

**REPORT ON YOUTH MINISTRIES, ESPECIALLY  
THOSE OUTSIDE OF KERALA IN INDIA**

**Submitted to the Holy Episcopal Synod of the Malankara  
Orthodox Syrian Church**

**By the Subcommittee to Assess the Situation of Malankara  
Orthodox Syrian Youth Outside of Kerala**

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## **ABSTRACT**

**PROBLEM:** The ministry to our Youth outside of Kerala is critical to the future of our church. Currently, we have many activities, but the spiritual impact is not being seen as it should, which is resulting in “leakage,” people leaving our church to have their needs met elsewhere.

**CAUSE:** The reason for this is that we have two-distinct groups, those from a Kerala background and those from an outside Kerala background (OKR). Within those groups, we have students, working youth and young couples and we are not clearly focusing on each of these demographics.

**SOLUTION:** To solve this problem, the first thing that is needed is to remove the confusion that currently exists.

### **I. CLEAR VISION:**

- a. That all Youth, regardless of background, are brought to a point where they:
  - i. Experience a transformative relationship with the One Triune God
  - ii. Get the input they need to continue on their spiritual journey to holiness throughout the different phases of their lives
  - iii. Become integrated into the mainstream of the Body of Christ, the Holy Church

### **II. CLEAR ORGANIZATION:**

- a. Students – MGOCSM
  - i. To bring them into an experience of Christ through worship, study and service
- b. Post-Student, both married and unmarried
  - i. Focus on application of Christianity to daily life – in home, work, church, community and society
  - ii. Kerala background Youth – OCYM
    1. Need to ensure that the proper balance between business meetings and spiritual meetings is maintained
  - iii. OKR background Youth – Single Organization (nature of which will be discussed at meeting July 31 and August 1 in Delhi)
    1. Need to have regular meetings for this group
    2. Need to give these members responsibilities in Church to bring them into the mainstream, including mentorship of the local MGOCSM unit
  - iv. Joint Programs – conferences, seminars, etc. that recognize language needs/preferences; joint committee-planned church functions; and fellowship events (meals, picnics, outings, trips) with the goal of unifying our Youth

### **III. CLEAR SUPPORT FROM THE HOLY SYNOD:**

- a. Leadership
  - i. Message from top (bishops, priests, organizers, etc.) needs to be “quality” – spirituality, impact on personal lives – over “quantity” – numbers at big events
  - ii. Local ministry key for this group – Diocesan Metropolitan must provide needed direction, guidance, support and encouragement
  - iii. Dialog critical to keeping up with needs of this demographic. OKR has an annual Diaspora MGOCSM Leadership Forum; Kerala region should consider something similar.
- b. Resource Allocation
  - i. Each Diocese needs a full-time Youth Minister – preferably a recent Seminary graduate for a 3-year posting
  - ii. Need to promote and financially support the MGOCSM Student Chaplaincy program for student ministry in major metros, not just in India but abroad as well
  - iii. Provide an Orthodox Resource Center in each Diocese and/or major city
  - iv. Train, authorize and utilize our active members for lay leadership roles
  - v. Develop a digital system to incorporate relocating individuals/families into our Youth ministries

## FULL POINTS

- I. **Goal:** To begin to appreciate the complexities faced in our youth ministry outside Kerala in India and to propose a methodology to make that ministry more effective.
  
- II. **Overview of Situation:** We find two distinct groups in the Diaspora which require focused attention, namely those with a Kerala-background and those with an outside Kerala-background (OKR). Superficially, these differences are commonly referred to in the gap between those whose native tongue is Malayalam and those whose native tongue is another language, but the differences extend far beyond this, to culture, interests, way of reasoning, values and many more. Ultimately these distinctions will have to be considered in the context of all our spiritual activities, but this matter needs to be addressed most immediately with regards to our youth ministries outside of Kerala.
  
