

Rooted in the Eucharist, Strengthening the Domestic Church, Renewed for Mission

*Lineamenta for the Eparchial Assembly of the Syro Malabar
Eparchy of St. Thomas the Apostle, Melbourne*

The *Lineamenta* is a foundational preparatory document issued prior to an Eparchial Assembly, intended to guide reflection, consultation, and discernment among the faithful. It outlines the key themes and pastoral priorities that require attention, enabling the faithful in the Eparchy to engage meaningfully in the process of ecclesial renewal. Far from being merely an administrative text, the *Lineamenta* serves as a spiritual and pastoral instrument that invites the entire eparchy to listen, reflect, and respond together to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

The Eparchial Assembly itself is a significant moment in the life of the local Church. It is an expression of synodality, where the People of God come together to evaluate their present realities, discern future directions, and strengthen communion in mission. It provides a structured opportunity to address pastoral challenges, renew ecclesial life, and foster a shared vision rooted in the Gospel and the Church's tradition.

The chosen theme—“*Rooted in the Eucharist, Strengthening the Domestic Church, Renewed for Mission*”—is both timely and deeply relevant. It highlights the centrality of the Eucharist as the source and summit of Christian life, calls for the strengthening of families as the primary place of faith formation, and emphasises the missionary responsibility of the Syro-Malabar diaspora. This integrated vision ensures that faith is lived, nurtured, and proclaimed in a holistic manner.

The *Lineamenta*, structured in five chapters, addresses the core dimensions of ecclesial life through themes centered on the primacy of liturgy, the transmission of faith through catechesis, the vital role of youth in ecclesial renewal, the strengthening of the family as the domestic Church in the face of contemporary challenges, and the empowerment of the Syro-Malabar community within the Australian context. These themes are carefully discerned in response to present pastoral realities, fostering active participation, deeper formation, and a renewed sense of identity and mission among the faithful.

CHAPTER I

Celebrating the Mystery of Christ: Liturgy at the Heart of Ecclesial Life

Introduction

The liturgy is not simply one activity among many in the life of the Church; it is the source from which the Church's power flows and the summit toward which all her activity is directed (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10). The vitality of a parish is therefore measured not primarily by its programmes or structures but by the depth, reverence, and participatory character of its liturgical life, especially the celebration of the Holy Qurbana.

In the Syro-Malabar Church, the liturgy has a uniquely formative role. Rooted in the East Syriac tradition, it is profoundly biblical, ecclesial, and mystical. Through the liturgy, believers are formed not only through teaching but through participation in the saving mysteries of Christ. In a multicultural and increasingly secular context, the faithful—especially younger generations—must rediscover the liturgy as a living encounter with the Risen Lord rather than as a routine obligation.

Pastoral renewal of parish life therefore requires renewed attention to several key areas: the centrality of the Holy Qurbana, the celebration of the sacraments, active participation of the faithful, fidelity to the Syro-Malabar liturgical tradition, and the need for mystagogical catechesis.

The Holy Qurbana: Source and Summit of Parish Life

The Holy Qurbana makes present the Paschal Mystery of Christ and continually builds up the Church as His Body. As the Second Vatican Council teaches, participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice is “the source and summit of the whole Christian life” (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 11).

For this reason, all pastoral initiatives in a parish must flow from and lead back to the Eucharist. Devotional practices, social activities, and administrative responsibilities all have their place, but they should never overshadow the central role of the Holy Qurbana. Catechism programmes, youth ministries, and parish planning should remain consciously Eucharistic in orientation.

The Sunday celebration of the Holy Qurbana is especially significant. Gathering as a parish community around the altar expresses the visible communion of the

Church. Habitual absence from Sunday Qurbana or casual movement between parishes without pastoral reason can weaken this sense of ecclesial unity. Pastoral efforts should therefore help families rediscover the meaning of Sunday as the Lord's Day and encourage reverent and prepared participation.

