

EPARCHIAL ASSEMBLY IN THE DIOCESE OF KALYAN

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Abstract

This article examines two Eparchial Assemblies (2006, 2015) in the Diocese of Kalyan, India, aligning them with Pope Francis' Synod on Synodality themes—Mission, Participation, Communion. It outlines their structure, inclusive membership, and outcomes, such as initiatives for youth, families, parishes, and social action, highlighting their role in fostering synodal governance and local ecclesial renewal.

Key Words: Communion; Ecclesial Governance; Eparchial Assembly; Mission; Synodality

Introduction

In 2021, Pope Francis declared a 'Synod on Synodality' in the whole Church. It is a process through which all the members of the Catholic Church can participate in the mission of Christ. The three keywords in this process are Mission, Participation, and Communion. These three are very important for the functioning of our Catholic Church. In the Eastern Church, this synodal process happens through an Eparchial assembly, which takes the place of a synodal process. This article will deal with the two Eparchial assemblies that took place in the Diocese of Kalyan. The attempt is to show how an Eparchial assembly is similar to the synodal process of the 'Synod on Synodality.'

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Eparchial Assembly

Eparchial assembly is an ancient Ecclesiastical institution which helps the bishop in the governance of the diocese. It allows us to experience Communion, Participation and Mission in one Spirit, in one faith and hope, and in one Catholic Church of God. The main duty of the bishop is to point out the true way to his people, strengthen their faith, and preserve them from all dangers which will take them away from Christ. For this mission, the bishop needs the help of his faithful in the diocese. By virtue of baptism, all are conferred with the common priesthood, by which we are all called to serve and participate in the mission of the Church. Each person has a core responsibility to foster the mission of God in the Church. According to Canon 460 of CIC: (Code of Canon Law of the Latin Church) the purpose of the diocesan Synod is "to assist the bishop in the exercise of the office proper to him, namely that of governing the Christian community." Also, CCEO (*Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*), C. 242 states that "the decisions taken at the time of the assemblies are to be known as the text of the laws (*Textus Legum*), declaration and decree." The first Eparchial assembly was only for the clerics, but later there was a development of communion theology. After the Second Vatican Council, it included religious and laity. The document which supported this is *Christifideles Laici* (1988) Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II. The Eparchial assembly gives a fresh start and a new direction to the eparchy.

Statutes of the Eparchy of Kalyan

According to the CCEO, C.242, the Eparchial Bishop is to communicate the text of law, declarations and decrees which have been decided upon at the Eparchial assembly to the authority which the particular law of his Church *Sui iuris* has determined, since the Bishop of the Diocese can decide the laws based on the particular laws of the church. This paper will explain some general norms regarding the Eparchial assembly in the diocese of Kalyan. Reference will be made to 'the Statutes of 'The Eparchy of Kalyan' which were published on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the Diocese.

Article 208 states that "the Eparchial assembly assists the Eparchial Bishop in matters that regard the special role needs of the Eparchy or its benefits" (CCEO, c.253)

Article 209 §1 states, "the Eparchial assembly is convoked, as often as is suggested by circumstances, according to the particular bishop's judgment."

§2 "The Eparchial Bishop presides over it personally and through another, transfers, prorogues, suspends, or dissolves it" (CCEO, c.226, 237).

§3 “It is recommended to have it once in 7 years.”

Article 210 states “all the members should be convoked to the Eparchial assembly and they must attend it.”

Article 211 lists the members of the Eparchial Assembly.

§1 The Ex-officio members: Coadjutor bishop and the auxiliary bishops, protosyncellus, Syncelli, Syncelli of the missions, judicial Vicar, Finance officer, Chancellor, Eparchial consultants, rector of the Eparchial minor seminary, Priest in charge of the major seminarians, Cathedral vicar, all protopresbyters, President of the Conference of Religious of India (CRI) Kalyan unit, Secretary and the joint secretary of the pastoral council, secretary of the Presbyteral council, secretary of the Presbyterium.

§2 The Elected Members: At least one parish priest from each zone, to be elected, by all of those who are actually the care of souls there, with the protopresbyters presiding over the election. Five members of the Presbyteral Council elected, excluding those who are already members of the assembly. Six men and three women lay representatives from pastoral council, elected by the pastoral council. One deacon from among those preparing for priesthood and one from the permanent deacons, elected by their respective groups. Superiors of monasteries *sui iuris* and one man and four women religious superiors of other institutes of consecrated life, which have a house in the eparchy, elected by the Conference of Religious of India, (CRI) Kalyan unit. One priest, and one woman religious representing each from four missions of the eparchy and elected in the representative mission under the presidency of the Superior. One lay representative of Kalyan laity movement, Pithruvedi, Mathrusangam, Kalyana Eparchy Youth, Kalyan Renewal Service Team, Jesus’ Nurses Fraternity elected by the respective eparchial executive bodies. One Zonal lay representative from each zone of the eparchy of Kalyan, elected by the Zonal council. One lay person, representing all the four missions. There shall be a substitute for all the elected members if they are impeded, and the name of the substitute should be submitted together with the names of the elected representative.