- III. **Vision**
  - a. That all Youth, regardless of background, are brought to a point where they:
    - i. Experience a transformative relationship with the One Triune God
    - ii. Get the input they need to continue on their spiritual journey to holiness throughout the different phases of their lives
    - iii. Become integrated into the mainstream of the Body of Christ, the Holy Church
  
- IV. **Current Situation:** In general, there are activities for Youth of the outside Kerala Dioceses, but, there is not enough of a spiritual emphasis in these activities, so we are still at risk of losing these Youth in the future. Additionally, our offerings have not been comprehensive enough to cover the needs of the entire population we have to focus on, so that has led to significant “leakage,” our youth seeking the fulfillment of their spiritual needs in other places.
  - a. The present MGOCSM members (OKR):
    - i. There are MGOCSM/Youth units in many of the parishes, they have regular meetings, regional/diocesan level camps and other programs.
    - ii. Majority of the time is spent for activities (cultural programs, competitions, sports, etc.) rather than spiritual activities (prayer, service, study, meditation, etc.).
    - iii. Since many of these programs/meetings are conducted on Sundays, the priest often cannot attend or lead them.
    - iv. The spiritual feeding from these programs is minimal.
  - b. The OKR young people who are working and not married:
    - i. Many of them are not regular in the Holy Qurbana or other spiritual activities.
    - ii. Some of them are still supporting MGOCSM/Youth programs.
    - iii. Young people from states other than Kerala are totally neglected. If they are really interested in Church, they find nearby churches on their own and attend worship there.
    - iv. Overall, this group is not ministered to directly and, as a result, are not fed well in their spiritual life.
  - c. OKR young couples:
    - i. Some young couples who have children come to the church regularly, to allow their children to attend Sunday School.

- ii. There is no particular ministry to this group, despite a great need, as they face work pressure as well as family responsibilities.
- iii. The need to focus on this audience has been identified, which has led to the sprouting up of a few groups to address them – Indian Orthodox Diaspora in Delhi, FOCUS in the US, MGOCSM Senior Friends Fellowship in Mumbai and AMMA in Chennai. The purpose and effectiveness of these groups vary, and it would be good to bring some unity to these organizations under one vision and purpose.
  - 1. At the same time, there are still large geographic areas that do not have any such ministry
- d. Young people who come from Kerala for their studies.
  - i. The MGOCSM Central Office has appointed Student Chaplains in a few cities (mainly in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu).
  - ii. In a few colleges, these Chaplains conduct Holy Qurbana and prayer meetings.
  - iii. Now the number of Chaplains has been severely reduced due to achen leaving the program to pursue their further studies and other opportunities and major cities, like Delhi, Mumbai and Hyderabad, still have no Student Chaplains.
  - iv. A majority of our students studying around the country are neglected and, in general, there is no systematic, effective ministry for this group.
- e. Young people who come from Kerala as employees:
  - i. Young people who come from Kerala have Yuvajana Prasthanam (OCYM) units, but the church has to evaluate the spiritual emphasis of these activities. Many times they get together without a priest and the majority of their time is spent on business meetings.
  - ii. This group seems active and, therefore, feels satisfied in their church life, but there is a lot more needed to bear the spiritual fruit in their lives that we as a church are called to nurture.
- f. Young couples who come from Kerala:
  - i. No specific ministry to these people, they either take part in OCYM units or are just considered part of the main membership of the parish.

## V. Roadmap to our Vision

- a. Meet all Youth where they are
  - i. This involves a recognition that the starting point of our Youth varies significantly, depending on their background
  - ii. Once that recognition is made, the next step is to tailor our spiritual organizations to meet the needs of the Youth from both the Kerala and the OKR background
- b. Refine and clearly communicate the mission of our Youth ministries
  - i. Within the general categories of “Youth” we have three distinct sub-groups, as already highlighted above, which need to be addressed through our Youth ministry
    - 1. Students
    - 2. The young, working unmarried
    - 3. Young couples
  - ii. We need to remove the confusion between the missions of MGOCSM, OCYM, and a number of other groups (Indian Orthodox Diaspora, MGOCSM Senior Friends Fellowship, Mar Dionysius Youth, FOCUS, AMMA) to best address the needs of these distinct audiences
    - 1. For students
      - a) MGOCSM