The Sacraments: Celebrating the Mystery of Salvation

The sacraments are the privileged celebrations of the mystery of salvation, through which Christ continues to sanctify His people and build up the Church. Each sacrament is a liturgical encounter with the living Lord, communicating grace and drawing the faithful into deeper communion with God and with one another. Therefore, it is essential that the faithful be formed to understand the profound spiritual and ecclesial significance of sacramental celebrations, especially within the richness of the Syro-Malabar liturgical tradition. In contemporary pastoral practice, however, there is a tendency to emphasise the social and cultural dimensions of these celebrations—such as external arrangements, gatherings, and festivities—often at the expense of their sacred character. This calls for renewed catechesis that reorients the faithful toward the primacy of the liturgical mystery, fostering a deeper awareness that the sacraments are not merely social events, but transformative encounters with Christ that demand reverence, active participation, and a life of ongoing conversion.

Active Participation in the Liturgy

The Second Vatican Council emphasises the need for the full, conscious, and active participation of the faithful in the liturgy (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14). True participation involves both interior and exterior engagement with the mystery being celebrated.

Interior participation includes attentive listening to the Word of God, meaningful responses in prayers and acclamations, reverent silence, and the offering of one's life in union with the Eucharistic sacrifice. Exterior participation includes the exercise of liturgical ministries such as readers, altar servers, and choir members. Those who undertake these ministries should be properly trained and spiritually formed, recognising that they serve the sacred liturgy of the Church.

The Syro-Malabar Liturgical Tradition

The Syro-Malabar liturgy is a precious patrimony of the Church. Its prayers, gestures, and symbols express a rich theology marked by biblical imagery, eschatological hope, and a profound sense of mystery. Faithful observance of the approved liturgical texts and rubrics safeguards the unity of the Church and preserves the integrity of this tradition.

Pastoral efforts are therefore needed to help the faithful understand the meaning of the symbols and structure of the East Syriac liturgy. Such formation will foster deeper appreciation of the Syro-Malabar identity while strengthening communion with the universal Church.

The Need for Mystagogical Catechesis

Mystagogical catechesis—guiding the faithful into the meaning of liturgical rites and symbols—is particularly important today. Many participate in the liturgy without fully understanding its language, gestures, and theological depth. Through homilies, catechism programmes, and parish formation initiatives, the faithful should be gradually introduced to the spiritual meaning of the liturgy. When properly understood, the liturgy becomes a school of faith that shapes Christian life and discipleship.

Conclusion

Renewal of parish life begins at the altar. A Eucharistic centred, participatory, and tradition-rooted liturgical life naturally strengthens faith, fosters unity, and encourages missionary witness. By rediscovering the beauty and depth of the Syro-Malabar liturgy, our parishes can become communities truly formed by the Eucharist and sent forth in mission.

CHAPTER II

Strengthening the Domestic Church

Contemporary Challenges and Pastoral Responses

Introduction

The Second Vatican Council reminds us that the renewal of society and the Church is closely connected with the health of family life: *“The well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life”* (Gaudium et Spes, 47). Marriage is not merely a social contract but a sacrament in which husband and wife participate in the faithful love of Christ for His Church. Through this sacrament, the family becomes the **domestic church**, the first place where faith is lived, prayer is learned, and Christian love is practised.

In the diaspora context, families often face many pressures, including migration, cultural transition, economic demands, and rapid social change. These realities create both opportunities and tensions. Recognising these pastoral realities with

honesty and compassion is essential if the Church is to accompany families toward renewal.

Rediscovering the Sacramental Power of Marriage

A significant concern today is the lack of awareness regarding the sacramental dignity and grace of Christian marriage. Many couples fail to recognise that Matrimony is not merely a social contract but a covenant rooted in Christ. When Jesus is not consciously invited into daily family life, marital unity weakens. Ignorance of the importance of the Holy Qurbana, family prayer, couple prayer, and regular confession further contributes to spiritual dryness. Without Eucharistic nourishment and sacramental reconciliation, families lose access to the grace necessary to endure trials. A renewed catechesis on marriage and sacramental life is urgently needed.

