

ST. THOMAS SYRO MALABAR

Catholic Eparchy (Diocese) of Chicago, IL

Diocesan Women's Forum

BYLAW - 2025



Theme: **Women for Faith, Friendship and Fellowship**

Eparchial Bishop: His Ex. Bishop Mar Joy Alappatt

Diocesan Director: Very Rev. Fr. John Melepuram

Associate Director: Rev. Fr. Nicholas Thalakkottor

February 05, 2025



St. Thomas Syro Malabar Catholic Diocese of Chicago, IL

Bp. Mar Joy Alappatt (Eparch)

372 South, Prairie Ave; Elmhurst, Illinois 60126-4020

Dear Sisters in Christ,

Grace and peace to you all!

It fills me with great joy to witness the growth and active participation of women in the life of our Church. Your commitment to fostering faith, leadership, and unity among women is a testament to the vitality of the Syro-Malabar community here in the United States.

We are truly blessed with many educated, talented, and visionary women in the St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Catholic Eparchy of Chicago. You are one of the driving forces behind the establishment, operations, and ministries of our parishes and diocese, and for that, we are deeply grateful.

After careful review and prayerful consideration, I am pleased to formally approve the newly created **Women's Forum Bylaw**. This bylaw reflects your dedication to organizing your efforts in a manner that upholds the values and mission of the Church while addressing the unique needs and aspirations of women within our community.

May this bylaw serve as a foundation for your continued service and growth as women of faith. I encourage you to work together in a spirit of collaboration, humility, and love, always keeping Christ at the center of your endeavors. Your contributions are invaluable to the flourishing of our Church and the spreading of the Gospel message. The Women's Forum in our parishes and missions must operate in accordance with this bylaw.

Please be assured of my prayers and support as you move forward. May the Holy Spirit guide you in all your initiatives, and may Our Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, intercede on your behalf.

With every blessing,

Yours in Christ,

Approved on: February 5, 2025

+Bishop Mar Joy Alappatt
St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Catholic Eparchy of Chicago





BYLAW

St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Catholic Eparchy (Diocese) of Chicago

Syro-Malabar Women's Forum (SWF)

Motto: "Women for Faith, Friendship & Fellowship"

Mission Statement:

The Syro-Malabar Women's Forum seeks to empower women to live out their Christian vocation with authenticity and excellence, contributing to our Church and society's spiritual and cultural growth. Through unity, collaboration, and sharing our God-given talents, we aim to uphold our values, preserve our traditions, and inspire future generations to walk boldly in faith and service.

As daughters of a rich heritage rooted in the Syro-Malabar Catholic faith and culture, we recognize the unique blessings and responsibilities entrusted to us as educated, talented, and visionary women of the St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Catholic Eparchy of Chicago. Women's Forum will work in close collaboration with Syro-Malabar Synodal Association of 'Global Mathruvethi'

Introduction to the Bylaw:

This Bylaw has been prepared to foster the development and growth of the Women's Forum within our Missions, Parishes, and Diocese. With gratitude for our shared journey and hope for the future, we present this Bylaw as a testament to our commitment to the mission and vision of the Syro-Malabar Church in the United States.

The Bylaw serves as a guiding charter for establishing, organizing, and operating the vibrant Syro-Malabar Women's Forum. Grounded in faith, friendship and fellowship, this Forum operates within the Syro-Malabar Diocese of Chicago, its Parishes, Missions, and Regions, fostering a spirit of unity and purpose among women.

The Diocesan Bishop serves as the supreme authority of this Forum. Leadership at the Diocesan level will be provided by a Diocesan Director, while a Parish/Mission Director (Vicar) will oversee activities at the Parish/Mission level. This Bylaw is aligned with diocesan statutes, the needs of local parishes, and the vision of the Women's Forum to ensure effective and meaningful engagement.

Article I: Name and Purpose

1. Name:

This organization will be known as the **Syro-Malabar Women's Forum, Eparchy of Chicago (SWF)**.

