadership Development: Calling forth, affirming, empowering and training young people to use their diverse gifts, talents and abilities for both Christ and His Church. In light of Christ's model of humble love, we seek a generation modelled after Christ's servant leadership.

Liturgy & Sacramental Life: Honoring, praising, and communicating with God. Offering God the gift of ourselves through Holy Qurbana, the sacraments, prayers and prayer services. By emphasizing the necessity of a vibrant sacramental life for the efficacy of all our acts of charity, we desire to make the Eucharist the "source and summit of our life."

Pastoral Care: The call to be a compassionate presence in imitation of Jesus' care of people, especially those who are hurting and in need.

Interreligious and Ecumenical Dialogue: As SyroMalabar Catholics living in the midst of a very diverse and multi-religious context, we must understand what it means to be Catholic in relation to our brothers and sisters of other denominations and our neighbors of other faiths. While affirming who we are as disciples of Christ, we also desire to love and respect those of other traditions who may inspire us to become better Catholics.

### **Section III: Structure of the Youth Apostolate**

At the historic Second Vatican Council, our Church Fathers declared that:

The Catholic Church holds in high esteem the institutions, liturgical rites, ecclesiastical traditions and the established standards of the Christian life of the Eastern Churches, for in them, distinguished as they are for their venerable antiquity, there remains conspicuous the tradition that has been handed down from the Apostles through the Fathers and that forms part of the divinely revealed and undivided heritage of the universal Church. This Sacred Ecumenical Council, therefore, in its care for the Eastern Churches which bear living witness to this tradition, in order that they may flourish and with new apostolic vigor execute the task entrusted to them, has determined to lay down a number of principles, in addition to those which refer to the universal Church (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*)

From this decree, the Second Vatican Council calls upon all Eastern Catholic Churches, including our church, to live in the fullness of their sacred tradition and faith life for the salvation of souls and the greater glory of Christ and His heavenly kingdom.

Recognizing this responsibility and obligation to proclaim the Gospel of Christ, Blessed John Paul II established the first SyroMalabar diocese outside of India - our St. Thomas Diocese of Chicago. Established in March 2001, our diocese was a historic moment for our church because we are the first diocese outside of India.

The authority and patron of the Diocesan Youth Apostolate is the Bishop of the Saint Thomas SyroMalabar Diocese of Chicago. We refer to *Christus Dominus*, the Second Vatican Council's Decree on Concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops:

Individual bishops who have been entrusted with the care of a particular church - under the authority of the supreme pontiff - feed their sheep in the name of the Lord as their own, ordinary, and immediate pastors, performing for them the office of teaching, sanctifying, and governing...

In faithful obedience to Christ and His Church, the Diocesan Youth Apostolate is fully committed to the Bishop.

This Charter of the Youth Apostolate shall be subject to the Bishop of the St. Thomas Diocese and the SyroMalabar Catholic Major Archiepiscopal Church. We fully submit to the bylaws and official guidelines of the St. Thomas Diocese as a complement to this charter. We also recognize Bishop's authority outside the bounds of this charter in any circumstance to meet the needs of pastoral care and spiritual welfare of the faithful entrusted to him.

**2. Structure of the Youth Apostolate.** To effectively and efficiently operate the Youth Apostolate and its charter, the Bishop of the St. Thomas SyroMalabar Diocese of Chicago has constituted the following structure:

**Youth Apostolate Director:** A priest who is appointed directly by the Bishop of the St. Thomas SyroMalabar Diocese of Chicago.

**Parish level.** A team of coordinators in a parish who are selected and appointed by the individual parish vicar. The vicar can consult with the parish animator & former team of coordinators to help make determinations. A group of 6 coordinators is recommended for proper distribution of responsibilities amongst leaders, however is not restricted to that number. Elections & hierarchy (president, vice president) are highly discouraged.

**Regional Teams of Coordinators:** Led by a National Youth Coordinator(s) who belongs to that same region, regional teams are composed of representatives from every parish and mission per region. These individuals are recommended by the parish/mission priest to the Youth Apostolate Director and appointed by the Bishop.