Weak Sense of Belonging

Families today often struggle with a weakening sense of belonging within their marriages and within parish communities. Participation in parish activities does not always create meaningful relationships. Many couples lack opportunities for spiritual fellowship, faith sharing, and mutual support with other families.

In the early Christian community, faith was lived in strong networks of relationships centred on prayer and fellowship (Acts 2:42). Belonging grows through relationships, shared responsibility, and recognition. When families experience isolation, faith can become fragile, and couples may turn to secular advice or digital sources rather than to the Church for guidance.

Communication Challenges in Marriage

Another pastoral challenge affecting families is the gradual breakdown of communication between spouses. Difficulties often begin in small ways, such as the inability to say “sorry,” failure to express appreciation, or reluctance to make respectful requests.

Modern pressures such as long working hours, financial stress, and parenting responsibilities can intensify these tensions. Without patience, forgiveness, and emotional maturity, resentment may grow within relationships. In some cases, this contributes to marital breakdown and increasing fear of commitment among younger generations.

The Christian understanding of marriage calls spouses to imitate the self-giving love of Christ. Forgiveness, humility, and mutual respect are therefore essential foundations for a healthy marital relationship.

Parenting and Transmission of Faith

The family has always been the primary place where faith is transmitted to the next generation. However, many parents face significant challenges in fulfilling this responsibility. Long working hours, academic pressures, and generational gaps can reduce opportunities for meaningful family interaction.

Sometimes parents rely primarily on parish programs to provide faith formation rather than nurturing faith within daily family life. Yet children learn faith not only through instruction but also through the witness of their parents. Simple practices such as family prayer, participation in liturgical celebrations, and living Christian values within the home play an important role in forming faith.

When these practices weaken, the transmission of faith becomes fragile.

Digital Culture and Moral Confusion

Digital technology has profoundly influenced family life. While it provides many benefits, it also introduces challenges such as excessive screen time, exposure to harmful content, reduced family conversation, and constant distraction.

At the same time, contemporary culture often promotes relativistic attitudes toward truth and morality. A weakening sense of sin, neglect of the sacrament of reconciliation, and the influence of social media can lead to moral confusion. When cultural narratives become the main source of moral guidance, Christian values may gradually lose their influence within family life.

Need for Pastoral Accompaniment

Many families today express a desire for deeper pastoral accompaniment from the Church. However, factors such as limited pastoral visits, lack of opportunities for dialogue, and the heavy responsibilities of clergy can sometimes create distance between pastors and families.

Families often seek a Church that listens, understands, and walks with them through their struggles. When priests and pastoral leaders accompany families with compassion and spiritual guidance, the Church becomes a visible community of care and communion.

Conclusion

The challenges faced by families today—weak sacramental awareness, communication difficulties, digital distractions, and moral confusion—are not merely social trends but spiritual realities that affect the life of the Church.

The renewal of the Church must therefore begin with the renewal of the **domestic church**. When families rediscover their vocation as places of prayer, forgiveness, and faith formation, they become powerful witnesses of the Gospel.

Strengthening families is therefore essential for the renewal of the Church and for the future of faith in the next generation.

CHAPTER III

Catechesis: Handing on the Faith and Forming Disciples

What Is Catechesis and Why Does It Matter?

Catechesis is the Church's mission of handing on the faith from one generation to the next. At its heart, catechesis is not simply the transmission of information but an encounter with the living person of Jesus Christ. St John Paul II, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, teaches that the goal of catechesis is "to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ."

Catechesis therefore involves more than learning doctrines, though sound doctrine remains essential. Its deeper purpose is to form disciples who know Christ, love Him, and follow Him in every aspect of life. Authentic catechesis nurtures faith through participation in the sacraments, listening to the Word of God, personal and communal prayer, moral formation, and service to others.

When catechesis is alive and effective, its fruits become visible in the life of the Church. Children grow in confidence in prayer, families practise faith within the home, young people develop a deeper understanding of the sacraments, and adults are able to "give a reason for the hope that is in them" (cf. 1 Peter 3:15).