- i) Purpose: to focus on needs of all students, both of OKR and Kerala background, to bring them into a relationship with God through worship, study and service
  - ii) Student years are times when we can bring together students from different backgrounds – they are open to different people and new ideas so one focused ministry is enough
  - iii) But the backgrounds of the students need to be noted and efforts taken to account for their varying interests and to integrate them, building fellowship and understanding between students from both groups.
    - 1) If this can be done, it will go a long way in strengthening our church and the bonds between our members when they take on parish leadership in the future, irrespective of background.
- 2. For working youth, both married and unmarried
  - a) Purpose: To continue the path of a deeper relationship with the Triune God through worship, study and service, but understanding the time demands on working folks, especially couples with young families, and providing focused spiritual nourishment to help them endure through the challenges and seduction of modern life with a proper spiritual orientation
    - i) The spiritual purpose of these groups should be to teach our members how to follow Christ in their daily lives:
      - 1) In their homes - relationships with their spouses and families and how to be Christian parents
      - 2) How to be effective Orthodox witnesses in their workplaces and amongst their co-workers
      - 3) In the Church
      - 4) In the local community
      - 5) In society at large
  - b) OCYM for those coming directly from Kerala backgrounds
    - i) Current challenge to be overcome: Very active and integrated to Church, but spiritual life not emphasized by organization and, consequently, not by individual either
    - ii) Proposal:
      - 1) Actively monitor the proportion of business meetings to “spiritual” meetings.
      - 2) Reduce the number of parish responsibilities (maintenance, Onam program, Christmas program, etc.), if necessary.
  - c) Single Organization (or umbrella organization of existing bodies – to be determined – for purpose of this discussion will refer to as OKRSO) for those from OKR (and MGOCSM) backgrounds
    - i) Current challenge to be overcome: This group not being addressed by the church as a whole, only by specific Dioceses, and not being incorporated into the mainstream of our church life, leading to these members being in a “lost,” “forgotten,” “uncared for” or “outsider” state, susceptible to outside influences and/or leaving the church.
    - ii) Proposal:
      - 1) Make sure regular fellowships and studies are started for this group, under some organization or arrangement recognized throughout the church

- 2) Give them some of the program/parish-wide responsibilities previously handled by OCYM to better integrate them with the parish itself
  - 3) Make them mentors for the associated MGOCSM unit – to monitor activities, get updates on their programs, offer input and guidance to keep the unit on the proper spiritual direction, and help lead meetings/give talks (but not to run the unit! Students need to take this responsibility upon themselves, the seniors should just be guides and sounding boards for them).
    - ❖ Provide training to those interested in taking up these mentorship roles, including special classes and guide books.
- d) Joint Programs
- i) Purpose: To actively address the “two-group” state in our church by meaningfully bringing together our Youth, both of a Kerala and OKR background, to foster better understanding, growth through common experiences and unify our outside Kerala churches
  - ii) Proposal:
    - 1) Co-sponsored programs, seminars, retreats, one-day conferences, etc. on the Christian living themes mentioned above that could benefit both groups, but recognizing the backgrounds of the participants and having provisions for mostly parallel sessions in Malayalam and the local language, with a single joint session at the beginning and end, for instance
    - 2) Joint OCYM/OKRSO functions, with the planning committee balanced between the two groups
    - 3) Joint OCYM/OKRSO fellowship events – meals, picnics, outings, trips, etc.

## **VI. Support Requested from the Holy Synod**

- a. The key role the members of the Holy Synod can play is in encouraging discussion and concentration on Youth issues
  - i. We need to encourage a mindset within our Dioceses of “quality not quantity” and be more focused on the impact that we have on the lives of Youth, rather than simply increasing numbers for events
    1. Only if we take this initiative will the focus on spirituality return in a meaningful way
    2. Large events have only a temporary effect, it is through diligent and consistent prayer and study that a relationship with God can be developed and a life on the narrow path can be maintained. We need to make sure this message is not lost on our Youth.
  - ii. Individual Metropolitans must take responsibility for the Youth ministry in their Diocese, in dialog with the spiritual organizations and one another, to make sure all the best programs are being undertaken in each Diocese.
    1. The local areas are in the best position to understand the needs of their Youth so they should be empowered to do the needful. What is required from us is direction, guidance, support and encouragement for their activities.
    2. Diaspora MGOCSM has begun an annual meeting for OKR Bishops and Diocesan VPs and Coordinators called the Diaspora MGOCSM Leadership Forum, which met for the first time in August 2011 in Mumbai and will meet again this July 31-August 1 in Delhi

