

MGOCSM Startup Kit

What is the MGOCSM?

The name MGOCSM stands for the Mar Gregorios Orthodox Christian Student Movement. College and high school students originally founded the movement in the form of an annual “Syrian Student Conference” in Kerala, starting in 1908. From a single yearly event, the movement has grown into a comprehensive organization engaging in social service, occupational training, Orthodox education, and mission work. The MGOCSM has been an influential force in guiding the youth into respectable professions and into being active and devout laity, priests, and bishops of our Orthodox Church.

MGOCSM-America

Though the American Diocese of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church has been in existence since the late 70s, the MGOCSM has begun to flourish in the past few years. The MGOCSM in America is diverse, and spread over a vast landscape. The MGOCSM has been divided into Western, Central, Southern, Southeastern, and Northeastern regions. Currently all these regions of the diocese have actively growing student movements. The units have usually been organized at the parish level and encompasses a younger more Westernized demographic. The MGOCSM in the USA seeks to meet the unique needs of its students within the Indian-American context.

Why Should I Be a Part of the MGOCSM?

Are you interested in the Faith and practices of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church? Are you looking to engage in fellowship with other likeminded youth? Do you want to be an active member of your Church and your community? Being a part of the MGOCSM entails all of this and more. All that is asked of from each and every one of you is genuine commitment and dedication in being a part of Christ’s Holy Orthodox Church. MGOCSM is looking for more energetic members, both men and women, to carry this organization into the 3rd millennium and onwards. So don’t be afraid to stand up and GET INVOLVED!

What do I need?

1. Vision

Every youth group needs to set a plan before itself. Each MGOCSM unit is unique. Some groups are small and isolated, some are large but contain numerous “cliques,” others will have a large amount of parish support, yet others will have very little. Based on your situation, you need to have a vision of where you want to be in a week, a month, a year, and so on. Your vision may be that you want to have at least 20 people come to your monthly Bible studies. Perhaps your situation dictates that 10 people coming for a Bible study would be impressive. Your vision should motivate you to get things accomplished.

2. Dedication

Merely having great plans is not enough. You need to follow through. Now that you know that you want to have 20 people attending your regular meetings, you need to work on making it happen. In order for anything MGOCSM does to be successful, countless hours of work are required making flyers,

delegating responsibility, talking to clergy, etc. Look deep within yourself and ask yourself if you're really up to it.

3. Persistence

Any road you travel is probably going to have bumps and potholes along the way. You should be weary of this beforehand, but not afraid. Sometimes there will be people who have serious problems with the direction MGOCSM is going. Be prepared to humbly receive criticism and perhaps even learn from it.

4. Prayer

As true Orthodox Christians, nothing can be accomplished without prayer. Every member should be committed to praying for the success of the MGOCSM.

The Objective

According to the 1975 MGOCSM Constitution, the objects of the Movement shall be, "To help its members and others, particularly students and young people, to grow up as true disciples of the Lord, Jesus Christ and loyal members of the Church through worship, study, and service." The motto and underlying philosophy of the MGOCSM is "Worship, Study, Service." The words themselves are understood exclusively within the Orthodox Church. The MGOCSM is not a separate entity from the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, but exists solely within the Church, in order to create an educated and devoted generation for the future.

1. An Orthodox Identity

The MGOCSM is mandated to be fully committed to the Holy Tradition of the Orthodox Church. As such, this group is not simply interchangeable with other fellowships. The Faith and practices of Orthodoxy should permeate through all the worship, study, and service that takes place in the name of the movement. The MGOCSM should not be used as a forum to collectively criticize the Church, though asking questions about the Faith is encouraged. The MGOCSM in America is now obliged to reverse the mistakes of the past, and bring Orthodox Christianity to the forefront of the student discourse.

2. Worship

The Holy Eucharist is central to an Orthodox Christian life. Regular participation in the Holy Qurbana and the Sacramental Life of the Church should be foundations for any further pursuit by an MGOCSM unit. Accordingly, every MGOCSM unit should be mindful of the daily offices of the Church, and respectful of the Church's traditions of prayer and fasting when conducting any activity. The MGOCSM should not be a platform for movements outside the Church. While every meeting begins and ends with prayer, each member is expected to approach worship with discipline and humility.