Catechesis is therefore not merely a parish program for children but a vital mission of the entire Church. Through catechesis, the faith received from the apostles continues to be handed on faithfully to new generations.

Why Syro-Malabar Catechesis Matters

The Syro-Malabar Church is one of the twenty-three Eastern Catholic Churches in full communion with the Pope and the universal Catholic Church. Our ecclesial identity is rooted in the apostolic tradition of St Thomas the Apostle and expressed through the East Syriac liturgical tradition.

The Second Vatican Council emphasised the importance of preserving the heritage of the Eastern Churches: *“All members of the Eastern Rite should know and be convinced that they can and should always preserve their legitimate liturgical rite and their established way of life”* (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 6).

Syro-Malabar catechesis is therefore essential for handing on the richness of our liturgy, spirituality, and traditions to future generations. These are not merely cultural elements but living expressions of faith that deepen our encounter with Christ.

The Holy Qurbana, the centre of our ecclesial life, is not simply the Latin Mass celebrated in another language. It is a distinct liturgical expression of the one Eucharistic mystery, with its own prayers, symbols, gestures, and structure. Through this tradition, the faithful encounter the mystery of Christ in a way shaped by centuries of East Syriac spirituality.

Our unique tradition is not a separation from the universal Church but a gift that enriches the entire Catholic communion. Catechesis must therefore help young people understand and appreciate the beauty and theological depth of the Syro-Malabar liturgical and spiritual heritage.

3. Catechesis in Our Eparchy: Challenges and Opportunities

The Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Melbourne serves families living in a multicultural and fast-paced society. While this environment offers many opportunities, it also presents unique pastoral challenges for catechetical ministry.

Challenges Faced by Families

Many children in our Eparchy grow up primarily in English-speaking environments and have limited exposure to Malayalam and the cultural context from which the Syro-Malabar tradition emerged. Families often experience time pressures due to school commitments, work schedules, travel, and extracurricular activities.

Although many parents desire strong faith formation for their children, they may feel uncertain or under-equipped to nurture faith within the home. This gap between family life and catechetical formation can weaken the transmission of faith.

Challenges Faced by Parishes

Parishes also encounter several practical difficulties in catechism ministry. These may include the availability and formation of catechists, consistent student

attendance, and maintaining engagement among teenagers and youth. Other challenges include helping children participate meaningfully in the Holy Qurbana and ensuring alignment between parish catechesis and faith practice at home.

In many places, catechism classes take place in rented facilities rather than parish-owned buildings. Time limitations within shared spaces and the absence of priests due to multiple liturgical responsibilities can also affect catechetical ministry and access to the sacrament of reconciliation.

Opportunities and Strengths

Despite these challenges, our Eparchy also possesses many strengths. Our migrant communities include highly educated and committed catechists from diverse professional backgrounds who generously contribute their time and talents to catechism ministry.

There is also access to a wide range of Catholic educational resources. Many parishes benefit from well-trained first aid volunteers and strong safeguarding policies that ensure child-safe church practices.

These strengths provide valuable opportunities for strengthening catechetical formation within the Eparchy.

Two cross-cutting areas require particular attention in catechism ministry. The first is **safeguarding and child safety**, including proper training, supervision, and safe communication practices. The second is the thoughtful use of **digital resources**, identifying what supports faith formation while avoiding distractions and ensuring consistency across the Eparchy.

CHAPTER IV

Young People at the Heart of Renewal

Introduction

Young people are not only the future of the Church; they are also an essential part of its present vitality. The Church's mission therefore requires serious attention to the spiritual, cultural, and social realities that shape their lives. Today's young people grow up in a rapidly changing world characterised by cultural hybridity, digital transformation, moral uncertainty, and rising mental health challenges. In this context, three fundamental questions strongly influence their lives: **Who am I? Where do I belong? What difference can I make?** These questions shape their faith, relationships, and long-term commitments.