- a) This meeting has been essential for setting the direction of the OKR Student Ministry and an initial action plan has been produced out of this (minutes of the meeting and latest action plan are available for those interested)
  - b) The main issue to be discussed in this year's Leadership Forum is the ministry to the working Youth, especially regarding the relationship of the existing bodies (IOD, MGOCSM Senior Friends, FOCUS, Mar Dionysius Youth, etc.). The fruits of this discussion will be presented to the Holy Synod in August.
  - c) It is advisable that such an annual fellowship be started for Kerala Youth Ministry as well
- b. Another role the members of the Holy Synod can play is in preparing the way for a non-parish centered youth ministry that is still within the mainstream of the church
- i. At the start, each Diocese should allocate one Priest (preferably a new Seminary graduate) to focus full time on Diocesan Youth Activities, in concert with the Diocesan MGOCSM and OCYM VPs (parish priests)
    - 1. This will allow the new Priest an exposure into the diversity and broad situation of the Diocese
    - 2. Such a priest will be closest to the age and mindset of the Youth, and, therefore theoretically, best able to serve their needs
    - 3. This priest should not lose service time or other administrative benefits as a result of this ministry, it must be accepted within the Diocese and the Church itself
    - 4. Partial support of these full-time workers will be provided by MGOCSM, through funds authorized by the Holy Synod, if needed
  - ii. MGOCSM should be encouraged to continue to post Student Chaplains in the major metros outside of Kerala on a full-time basis, with the support, both moral and financial, of the Holy Synod.
    - 1. When previously Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai, Coimbatore and Mangalore were at least covered, to be in a position where by March 2012 only Managlore region will have some Student Chaplaincy coverage is not a situation acceptable to the Holy Synod
    - 2. In this way, HG Mar Eusebios should be commended for having Student Ministers in three areas of his Diocese – Dallas, California and Chicago – and we must work to increase the number of such ministers throughout the world
      - a) As the Holy Synod supports the MGOCSM Student Chaplaincy program, some amount should be given to MGOCSM to specifically contribute to all Student Ministers in the church, even in the American Diocese, at least in a token way to reflect the Holy Synod's support of this initiative globally, with a similar commitment, commensurate to the cost of living in an area, promised for any new positions that may be filled in the future
  - iii. The ministry of the Student Chaplains could be aided greatly by a center, an Orthodox Resource Center which could be utilized by all, but particularly focused on the needs of students and other youth, in each Diocese and/or major city, which could serve as a place for people to gather and a center for our Youth activities in the area.
    - 1. If this Center could provide hostel facilities as well in which students could live as they studied away from home, this could form the basis of a supportive, Orthodox community for our students where ever they are based
  - iv. A critical need is to strengthen our lay leadership to help alleviate the burden on our priests and provide a more personal contact which our youth require
    - 1. Our Dioceses/spiritual organizations need to provide opportunities to train key, active members of our church to be able to disseminate our faith and teachings amongst our people

2. We need to provide an authorization to utilize such leaders, like is being done in the Mumbai Diocese, for example, where leaders are given a kalpana from the Diocesan Metropolitan certifying them for lay leadership roles, including giving messages at churches and leading prayer/cottage meetings
- v. Finally, the church can take a lead in coordinating the ministry to our Youth leaving their homes by developing a system (most likely an online system built on a management software platform) by which individuals can input their change in location, either for education or for work, and can find the nearest church or MGOCSM/OCYM/OKRSO unit and be connected to it.
  1. This network should be comprehensive and linked to the central systems of all the MGOCSM, OCYM and OKRSO.

**VII. Conclusion:** The future of our church lies in our Youth. Our ability to meet their needs will reflect our ability to adapt to the challenges presented to us in this changing world and could serve as the basis of the evolution of the concept of mission in our church. It is in such adaptation to the need of the day that we reflect the Will of God, the Almighty and Omniscient Head of our Church.

As the appointed overseers of His precious flock, it is time for us to revitalize Orthodox spirituality in the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, and our first, and best, opportunity to do so is in our Youth ministry. I pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us to be worthy to meet such a great task. May the Lord have mercy on us all.