§3 The Nominated Members: The Bishop can nominate not more than 10 members from among the priests, religious and laity (CCEO, c.238).

Article 212 states that the number of lay people shall not exceed 1/3 of the total number of the eparchial assembly (CCEO, c.238 §1).

Article 213 states that There can be members invited from the other Catholic churches and observers can be invited from the non-Catholic churches (CCEO, c.238 §2).

Article 214 states that those who are impeded from attending the eparchial assembly, cannot send a proxy to attend it, but they are they are to inform the Eparchial Bishop of the impediment (CCEO, c.239).

Article 215 §1 states that any Christian faithful can suggest the topics for discussion, but it is only for the Eparchial Bishop to determine the topic to be discussed in the assembly.

§2 The Eparchial Bishop is to appoint in the due course of time one or several commissions to prepare the topics to be discussed in the assembly and he is to see that the schema of the topic is given well in advance.

Article 216 states that all the topics for discussion proposed to the assembly are submitted for free discussion during its session (CCEO, c.240).

Article 216 states that in course of time, various other committees are to be appointed by the Eparchial Bishop for the better functioning and the best result of the Eparchial assembly.

Article 217 states that the Eparchial Bishop is the sole legislator. The others have only a consultative vote. He alone signs whatever decision has been taken in the Eparchial assembly.

Article 218 states that the Eparchial Bishop will appoint in course of time a general coordinator and a general secretary for the assembly, who are ex-officio members of all the committees. At least one of them shall attend all the meetings of other committees. Each committee is to have a convener and a secretary.

These are some of the general norms to be followed while conducting the Eparchial Assembly in the Diocese of Kalyan. Their attention to details is plain.

Eparchial Assembly in the Diocese of Kalyan

In this section I wish to speak about the context and brief history of the Diocese of Kalyan and the two Eparchial assemblies which were held in the Diocese of Kalyan. Then I explain the outcome, that is what changes occurred in the diocese on account of these assemblies. I will conclude this section with the significance or the importance of eparchial assemblies in the Diocese of Kalyan.

Context and Brief History of the Diocese of Kalyan

The Diocese of Kalyan was established on 30th April 1988 by the decree of Pope John Paul II and inaugurated on 24th August 1988. The present bishop of the diocese is Mar Thomas Elavanal. Late Mar Paul Chittilappilly was the first and former bishop of the diocese. The patron saint of the diocese is St Thomas. It is located in the state of Maharashtra with a total area of 1, 46,282 sq. kms. The civil districts included in the diocese are Greater Mumbai, Thane, Raigad, Pune, Palghar, Nashik, Kolhapur, Satara, Solapur, Sangli, Sindhudurg, Ratnagiri, Dhule, Jalgaon, Nandurbar and Ahmednagar. The languages used in the diocese include Marathi, Hindi, Malayalam and English. Out of the total population of 7, 51, 76,099 the Syro-Malabar Catholics count 65,499. Several mission regions are entrusted to Religious congregations, which include Sangli mission (MST), Ahmednagar (VC), Chavara mission (CMI) and Solapur-Satara mission (MCBS). There are a total number of 90 Parishes and 13 Mass centers in the diocese and 56 parishes in the mission area. There are priests allotted for the pastoral and mission needs of the diocese. The total number of priests serving the pastoral needs of the diocese are 196; they are working in Greater Mumbai, Thane, Raigad, Pune, Palghar, Nashik. Out of these, 80 priests are ascribed to the diocese, 2 priests are from other dioceses, 11 are religious priests. There are a total number of 103 priests to serve the mission needs of the diocese; they are working in Kolhapur, Satara, Solapur, Sangli, Sindhudurg, Ratnagiri, Dhule, Jalgaon, Nandurbar and Ahmednagar. There are 89 religious convents in the diocese which includes a total number of 365 nuns. Total seminarians studying for the diocese are 53, among which 33 are major seminarians and the remaining 20 are minor seminarians. Apart from the churches, there are 58 Church offices or priest residences, 2 plots for Churches, 73 Pre-primary, Nursery and day care centers, 3 higher secondary schools, 1 College, 3 professional colleges, 13 special institutions for mentally challenged, 15 health care centers, 14 boardings and hostels, 15 social charitable centers, 4 seminaries and 7 other institutions. There are priests who are engaged in inter religious dialogue with Hindus, Muslims, and other religions. These meetings are organized specially in mission areas. Under Karunya Trust (Social action of the Diocese), there are various projects for transgender, rag pickers (Specially Children), Women empowerment in the rural villages and other charity works when there is urgent need in the state and in the country. (The above mentioned details are from Diocese of Kalyan, Diary 2018 which is given to all clergy).