2. Purpose:

1. Diocesan Level

- a. Coordinate the various Parish/Mission units under the umbrella of St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Catholic Diocese of Chicago
- b. Empower and encourage Syro Malabar women through the 'Syro-Malabar Diocesan Women's Forum'
- c. Foster positive and constructive planning to enrich faith, friendship, and fellowship

2. Regional Level

- a. The Parishes and Missions are divided into 7 Regions: Northeastern, Southeastern, Mid-Atlantic, Southern, Central, Western and Knanaya.
- b. Mobilize and organize the parish units at the regional level for various programs under the leadership of the Regional Team

3. Parish / Mission Level

- Strengthen individual, family and community life of women.
- Promote spiritual nourishment of individuals, by fostering prayer life among women.
- Inspire parents to deepen their relationship with Christ and thereby raise children as evangelized Catholics.
- Establish and maintain close relationships among women and foster friendships within the parish community.
- Encourage active participation in parish life through service, leadership, and outreach.
- Support families requiring special care for women at different stages of life.
- Empower women to actively engage in leadership and service roles within the Church and society.
- Organize programs in alignment with the mission of the Syro- Malabar Catholic Church, including educational, cultural, charitable, and evangelization initiatives, including outings.
- Uphold the highest ethical standards and maintain the dignity of the Catholic faith.

- Identify and promote manageable projects for the parish's growth and development.
- Address the challenges and concerns faced by the children and promote youth and young adult engagement.
- Motivate mothers to love and support their families, educate their children, and establish Christ as the center of family life.
- Encourage mothers to live by the principles exemplified by Mary, Mother of the church.
- Promote vocations to priesthood and religious life and their support
- Assist the parish ministries by coordinating the parish/mission events, activities, and celebrations.
- Serve as a resource group for new families joining the parish.

Article II: Membership

1. Eligibility:

- Membership to Parish / Mission units, is open to all Syro-Malabar women (25+ or married) of active and contributing families of the Parish.

2. Membership:

- Membership is granted to any eligible member upon submission of a completed and signed registration form, to the Pastor, with a nominal registration fee, and it should be approved by the Pastor.
- It is recommended to have a membership drive every year.

Article III: Structure and Leadership

1. Diocesan Level:

- a. **Diocesan General Body:** Composed of Diocesan Director, Regional Directors and Regional Executive Members. The Diocesan Bishop can nominate 25% members to the Diocesan General body.
- b. **Diocesan Executive Committee:**
 - i. **Diocesan Director:** Appointed by the Diocesan Bishop, to coordinate diocesan-level programs in collaboration with the Diocesan Team.
 - ii. **Associate Diocesan Director,** if there is any.
 - iii. **Diocesan President:** Selected by the Diocesan General Body
 - iv. **Diocesan Vice President:** Selected by the Diocesan General Body.
 - v. **Diocesan Secretary:** Selected by the Diocesan General Body.
 - vi. **Diocesan Joint Secretary:** Selected by the Diocesan General Body.
 - vii. **Diocesan Treasurer:** Selected by the Diocesan General Body

2. Regional Level

- a. **Regional General Body:** The Regional General body consists of Regional Director and two representatives from each unit.
- b. **Regional Executive Committee:** The Regional Executive Committee will include Regional Director and a five-member team consisting of the president, secretary, treasurer, and two additional representatives, who will be elected by the regional general body.

3. Parish Level

- a. General Body of the Parish Women's Forum: All members registered in the Women's Forum with a registration form signed by the member and approved by the Pastor.
 - b. Pastor will be the Director. Where there is an Assistant Pastor, he will be the Assistant Director
 - c. Where Religious Sisters are available in the parish, it would be beneficial to the Women's Forum if the Pastor can assign a Nun, as the Animator to assist the Women with the formation and engagement in the community.
- **Executive Committee:** Parish / Missions' Women's Forum shall be led by an Executive Committee composed of:
 - Pastor / Vicar (Director), / Associate Pastor and Animator, if any
 - President
 - Vice President
 - Secretary
 - Joint Secretary
 - Treasurer

Article IV: Selection:

- Office bearers shall be selected by consensus. If consensus is not achieved and if there are more candidates for one office, the selection shall be done through lot. To be selected as an office bearer, the member should be registered in the association, for at least for a period of six months.
- A member who holds a major official role in any cultural or political organizations or associations (other than church-related service) outside the parish, cannot become an office bearer in the parish organizations; however, she can be a member

Terms:

- The term of office bearers shall be two years. They can be re-selected for a second term consecutively, but not for another term in the same role.
- If an amicable selection process is not achieved, the Director may nominate eligible individuals from the parish to the office.
- If an office bearer resigns or is removed for genuine reasons, that vacancy shall be filled by another person through the same selection process. This person shall continue as the office bearer, until the term of other office bearers.