Major Pastoral Challenges Facing Young People

The document identifies several interconnected challenges experienced by young people in the Syro-Malabar diaspora.

a. Fragmented Identity

Many young people grow up navigating multiple cultural influences: Indian heritage and Western social culture, Eastern Catholic liturgical identity and Latin-dominant church environments, and traditional family expectations alongside individualistic societal values. These tensions often create confusion regarding identity. Some experience the Syro-Malabar tradition primarily as an ethnic inheritance rather than a living faith. When identity is not rooted in baptism and a personal encounter with Christ, it is easily shaped by peer culture, social media, and prevailing ideologies.

b. Weak Sense of Ecclesial Belonging and Lack of Liturgical Formation

Many young people participate in parish activities yet feel disconnected from the life of the Church. When parishes remain largely adult-centred, youth may feel invisible or unnecessary. Studies show that many young Catholics drift away from the Church not because they reject its teachings but because they do not experience genuine belonging within the community. Authentic belonging requires relationships, responsibility, and recognition.

Another significant challenge in diaspora communities is insufficient understanding of the Syro-Malabar liturgical tradition. Many young people attend the Holy Qurbana without fully grasping its theological depth and spiritual richness. Language barriers, limited catechesis, and insufficient explanation of liturgical symbols contribute to this disconnect. Without proper formation, the liturgy risks becoming routine rather than a transformative encounter with Christ.

c. Lack of Accompaniment and Mentorship

Young people need mentors and spiritual guides who walk with them through questions of faith, vocation, relationships, and personal struggles. However, many pastoral contexts lack intentional structures of accompaniment. Youth leaders are often generous but insufficiently trained, clergy are frequently overburdened, and families may feel unprepared to address the complex cultural challenges faced by their children. Without guidance, young people often turn to social media, peers, or online ideologies for direction.

d. Confusion Regarding Sexual Identity and Relationships

Modern society presents powerful and often conflicting narratives about sexuality, gender identity, and relationships. Many young Catholics struggle to reconcile these cultural influences with Church teaching. They seek a pastoral approach that offers both clarity and compassion. The Church therefore faces the challenge of presenting Christian anthropology in a way that is intellectually credible, emotionally sensitive, and spiritually meaningful

e. Fragile Family Foundations

The family is the primary environment where faith is transmitted. However, migration pressures, demanding work schedules, generational communication gaps, and academic stress can weaken family relationships. In some situations, faith formation becomes limited to parish programs rather than being lived within the home. When family stability weakens, young people may experience emotional insecurity and search for belonging elsewhere.

f. Influence of Digital Culture

Digital technology profoundly shapes the lives of young people. Social media creates opportunities for communication but also fosters comparison, addiction, cyberbullying, and exposure to harmful content. Digital environments can weaken attention, reduce authentic human encounters, and fragment moral formation. If the Church does not engage thoughtfully with this digital culture, young people may be formed more by online algorithms than by the Gospel.

g. Loss of Purpose and Fear of Commitment

Many young people desire to make a meaningful contribution to society but hesitate to embrace long-term commitments. Marriage, priesthood, consecrated life, and lifelong service can appear uncertain in a culture marked by instability. Without clear vocational guidance and inspiring role models, young people may postpone important decisions and focus primarily on personal success rather than mission and holiness.

3. Conclusion: A Call to Courageous Pastoral Renewal

The challenges facing young people today are not merely social or cultural issues; they are deeply spiritual realities. Questions about identity, belonging, and purpose shape the entire life journey of young people.

The future vitality of the Church in the diaspora depends on forming young people who are rooted in Christ, confident in their baptismal dignity, integrated into authentic Christian community, and inspired to live their faith as missionary disciples.

Young people today are not primarily searching for entertainment or superficial activities. They seek authenticity, meaningful relationships, and a clear sense of purpose. If the Church listens attentively, accompanies them patiently, and forms them intentionally, the same young people who struggle with identity and belonging today can become tomorrow's leaders, missionaries, and builders of strong Christian families.

The task of accompanying young people is therefore not optional. It is central to the mission of the Church and essential for the renewal of ecclesial life in the Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Melbourne.