Brief History of Eparchial Assembly- I

The first ever Eparchial assembly of the diocese of Kalyan was held in 2006. After a consultation with the Presbyteral Council on 16th December 2005, Mar Thomas Elavanal, the Bishop of the diocese announced the convocation of the Eparchial assembly. The pastoral letter for this announcement was read out in the parishes on 08th January 2006. The main focus of this Eparchial assembly was to discuss the vision statement of the Eparchy, so that the assembly might study it and form various commissions to focus on three themes- Pastoral care, Evangelization and Integral Human Development. There were 92 participants, of which 23 were ex-officio members. Elections were conducted in the respective forums to elect 59 representatives. 10 members were elected from among Priests, sisters, and laity. It was held in St Pius X College, Goregaon East, (Bombay Archdiocesan seminary) from 23-26 October 2006. The Eparchial assembly began with the Holy Qurbana (Mass) in Malayalam.

Plans Implemented Because of this Assembly

The methodology which was used in the Eparchial assembly is as follows- starting with the keynote address, followed by the diocesan response, cobbled together with practical suggestions. On each theme after the input session, there was a group discussion among 10 participants for one hour. Afterwards, they were asked to share their views and suggestions. Bishop Mar Thomas Elavanal presided over all the sessions and discussions to help the assembly to come to some concrete suggestions. A seven-year planner with clear divisions and plans was formed as a spiritual preparation for the Silver Jubilee Year in 2013. There were many suggestions which were taken and later implemented in the diocese. All the participants of the assembly took the oath which was read out by the bishop as a pledge of the commitment to the implementation of the suggestions of the assembly. The following are some important suggestions which were implemented in the diocese. (All the details above and the details which will follow are taken from Kalyan Bulletin)

Youth

Youth need to be educated on the concepts and symbols of Holy Qurbana. Around 10% of the parish council members should be from the youth. A full-time youth director with proper setup should be established. All the activities of KEY (Kalyan Eparchy Youth) should be conducted keeping in mind the spiritual dimension. The pro-life movement should be incorporated into the youth activities.

Family

Opportunities should be created at parish level for effective and meaningful debates and dialogue between parents and children to strengthen the family communication and better relationship. There should be counseling programmes on a regular basis, mainly focused on married couples who have completed one, two and five years of their married life. Diocesan level classes are to be conducted for the parents of the youth getting married, to help them adapt to the modern situation in the family. Parish level classes should be conducted for the parents of the children who will receive Baptism, Holy Communion and Confirmation. Inter-religious marriages should be discouraged and marriage between Syro-Malabar Catholics should be encouraged. There should be regular follow-up for those who have contracted inter-religious marriages.

Parish Level

It is recommended to maintain the simplicity of style of the church constructions. Every parish is to have a vision statement and spiritual targets for a year. Parish priests and the religious should make family visits to maintain better rapport with the parishioners. While celebrating occasions like First Holy communion, Marriage, Baptism, Jubilee, etc., extravaganzas and use of alcohol should be strictly avoided. Seminars and study classes should be arranged to create awareness among the laity about their role and responsibilities in the church. Priests should strictly follow the norms of the church on the celebration of the Eucharist.

Diocesan Level Activities

As we are in the land of Maharashtra learning Hindi and Marathi should be given more importance. It should be made compulsory for the seminarians. A proper mechanism should be evolved to accommodate those who come to our faith from other languages, and cultures to get into the parish structure. Tabor Ashram has shown its readiness in providing such pastoral care to these faithful under the direction of the Eparchy. An orientation program of a minimum of 3 days should be held for newly appointed priests and religious.

Evangelization, Ecumenism and Mission

It is good to organize a programme of catechumenate for those who join our church through marriage or conversion, as proposed by the synod of the Bishops of Syro-Malabar Church. The diocese should give clear norms for promoting ecumenism at the parish level. Some financially self-sufficient parishes are to adopt mission parishes. In order to foster ecumenism, invite the other denominations to our

feasts, allow them to use our infrastructure for their religious functions according to diocesan directives, join hands in common religious and social causes, organize seminars, including programmes for children.

Social Concerns

A Minimum of 5% in educational institutions of the eparchy are to be reserved for the poor. We need to encourage families to adopt a child for its education. Provide church premises for children to study and also for conducting classes for 10th and 12th standard students who cannot afford tuitions, with the help of youth. Social issues are to be addressed in the Sunday homily. These were a few important suggestions which were implemented in the diocese, and which are still actively pursued in the diocese with maximum efforts.