Article V: Activities and Responsibilities

1. Empowering the women in the Parish

- Establish a unified organization to bring women in the parish together under one umbrella, fostering mutual support and collaboration.
- All plannings and proposals at the parish level should be done in consultation with the Pastor to ensure alignment with the parish's goals and activities

2. Faith Formation:

- Organize adult faith formation like retreats, study classes on Bible, Liturgy, Faith and Moral topics, for women.
- Organize spiritual activities (such as the Rosary, Novenas, Adoration, and Stations of the Cross) for the growth of members, the parish community, priests, religious, diocesan administration, and other relevant causes.
- Organize prayer meetings in small manageable groups within the Forum members, for the personal and community spiritual enrichment.

3. Parish Support:

- Assist in hospitality and liturgical ministries, such as choir participation, altar decoration, sanctuary cleaning etc.
- Support the Parish Sunday School program by serving as teachers to guide the younger generation in faith and friendship and fostering pride in their Syro Malabar Catholic identity or by assisting Sunday School teachers.
- Actively participate in the parish Catechetical program and its PTA.
- Facilitate community-building activities, including parish feasts, charity drives.

4. Community Outreach:

- Engage in charitable works, such as aiding the poor, visiting the sick, and supporting Catholic Missions in the neighborhood.
- Promote vocations to priesthood and religious life, particularly within the diocese, and provide sponsorship or other forms of support.

5. Education and Advocacy:

- Host and organize workshops on Catholic teachings, health-related topics, job-related opportunities, moral values, family life, and social issues.

Article VI: Meetings

1. Frequency:

- The Forum meets monthly / bi-monthly, with additional meetings scheduled as necessary for specific activities.
- An annual gathering shall be held, with the celebration of Holy Qurbana, cultural activities, and dinner, depending on the circumstances of each unit

2. Quorum:

- No quorum is required for regular meetings.
- A minimum of one-third of the registered members of the Women's Forum must be present to conduct official and business meetings.

Article VII: Finances

1. Funds:

- Funds can be raised through membership fees, voluntary contributions, donations, and fundraising events.
- Any fundraising events should be conducted in consultation with the Pastor/Director.
- The money shall be deposited through the parish banking system.
- All the transactions should be done through the parish account under a separate folder or heading.

2. Treasury Oversight:

- The Treasurer shall maintain accurate financial records, which shall be reviewed by the Executive Committee monthly / annually.

Article VIII: Code of Conduct

1. Faithfulness:

- Members shall uphold Catholic teachings and morals in all activities and decisions.
- All members of the administration and executions should fulfill the required diocesan Safe Environment training.

2. Respect and Collaboration:

- Members shall work collaboratively among themselves, and with the Director, respecting the dignity of each person

Article IX: Amendments

1. Procedure:

- Proposed amendments to the Bylaws must be submitted in writing to the Diocesan Executive Committee through the Diocesan Director.
- The Diocesan Executive Committee shall study and, if needed, present the proposed amendments to the Diocesan general body for further review.
- If two-thirds of members of the meeting approve, then the amendments shall be presented to the Diocesan Curia.
- Amendments shall become valid and effective only upon approval by the Diocesan Bishop

Article X: Dissolution

1. Process:

- In the unlikely event of dissolution of the Forum, the parish/mission director reports the event to the diocesan director and the curia in writing with the reasons that led to the dissolution.
- The dissolution will take effect when the diocesan Bishop approves the dissolution, and the director announces it in the church.
- Any remaining funds or assets of the Parish units shall be kept in Parish Accounts.
- The dissolution will be revoked if the cause of the dissolution is removed and with the approval of the diocesan Bishop.