3. Study

As a student movement, the MGOCSM focuses largely on helping its members learn more about the Orthodox Church. The movement must be submissive to the teachings of the Church, and should allow each student to reach personal understandings of the Church's Faith, and not "personal theologies." The Priests and Bishops of the Church should be intimately involved in the spiritual education of the youth. When these resources are unavailable,

there are many Orthodox resources available which should be studied both individually and in groups. Non-Orthodox resources can be consulted, but should be placed in the proper context under supervision. A good understanding of the issues of Faith is capable of inspiring MGOCSM members to participate more frequently in the Church.

4. Service

The American MGOCSM is obliged to participate charitably in the Indian as well as American communities. An MGOCSM is an ambassador of the Orthodox Church in the community. The community at large will respond positively to an MGOCSM which is active and visible in charity work. There is no shortage of suffering or crisis in the world that the MGOCSM cannot be involved in reaching out to others. Moreover, participation in service activities should occur frequently. While the MGOCSM is not intending to proselytize others, the sincerity and devotion each MGOCSM member has for his or her Faith will be a basic testimony of the Orthodox Faith.

How do I start?

1. Go to Church!

The MGOCSM is an organization that only has relevance in relation to the Indian Orthodox Church. Though this is a student movement, the youth are never separate from the rest of the Church at large. Having stated this, the MGOCSM unit in America usually starts at the parish level, though units are starting to be organized on the college campuses. There is no minimum number of members per unit required. Even the smallest unit can be effective in having regular Bible studies and fellowship activities.

2. Get organized

The individual unit is most successful when there is definite structure in leadership. Every member is, however, encouraged to take an active leadership role, whether formal or not. Formal leadership positions allow for responsibilities to be spread out and for each task to be overseen with the proper amount of focus. As turns out, different MGOCSM units have implemented different structural models. What follows is a generalized summary of what your unit can look like.

President: The president of the MGOCSM on the Diocesan level is exclusively the Metropolitan of the American Diocese. The designated parish priest should head the unit as representative of the Bishop.

Vice-President/Adult Advisor: A knowledgeable and devoted layperson should be consulted for advice ranging from dealing with the parish to figuring out the financial situation. A good adult advisor motivates the unit to stay active and committed to working towards its goals.

General Secretary: The general secretary is effectively the youth in charge of the day-to-day activities of the group. The secretary is

in charge of planning and conducting regular meetings, keeping the members well informed of MGOCSM concerns, as well as keeping minutes of the meetings. Often, the secretarial duties are divided into a few positions (corresponding secretary, joint secretary, etc.). Each group is free to determine their leadership structure according to its unique size and situation.

General Treasurer: The treasurer is in charge of overseeing the finances of the MGOCSM unit. The treasurer keeps track of the accounts and writes receipts when necessary. All accounts should be kept on record with the most extreme care.

Historian: All picture taking and scrapbook compilation are the responsibility of the historian.

Event Coordinator: Sometimes larger groups will need to designate an individual to take the lead in the planning and convening of an even such as a retreat, conference, fundraiser, etc.

Charity/Service Coordinator: Community outreach is an important mandate for every MGOCSM unit, and thus an individual should be designated to ensure charity programs are carried out.

3. Get Connected

Once your unit has gotten organized, you will need to establish contact with your Diocesan and regional officers. First of all, building an MGOCSM network will help facilitate the flow of ideas between people and parishes. In addition, each unit is necessarily under the umbrella of the larger MGOCSM organization as a whole. Think of your National Honor Society in high school, or a given college fraternity. None of these organizations function locally without permission from the national organization. Similarly, MGOCSM functions as a national and global organization, and thus requires dues and registration. Membership in the national MGOCSM requires each individual unit pay dues accordingly. The appropriate contact information is included at the end of this packet.

How Do I Run a Bible Study?

1. Planning

- a. **Frequency-** Based on your unique situation, you need to determine how often you can expect to have a Bible study. At the very least, you should meet once a month.
- b. **Where/When-** Perhaps it's best to meet on a Saturday night, perhaps on Sunday after Holy Qurbana. Discuss with your group when everyone is available and also where the best place to meet is. Rotating between peoples' houses could be a good idea that also adds a more personal feel to your meetings.
- c. **Invitations-** Make sure your Achen is well informed of and invited to all your Bible studies. It is up to his discretion what should be discussed and whether a layperson is qualified to teach from the Church. A few well-versed adults should also attend. Send an email

out to all the members at least a few weeks in advanced with the meeting specifics.