Brief History of Eparchial Assembly- II

The second Eparchial assembly of the Diocese of Kalyan was in 2015. After a consultation with the Presbyteral Council as per CCEO 236 and 237, Mar Thomas Elavanal, the Bishop of the diocese declared the convocation of the Eparchial assembly. The theme for this Eparchial assembly was “Christo-centric Family – Cradle of Integral Development” to discuss the various aspects of family life and how the family can be Christ oriented. The announcement of the assembly and the theme of the assembly was published in “Kalyan Lantern” (Diocesan Bulletin). There were 98 participants who included 54 priests (23 ex-officio members), 10 consecrated women, 24 men faithful and 10 women faithful, representing 16 districts of Maharashtra. It was held in the Animation and Renewal Center (Diocesan Pastoral Center), Panvel, from 21-24 October 2015. The Eparchial assembly began with the Holy Qurbana (Mass) in Malayalam.

Plans Implemented Because of this Assembly

The methodology used in this Eparchial assembly was the same as the first assembly. Since the first assembly had laid a foundation for all the aspects of the Diocese, this assembly focused only on the Family aspects. The assembly went through eight sessions on the Family tradition, pastoral implications, preparation for marriage, pre- and post- marital care, relationship within the family, the challenges that the institution of the family faces in this metropolitan city. There were about 500 suggestions which were made during the assembly, out of which the following were implemented. (All the details above and the details which will follow are taken from “Kalyan Lantern” - October and November 2015).

Family

The traditional form of family has been instrumental in preserving the religious, spiritual, social, and moral values among the faithful in the Eparchy, so it is important to keep this traditional form for future generations. 'Headship' or the leadership of the family is primarily of the husband, who has to fulfill it with the cooperation and complementarity of his wife and the other members of the family. The youth should be formed and trained so that when they are newly married, they will be empowered and encouraged to take up their roles as responsible parents. They should be taught to understand and appreciate the roles they fulfill in the Catholic families; they should also be taught the skills for complementing each other. The Marriage Preparation course should include sessions on finance management, relationship between spouses, importance of prayer life, crisis management and information about professionals to approach in crisis, sharing by successful families.

Pastoral Approach

Parish Priests have to play a significant role in the immediate preparation for marriage by praying for the 'to be married and their family, facilitating two candidates and their families to know about each other, finding out the compatibility between the future spouses through spiritual and psychological disposition and preparedness of the candidates and finding out any addictions to drugs or alcohol or any critical illness. The approach should change from 'Families to the Church' to 'Church to the Families'. Family unit meeting (SCC in Bombay Archdiocese) can be used as a forum to resolve family problems. These were the few important suggestions which were implemented in the diocese and which are still actively pursued in the diocese with maximum efforts.

Significance of Eparchial Assembly in the Diocese of Kalyan

When we go through both the assemblies we can see some common threads, like: the importance of ample preparations conducted in many areas, series of discussions, surveys, etc. Another important thing highlighted in both the assemblies is the participation of the laity. Even though there are differences in the thematic presentation in each assembly, there was a similar orientation in both the Eparchial assemblies; faith formation and catechetical instruction for the future generation. All the acts of the assemblies were the concerted efforts of the clerics, religious and laity. Role of the follow-up committee: after each eparchial assembly this committee had a crucial function in the eparchy, in order to ensure that the decisions are implemented. It is significant to note that the pastoral dimension

of the assembly was projected in both the eparchial assemblies. The Eparchial Assembly strengthens the eparchy with the acts of communion, promotes ecclesiastical regulations and also provides protection from all kinds of threats. It is also an instrument of reform in the eparchy. It continues to be a grace for the eparchy: because it is a fresh start, a regrouping of forces, a new direction pursued with a renewed spirit. The suggestions derived from the eparchial assembly are the reflection of the mind of the faithful in the eparchy. It assists the eparchial bishop as a consultative organ, to discern and genuinely respond to the needs of the time.

Conclusion

The Eparchial Assembly is the application and adaptation of the doctrine and discipline of the Universal Church to the particular situation of the eparchy. But it is not simply an automatic deduction from the universal to the particular; instead, it is a grasping and developing of the principles in the context of the local community (*Christus Dominus* 36). There is a hope and belief that there will be more eparchial assemblies to strengthen the diocese. These assemblies will help the Church to take steps according to the changing world. The eparchial assemblies emphasize the significance of the organ of the eparchial assembly in assisting the governance of the eparchial bishop. This article has tried to show how the eparchial assembly follows the three key words of the 'Synod on Synodality' that are Mission, Participation, and Communion. Each diocese should consult each and every member of the diocese to decide an action plan for the next 5-10 years. The Eparchial Assembly really does that, because through this, the Local ordinary gets the pulse of his diocese through which he can create an action plan and lead the people closer to God and protect them from all evil assailing the Church.

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