CHAPTER V

Syro-Malabar Community Empowerment in the Australian Context

Introduction

The Syro-Malabar Catholic community is one of the fastest growing Eastern Catholic communities in Australia. Carrying a two-thousand-year-old apostolic heritage from St Thomas the Apostle, our Church now stands at an important moment within a Western society where Christian identity is rapidly declining. The empowerment of the Syro-Malabar community must therefore proceed along two complementary paths: strengthening the Syro-Malabar community itself and contributing to the renewal of the wider Australian Church. If we focus only inward, we risk becoming an isolated ethnic community; if we focus only outward, we risk losing our unique identity. When both are pursued together, we can become a transforming presence in Australian Christianity.

The Changing Religious Landscape in Australia

Recent national data indicates a dramatic decline in Christian identification in Australia. In 1971, more than 86% of Australians identified as Christian. By 2021, this number had fallen to about 44%, while those declaring "no religion" have risen sharply. If this trend continues, Christianity could become a minority worldview within the next decade.

This shift is driven by several factors, including generational change, increasing secularisation, and migration patterns. As Christian influence declines in public

life, its impact on education, culture, and moral discourse also weakens. These changes present a significant challenge for the future of Christianity in Australia.

The Unique Role of the Syro-Malabar Community

In this context of declining Christian identity, the Syro-Malabar Church holds a unique role. Our community remains strongly family-centred, liturgically vibrant, and deeply committed to the faith. These qualities provide an opportunity to contribute positively to the renewal of Christian life in Australia.

However, growth alone is not sufficient. Without careful planning, organisation, and leadership formation, even a growing community can become vulnerable. The Syro-Malabar Church must therefore strengthen its institutions and develop initiatives that both preserve its heritage and serve the wider society.

Key Areas for Community Empowerment

Honouring Our Heritage

Educational initiatives such as exhibitions, seminars, and cultural programs can help both young people and the wider Australian society understand the rich heritage of the St Thomas Christians. These initiatives can present the history, liturgy, and cultural contributions of the Syro-Malabar tradition as a living expression of faith.

Formation of Future Leaders

A structured leadership program for youth can prepare young Christians for roles in public life. Training in communication, leadership, theology, media engagement, and civic participation can help form confident Christian leaders who can contribute positively to society.

Language and Faith Formation

Teaching Malayalam alongside catechism can strengthen both cultural identity and liturgical understanding. Language helps young people connect more deeply with the prayers, traditions, and spirituality of the Syro-Malabar Church.

Community Support and Welfare

As a growing migrant Church, the community should also serve as a support network for families. Initiatives such as help desks for migrants, employment guidance, legal referrals, and family assistance can make the Church a place of practical support and solidarity.

Strengthening Christian Values

In a culture increasingly shaped by secular values, the Church must actively promote Christian family life and moral teaching. Initiatives supporting pro-life values, parental rights, and the dignity of human life are important for protecting the moral foundations of society.

Digital Evangelisation

Modern communication platforms play a powerful role in shaping public opinion. The Church should therefore use digital media creatively for evangelisation, faith education, and responding to misinformation about Christianity.

Community Life and Social Unity

Strong communities are built through relationships. Cultural gatherings, sports activities, youth festivals, and family events help strengthen bonds within the community and promote mental well-being. Such initiatives also create spaces where faith can be lived and shared in everyday life.

Collaboration with the Australian Church

The Syro-Malabar Church should work closely with the wider Australian Catholic Church. Joint ministries such as pastoral outreach, care for the elderly, and evangelisation initiatives can strengthen the unity of the Church while contributing to the renewal of Christian life in Australia.

Conclusion

Christian culture in Australia is undergoing a period of significant transformation. In this context, the Syro-Malabar community has an opportunity to contribute to the renewal of Christian faith and culture. By strengthening our spiritual life, forming leaders, supporting families, and engaging confidently with society, our community can become a vibrant witness to the Gospel.

The goal is not merely to preserve a migrant identity but to serve the mission of the Church in Australia. Through unity, faith, and organised leadership, the Syro-Malabar community can help ensure that the Christian faith continues to flourish in this country.