



Circular 07/2025

07 October 2025

Guidelines on the Validity of Sacramental Marriage

My dear Brothers and Sisters in *Maran Isho M'shiha*,

I am writing this letter to clarify certain norms concerning the validity of the Sacrament of Marriage. These guidelines apply to all the faithful, including the Syro-Malabar Knanaya faithful, within the jurisdiction of the Catholic Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain.

The Syro-Malabar Church is one of the 23 *sui iuris* (self-governing) Eastern Catholic Churches that are in full communion with the Bishop of Rome, while possessing their own hierarchy, liturgy, theology, spirituality, canon law, and traditions. At present, the Holy Synod of the Syro-Malabar Church exercises jurisdiction only within the territory of India. In canonical terms, this jurisdictional area is referred to as the proper territory of the Syro-Malabar Church. All Syro-Malabar eparchies established outside India, including the Eparchy of Great Britain, lie beyond this proper territory and therefore fall under the direct jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome. This means that the Eparchy of Great Britain is immediately subject to the canonical authority of the Holy Father and, consequently, to the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches in Rome.

The Holy Father, St Pius X, established the Apostolic Vicariate for the Knanaya faithful in 1911 to preserve their unique heritage. This vicariate was later elevated to an eparchy and subsequently to an archeparchy. However, the archeparchy of Kottayam does not currently have jurisdiction over Knanaya faithful living outside India. Until the establishment of the Catholic Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain by Pope Francis on 16 July 2016, the Syro-Malabar faithful in the region, including the Knanaya faithful, were under the pastoral care of the local Latin Rite bishops. However, with the erection of the new eparchy, all Syro-Malabar Catholics in Great Britain—both Knanaya and non-Knanaya—*ipso facto* (by the fact itself) came under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of the Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain.

The Syro-Malabar Knanaya community in Great Britain forms an integral part of the Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain. At the same time, the Eparchy is committed to preserving and fostering the spiritual and cultural heritage of the Knanaya faithful. To this end, six missions and nine proposed missions have been established for the Knanaya faithful. Although, in the canonical and juridical sense, these missions belong to the Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain, the Knanaya faithful remain—and will continue to remain—part of the Knanaya community (for further clarification, see Circular No. 302, dated 20 July 2023, issued by the Archbishop of the archeparchy of Kottayam). This means that only those Knanaya faithful in Great Britain who are members of one of these established or proposed Knanaya missions can legitimately enjoy and claim their Knanaya canonical and ecclesial identity. Consequently, this arrangement enables them to remain fully part of the Universal Catholic Church while at the same time preserving their distinctive Knanaya identity.

Before discussing the validity of sacramental marriage, it is also important to clarify certain points regarding residential status. The Syro-Malabar faithful who were born and brought up in India or elsewhere, and who now reside in Great Britain, belong to the Syro-Malabar

Eparchy of Great Britain by virtue of domicile or quasi-domicile status. Domicile status applies when a person resides in a place with the intention of remaining there permanently, or when the residence extends for five years or more. Quasi-domicile status applies when a person resides in a place for at least three months with the intention of staying there for a certain period (cf. CCEO canons 912–917). If a person permanently returns to India or to another country, their domicile changes accordingly, based on the same principles.

According to the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, for a marriage between two persons belonging to the same *sui iuris* Church to be valid, it must be blessed by their local hierarch or local pastor. In Great Britain, the priests appointed by the Bishop of the Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain are the proper pastors for all Syro-Malabar faithful, including the Knanaya faithful. However, in certain exceptional cases, if the sacrament of marriage between two faithful belonging to the Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain is to be celebrated in another Catholic rite, including the Latin rite, a dispensation must be obtained. To secure this dispensation, the parties concerned must follow the required administrative procedures through the proper pastor of the faithful (cf. CCEO can. 830).

All priests appointed in the Eparchy should provide the necessary assistance and cooperation to those preparing to enter the Sacrament of Marriage—an experience of love and communion—so that they may grow in faith and fully receive the graces of the sacrament.

I invoke God's abundant Blessing on all the faithful of the Eparchy of Great Britain through the intercession of Marth Mariam, *Emme D' Mshiha* and of the Church, the Holy Patriarch Mar Yawsep, the Patron of the Catholic Church, Mar Thoma Sleeha, the Father of our Faith, Marth Alphonsa, the Patroness of our Eparchy and all Saints.

Yours in our Lord and our God,

+ *Joseph Srampickal*

Joseph Srampickal
Bishop, Catholic Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain



NB: This circular must be read in all the parishes/missions/proposed missions of the Eparchy during the celebration of the Holy Qurbana on Sunday the 12th of October 2025 (or the nearest Sunday when Holy Qurbana is celebrated, if there is no Holy Qurbana celebrated on the 12th of October 2025).