

Mar Thoma Church-Episcopal Church Agreement

Immigration from India to the United States in recent years has brought increased numbers of the people of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar to the United States. The Mar Thoma Church and the Episcopal Church are in full communion. The Metropolitan and the Presiding Bishop desire to establish an agreement whereby the Episcopal Church will enter into a partnership with the Mar Thoma Church which will enable the Episcopal Church to minister to Mar Thoma people in the United States.

Under the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church, Title I, Canon 16 applies to this situation, the appropriate portions of which follow:

Sec. 1. Whenever a Congregation of Christian people, holding the Christian faith as set forth in the Catholic creeds and recognizing the Scriptures as containing all things necessary to salvation, but using a rite other than that set forth by this Church, shall desire affiliation with this Church, while retaining the use of its own rite, such congregation shall with the consent of the Bishop in whose Diocese it is situated make application through the Bishop to the Presiding Bishop for status.

Sec. 4. Clergy and delegates of such Congregations may have seats but no vote in the Diocesan Convention unless by formal action of such Convention they are so admitted.

Sec. 5. The oversight of Congregations so admitted shall rest with the Bishop of the Diocese unless the Bishop delegates this authority to another Bishop who may be commissioned by the Presiding Bishop to have oversight of such Congregations.

Consistent with this canon and responding to the wishes of the Mar Thoma Church and the needs of its people in the United States, we agree to these principles:

When requested by the Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church, bishops of the dioceses of the Episcopal Church shall exercise episcopal oversight of clergy and laity of the Mar Thoma Church within the jurisdictions of this church.

Members of the Mar Thoma Church in the jurisdiction of an Episcopal diocese shall be treated as members of the Episcopal Church in the diocese by the bishop concerned, with the understanding that they remain members of the Mar Thoma Church.

The Episcopal Church shall minister to members of the Mar Thoma Church through organized parishes and congregations affiliated with dioceses and subject to the discipline of the Episcopal Church, except that the congregation shall be subject to the discipline of the Mar Thoma Church on liturgy, marriage, and finance and in such other matters where the Constitution of the Mar Thoma Church has specific reference.

The Metropolitan or another bishop of the Mar Thoma Church may visit the parishes and congregations being ministered to by the Episcopal Church after informing the respective local Episcopal bishops.

The Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church shall notify the Presiding Bishop and the local Episcopal Bishop of the appointment of priests to serve Mar Thoma parishes and congregations in the United States at the time of their appointment. Such priests may be licensed by the Episcopal Bishop to function in the Episcopal diocese where they serve and invited to participate in activities and fellowship in that diocese. While serving such congregations in the United States, priests shall remain on the salary and pension plan of the Mar Thoma Church. Special cost of living allowances shall be negotiated between the congregation and the Mar Thoma Church shall pay premiums for medical insurance under the diocesan plan, and for travel expenses from India to the United States and back.

Parishes and congregations shall offer financial support to the Mar Thoma Church in India, and may make offerings to the bishop of the local Episcopal diocese, the local Episcopal congregation with which they may be related, or others.

Mar Thoma parishes and congregations would normally be associated with an Episcopal congregation to provide fellowship and encouragement, and the Mar Thoma priest may be associate to the priest of the local Episcopal congregation.

The Metropolitan may request the local Episcopal bishop to act on his behalf in the event of difficulty or dispute within a Mar Thoma parish or congregation. The Episcopal bishop may act in matters of urgency affecting the local situation even without such a request.

Any modification to this agreement, when deemed necessary, may be made by mutual consent of the Presiding Bishop and the Mar Thoma Metropolitan.

—Journal of the General Convention, 1979, Resolution B300.