**National Team of Coordinators:** A team of national youth coordinators recommended by the Youth Apostolate Director and appointed by the Bishop of the St. Thomas Diocese.

#### **Parish/Mission Coordinators & Ministry/Initiative Leadership**

As a communion of youth groups, ministries, and initiatives, the Youth Apostolate enjoys the fullness of a wide variety of traditions and activities unique to every parish, mission, ministry, and initiative. This charter recognizes the value of each local youth organization's particular structure and tradition which has been formed throughout their history, local reality, and community context.

At the same time, a youth group in parish life should find its fullest reality and communion with other members of the parish in the celebration of the Holy Qurbana. For the Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life. Overflowing from an authentic Eucharistic spirituality, the youth group in parish life receives grace to act beyond cultural barriers and form a family-like environment that is welcoming, comfortable and safe. A family where all know that their presence is welcomed, their energy is appreciated, and their contributions are valued.

For this reason, the charter makes the following recommendation in accordance with the local authority of the Parish Pastor/Mission Director:

#### *Recommended System of Parish/Mission Coordinators & Ministry/Initiative Leadership*

- One-year term (term limits set by Parish Pastor/Mission Director)
- A team of coordinators equally responsible of all activities (recommended maximum of six total youth coordinators)
- It is strongly recommended that all those in church authority and leadership do not facilitate any elections based solely on voting by youth.
- The final and only appointment and/or approval of parish/mission youth coordinators shall be made by the Parish Pastor/Mission Director with no interference
- In the spirit of the Church and to foster Christian leadership, nomination of youth coordinators may also be submitted by the regional youth coordinator (in discernment with regional youth team) to the Parish Pastor/Mission Director
- New youth officers are requested by this Charter to communicate their official appointment to their regional youth coordinator of their local parish/mission and regional youth team

#### *Expectations of Parish Coordinators*

- Annual formation/Orientation for new leaders organized by regional youth team.
- It is recommended that all Parish Coordinators build a strong and meaningful relationship with the Parish Pastor/Mission Director.
- Youth activities should be in line with the ecclesial and missionary duty of the Church. Youth activities should include communal or social events as well as faith forming activities.
- It is strongly recommended that the Parish Pastor/Mission Director is invited to as many youth activities as possible so that youth may have an opportunity to develop and strengthen their relationship with the Parish Pastor/Mission Director.
- All youth activities should welcome all youth that are members of the parish. Such involvement should foster cooperation and active communication amongst all youth. The contributions of all youth that foster a vibrant parish life should be openly shared, appreciated and valued.
- Youth activities should not take on any specific spirituality or style in a consistent or long term manner. Rather, all faith expressions should be welcomed and encouraged.
- Youth activities should not be conducted in isolation of the Parish Pastor/Mission Director. Rather, all activities are subject to his recommendation and approval.
- Youth activities should work in collaboration with the other activities of the parish to achieve a communal place of worship. Youth activities should not take place during important parish events.
- Parish coordinators should cooperate with clergy, parish council, advisory board, youth animator and parish council youth representatives to share a common vision and to effectively serve the needs of the youth in the parish.
- The parish coordinators should also cooperate with other lay movements such as Jesus Youth, KCYL, St. Vincent Depaul, Women's Forum, etc.

## **Regional Teams of Coordinators**

For fruitful practice of a Christ-centered and genuine communion of SyroMalabar youth groups, regional teams will serve as a “bridge”, connecting their respective parishes/missions with the wider vision of the DYA. These teams will ultimately build communion of parishes within the region by communicating and executing the vision of the Youth Apostolate.

### **Responsibilities of Regional Youth Teams**

1. Implementing Diocesan goals.
2. Coordination and strategic planning of all regional youth events and initiatives.
3. Communication with the National Team of Coordinators

### **Composition**

- National Youth Coordinators who belong to a particular region will serve as *ex-officio* chairs of their respective regional teams. They will be responsible to the team’s activities and operations and accompany the team.
- Every parish priest/mission director will propose one person per parish/mission to be part of the regional team. While nominations are made by the respective parish priest/mission director, Regional Youth Coordinators are appointed by the Bishop. Recommendations may be suggested by the National Team of Coordinators.
- Criteria for Regional Youth Coordinator
  - Commitment to Christ, His Church and the Hierarchy.
  - Two-year term (January 1- December 31)
  - Minimum of one year experience of youth activities/leadership at the parish/mission level.
  - Must be 18 years of age at time of appointment.
  - Willingness to travel for church and DYA related activities.
- Regional Teams will meet at a minimum of twice a year.