- d. **Topic-** Decide whether you are discussing a particular Bible passage or a particular aspect of Orthodox teaching. If there are readings to be assigned, let everyone know at least a week ahead of time. Be sure the speakers are qualified to speak on the topic.

Bible Study Ideas	
<i>Elements of Holy Qurbana</i>	<i>Christian Dating/Marriage</i>
<i>History of Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church</i>	<i>Death/Original Sin</i>
<i>Early Church Practice/Fathers</i>	<i>Compare/Contrast with non-Orthodox Churches</i>
<i>How to read the Holy Bible</i>	<i>Lent (Meaning and Practice)</i>
<i>Priesthood/Apostolic Succession</i>	<i>Biological/Environmental Issues</i>
<i>Study of Individual Sacraments</i>	<i>Analysis of a Particular Book/Article</i>
<i>Group Study on 5th Thubden Fathers</i>	<i>Evangelism</i>
<i>Parumala Thirumeni</i>	<i>Teaching of Paulos Mar Gregorios</i>
<i>Vattasseril Thirumeni</i>	<i>Types/Antitypes</i>
<i>Infant Baptism</i>	<i>Christology</i>
<i>Virgin Mary</i>	<i>Intercession</i>

- e. **Group Study-** Some parishes do not have a regular local priest. In this case, the topics should be studied together as a group. The study should be based on the teachings of the Church. A list of Orthodox resources is available in this kit.

2. Your First Meeting

- a. **Devotional Hymns-** In order to establish the proper mood for focus and meditation, a few hymns should be sung. Attempt to sing both in English and Malayalam, as well as a few selected hymns from Holy Qurbana. Be sure that your singing is motivated by your need for a proper mindset and not by the “charismatic revival.”
- b. **Bible Reading-** Read the Bible passage to be (or relevant to the topic) discussed or otherwise from the Orthodox Lectionary.
- c. **Prayer-** The proper Morning/Noon/Evening Prayers are all available in books published by the Church. If the priest is unavailable, one should lead from among the MGOCSM members. When the prayers are over, a member should lead the group in a brief extemporaneous prayer.
- d. **Lecture/Discussion-** The designated speaker should present on the topic and initiate a discussion involving the whole group. Everyone should be encouraged to participate. The role of the priest is to facilitate the discussion and instruct the group in the Church’s teaching. Audio/Visuals (PowerPoint, handouts, etc) should be used if they enhance the learning experience without creating a distraction.
- e. **Business Meeting-** After the discussion is finished, the MGOCSM business should be gone over. Often a separate meeting is required to discuss MGOCSM business.

- f. **After Fellowship-** A responsible activity is a good idea for more informal bonding. Be sure everyone behaves and gets home safely and at a reasonable hour.

Running an Event

1. Planning

- a. **What do you want to do?**

Remember your tone. A conference is more upbeat and can feature icebreakers and games. A retreat, on the other hand, is more focused on prayer and meditation. Be sure that your speakers and activities all are geared toward the tone of the event as well as the theme.

- b. **Who will be speaking?**

- c. **Who are you doing this for?**

- d. **What is the theme?**

The theme will be the common thread to your whole event. All the programs should be built around getting the theme across to your participants

- e. **What do you want your attendees to gain from your event?**

- f. **How will you do it?**

2. Your Tasks

- a. **Consultation-** Be sure to talk to your parish before you do anything. Your priest and Church need to know what you're doing and will have some concerns for you to address. The parish priest will be able to offer you much-needed advice and guidance too. Do as much as you can to bridge any generation gaps that may exist for everyone's benefit.

- b. **The Team-** You will need a group of people with different talents to be successful. No individual should be expected to carry the entire load. A limiting factor on your event will be the number of people you have working on it. There should be different people designated to take care of different aspects (refreshments, speakers, etc.)

- c. **The Speakers-** Based on the speakers you're inviting, decide what format is most appropriate. A more devotional speaker would be appropriate for a retreat while an academic speaker would be better at a general conference setting. Be sure your speakers have their accommodations met and are treated well during your event.

- d. **Invitations-** Distribute a flyer with all the necessary specific information. Be sure to follow up a few times before your program so you have a good idea about how many people are coming. You need to have a rough estimate if you intend to order food and choose an outside location.

- e. **Location/Transportation-** How many chairs or tables will you need? Will your Church facilities be enough? Be sure that the location can accommodate everyone who's coming and that they have clear and unambiguous directions to get there.

- f. Scheduling-** According to the amount of time you will have, make a detailed schedule about how the time will be spent. Be sure to include breaks and food in your itinerary. Include group activities and devotional hymns to break the monotony. Planning the programs is your opportunity to be your most creative. An excellent program that is true to its theme will keep people coming back for the next year's event.
- g. Communicate-** Be sure that the whole team is well informed of everything that is going on in the weeks and days before your event. You'll be able to cover for each other in case one of you makes a mistake.

3. Your First Event

Your preparedness will be well worth it. Keep a clipboard and a checklist to make sure everything goes off without a hitch. A good leader will be able to dictate the flow of an event. It's up to you and your committee to decide when to speed things up or slow them down. Remember to be bold and decisive if you think the situation is getting out of hand. Be sure to evaluate your success once it's all over with.

Evaluation of All of Your MGOCSM Activities

- a. What did you learn?**
- b. Did everyone learn something?**
- c. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the activity?**
- d. Will you have less/equal/more people at the next meeting?**
- e. What should be changed to make sure everyone keeps coming back?**

Appendix 1:

Projects of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church

St. Thomas Karunya Guidance Center (started in 1989)

Ulloor, Medical College, P.O.

Trivandrum, 695-011

Kerala, India

Ph: 0471 445543

"A charity project that helps cancer patients and others during their treatment period in Trivandrum City. It provides free accommodations, food, medical aid and travel expenses.

President: His Grace Dr. Geevarghese Mar Osthathios, Metropolitan

Coordinator: Very Rev. Dr. Yuhannon- Ramban

Karunya Vishranti Bhavan (started in 1998)

Kattela, Sreekariyam, P.O.

Thiruvananthapuram, 17

Ph: 91 471 596418

"Metropolitan Geevarghese Mar Osthathios started the Karunya Bhavan on the 11th of December, 1993. A multi-purpose scheme that provides a variety of activities like:

- a) A rehabilitation center for terminally ill cancer patients and the like to receive medical attention and nursing care.*
- b) A shelter for people thrown to the streets.*
- c) A residence for the old aged poor.*
- d) A free clinic for the local poor.*
- e) A center for the physically handicapped girls is under consideration.*

President: His Grace Dr. Geevarghese Mar Osthathios

Coordinator: Very Rev. Dr. Yuhannon Ramban

Other Charity Projects of Karunya:

****Marriage Assistance Foundation (M.A.F.)**

(providing financial assistance for the marriage of poor girls).

****Sick Aid Foundation (S.A.F.)**

(Providing financial assistance for the medical treatment of poor patients).

****Save a Heart Foundation (S.H.F.)**

(providing financial assistance for the medical treatment of poor heart patients).

Mar Gregorios Karunya Nilayam, Kottayam

P.B. No. 3
Gandhi Nagar, P.O.
Kottayam, 686-008
Kerala, India
Ph: 0481 598520

“On July 9, 1993, the Mar Gregorios Karunya Nilayam was started jointly by Metropolitan Geevarghese Mar Ivanios, Fr. T.J. Joshua, Fr. Thomas Kurien, and Fr. E.K. George near Kottayam Medical College. Its objective is to take care of the poor cancer patients by giving them medicine, food and accommodations.

His Grace Geevarghese Mar Ivanios
Fr. T.J. Joshua (Director)
Fr. Thomas Kurien (Secretary and Coordinator)

Mar Pachomios Charitable Society

Mar Pachomios Mount
Meempara, P.O. 682-308, Kochi
Kerala, India
Ph: 0484-763025

PRATHEEKSHA: *“Catering to 45 developmentally disabled women. These inmates are orphans, and they are provided with long term protection, food, accommodation, medicine, and training programs that assist them to maximize their abilities. “*

Karimpana, Koothattukulam, 686-632
Kochi, Kerala, India
Ph: 0485 253504

PRASANTHI: *“Provide hospice care for 40 poor and orphaned patients who are terminally ill.”*

Kadayiruppu, Kolenchery, 682 310
Kochi, Kerala, India
Ph: 0484-763025

PRATHYASA: *“accommodate 50 boys who are developmentally disabled, who come from financially strained circumstances.”*

South Piramadam, Pampakuda, 686-667
Kochi, Kerala, India
Ph: 0485-273402

President: His Grace Dr. Mathews Mar Severios, Metropolitan.