## **National Team of Coordinators**

The National Team of Coordinators is the discerning body of the St. Thomas Diocesan Youth Apostolate. Directed by the Bishop and, with him, the Youth Apostolate Director, the National Team of Coordinators is responsible for the discernment of the mission and vision of the Diocesan Youth Apostolate. Guided by the Holy Spirit and in communion with Bishop, the clergy, parish/mission leaders, and youth groups, together the National Team of Coordinators most importantly promotes unity of vision and purpose.

### **Responsibilities of National Youth Coordinators**

1. Serve as a bridge of communication and cooperation between Bishop, his clergy, and youth of the St. Thomas Diocese.
2. Holistic leadership of the St. Thomas Diocese Youth Apostolate
  - a. Develop the structure and content of the new parish leaders’ orientation in collaboration with regional team members.
  - b. Focused efforts on the development of regional team members through the model of Christian discipleship.

- c. Promote spiritual growth and guidance in servant leadership.
- d. Enable others to lead exemplary sacramental lives by fostering, developing, and deepening an appreciation of the liturgies of the Church.
- 3. Advocacy and promotion of DYA Charter
  - a. Communicate the soul, principles, and structure of the Diocesan Youth Apostolate to parishes/missions within the diocese, explaining its contents to parochial vicars, regional team members, parish/mission youth leaders, and parents
- 4. Exemplify lives of integrity in accordance with Christian discipleship
  - a. Promote programs and initiatives that benefit the poor, oppressed, sick, and needy of our communities

*Appointment and Composition of the the National Team of Coordinators:*

- A coordinator is recommended by the Youth Apostolate Director and appointed by Bishop.
- Composition of the National Team
  - The Charter recommends a team with twelve coordinators:
    - Six (6) coordinators from the regions: at a minimum, one coordinator must represent each region of the St. Thomas Diocese. Coordinator(s) of each region(s) will serve as chairperson(s) of their respective regional teams.
    - Six (6) coordinators appointed: additional coordinators (up to six) may be appointed by Bishop according to the judgement of Bishop and the needs of the Youth Apostolate at that particular time.
    - While this Charter recommends a total team of twelve national youth coordinators, it is according to the pastoral preference of the Bishop.
- Serve a minimum two-year term from the day of appointment.

**Section IV: The Charter as a Governing Document**

This Charter is an official and governing document of the Saint Thomas SyroMalabar Catholic Diocese of Chicago (USA) by decree of the Bishop. It is applicable to all matters, activities and affairs pertaining to youth (ages 13 to 35) of the St. Thomas Diocese.

By decree, the Bishop calls upon his clergy, parish/mission leaders, leadership of every ministry and initiative within the diocese, and all those in authority within the St. Thomas Diocese to recognize and oblige to the Charter of the Youth Apostolate when most appropriate, suitable and expected.

Any amendments of the document must be proposed by the National Team of Coordinators with a 2/3 vote in the affirmative to the Youth Apostolate Director. The Youth Apostolate Director will then officially submit the amendment to Bishop. Bishop has full authority to accept or deny the amendment. If approved, the amendment goes into effect immediately. This Charter is to be reviewed by every new composition of the National Team of Coordinators, thirty days from when Bishop issues his decree. During each re-review process, this Charter calls upon the National Team of Coordinators to be open, transparent, and collaborative with all those interested within the St. Thomas Diocese.



To continue building the Church of Christ and to evangelize His Holy Gospel, this Charter calls upon every youth, every ministry, and every initiative within the St. Thomas Diocese to the communion of the Youth Apostolate - to take part of it in full cooperation, united in spirit, and in common faith.