Kalahandi Development Projects

Uditnarayanpur P.O. (VIA) Bhavaniputan
Kalahandi Dist., Orissa, 766-001

Activities of KDP:

- 1) *hospital to serve as the focus of the project in the name of His Holiness Baselios Mathews Pradhaman Hospital.*
- 2) *Mobile Dispensary to carry medical services to rural villages.*
- 3) *Home for Destitute children.*
- 4) *Vocational Training Center*
- 5) *Model agricultural farm and dairy farm*

President: His Grace Dr. Geevarghese Mar Osthathios
Manager: Fr. C.J. Joshua

St. Mary's Boys Home, Thalacode (administered by Parumala Mar Gregorios Memorial Charitable Trust).
(Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios Bhavan)
Mulanthuruthy, 682 314, Ernakulam
Kerala, India
Ph: 0484 711290

President: His Grace Geevarghese Mar Coorilos
Treasurer: Fr. T.P. Elias

St. Gregorios Balagram, Yacharam, P.O.
Ranga Reddy Dist., Andhra Pradesh 501-509

President: His Grace Dr. Geevarghese Mar Osthathios
Director: Very Rev. Philipose Ramban

Appendix 2: Orthodox Resources

For starters:

40 Questions Answered- His Grace Dr. Gheevarghese Mar Osthathios

A Devotional Study of the Holy Qurbana- His Grace Mathews Mar
Barnabas

Our Church- Very Rev. Fr. Thomas Mundukuzhy

An Orthodox Catechism on the Faith and Life of the Church- Fr. VC
Samuel

70 Questions Answered- Rev. Fr. Dr. Mathew Vaidyan

The Orthodox Way- Bishop Kallistos Ware

The Orthodox Study Bible- available from Thomas Nelson Publishers

History of the Malankara Church:

The Orthodox Church of India- David Daniel

Catholicate History- available from OSSAB Publications

Faith of our Fathers- Cheeran Varghese

Basic Patristics

On the Incarnation- St. Athanasius

Hymns on Paradise- St. Ephrem the Syrian

Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching- St. Ireneaus of Lyons

On the Internet:

www.indianorthodoxchurch.org – Diocesan Homepage

www.mgocsmamerica.org –MGOCSM America Homepage

www.orthodoxherald.com –Malankara Orthodox Internet Magazine

www.ccel.org – Christian Classics Ethereal Library (Patristic
Collections)

www.oca.org/pages/orth_chri/Q-and-A/index.html - Orthodox Church of
America Questions page

www.stots.edu – St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary

www.svots.edu – St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary

Appendix 3: MGOCSM America Contact Information

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Appendix 4: Healthy MGOCSM Checklist

Check all of the following that apply:	
	Do I have meetings at least once a month?
	Do at least 75% of members attending meetings?
	Do meetings include prayer, Bible study, and business portion?
	Does the parish priest attend meetings?
	Do members have "outside Church" fellowships (bowling, bbq, etc.)?
	Is there at least one regional retreat/conference hosted per year?
	Does the retreat, including confessional, held every Lent?
	Are girls actively participating in Meetings, holding leadership roles?
	Do the majority of members attend events hosted by other parishes?
	Is there at least 1 charity program a month?
	Are representatives sent to Leadership Camp?
	Are MGOCSM Programs announced after Holy Qurbana?
	Are there visits by speakers from other parishes and Orthodox Churches?
	Is there turnover in leadership every year?
	Does your MGOCSM have a website?
	Is there active support from parish (i.e. financial support, English Qurbana, etc.)?
	Does Everyone speak at least once in the course of a meeting?
	Are Lunch/Snacks provided by MGOCSM on Sundays throughout year?
	Does the MGOCSM participate in parish activities (Sunday School, Mother's Day, etc.)?
	Is the Parish priest consulted for advice in certain situations?
	Do you have a local MGOCSM t-shirt?
	Do you have a local MGOCSM list serve?

Questions? Comments? Concerns? Please feel free to contact Steven Kurian at stevekurian@yahoo.com or (813) 468-1223, or one of the Diocesan MGOCSM Officers listed in Appendix 3 for more information.