

## Background

The **Fellowship of Orthodox Christians in the United States (FOCUS)** is a ministry of the Diocese of Southwest America of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, and focuses on cultivating and educating adults, leading them to the likeness of God and the fullness of the Faith. The purpose of this ministry is to facilitate and encourage transformation in all aspects of a person's life as they become more active in the body of Christ.

FOCUS is a ministry and service of the Church, and not a formal organization or club; as such, these guidelines have been created rather than a formal constitution. The Diocese of Southwest America offers these guidelines in order to inform as to ecclesiastical purpose of the FOCUS ministry, and help offer guidance to all the faithful to accomplish the goals that are driven by basic Christian duties of worship, fellowship, service, and witness.

## Prayer for Guidance

**Grant us, O Lord, the knowledge of Your divine words and fill us with the understanding of Your Holy Gospel, the richness of Your divine gifts, and the grace of Your Holy Spirit.**

**Grant us the wisdom to obey Your commandments with joy, and do Your will, and make us worthy of Your blessings and mercies, now and always forever and ever.**

**Amen.**

**“They devoted themselves to  
the Apostles’ teaching and fellowship,  
to the breaking of bread and the prayers”  
(Acts 2:42)**

### **The Mission of FOCUS**

To grow more like our Lord Jesus Christ by applying the teachings of Scripture through fellowship and communion with the Orthodox Church.

### **Goals of FOCUS**

1. Deepen our relationship with the Holy Trinity through a better understanding of Scripture, Orthodox Theology and the Sacramental life of the Church (Colossians 2:6-7, John 6:44-58)
2. Fulfill our role as a faithful member of the Church in order to promote her betterment and growth (1 Corinthians 14:12, Philippians 2:1-4)
3. Encourage fellowship between like-minded Christians by fostering accountability and mentorship throughout various stages of life (Galatians 6:2)
4. Provide guidance and answer questions to those inquiring about the Orthodox faith
5. Witness Christ to those in the United States of America and abroad through charitable acts and selfless service to all in need (Proverbs 19:17, Matthew 6:3-4)

### **Patron Saint: St. Basil the Great**

*“Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:7-8)*

**Saint Basil the Great** (or Mar Baselios) is to be remembered as the patron Saint for the FOCUS Ministry. St. Basil is remembered during the Holy Qurbana and in the Fifth Thubden, and his Feast is celebrated by the Church on January 1<sup>st</sup>. The name “Baselios” is also given to the Catholicate of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church.

The personal story of St. Basil serves as inspiration for all those who seek a better understanding of our Lord Jesus Christ. St. Basil had been a university student and professor early in his life, and was growing more successful in the modern world. However the influence of a very remarkable woman, his sister St. Macrina, had deep

impact upon him and changed his life. St. Basil later described his transformation like a person who woke up from a deep sleep.

St. Basil became a great defender of the Orthodox Christian Faith, and is known for his selfless social and community work. The Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church remarks that among the Church Fathers, there seems to be none who gave more importance to social activities than St. Basil.

The saintly transformation of a person's life results from a growing understanding of the Gospel message and a closer communion with the Church. This transformation is seen in the life of St. Basil, making him the patron Saint for the FOCUS ministry.

*“The study of inspired Scripture is the chief way of finding our duty, for in it we find both instruction about conduct and the lives of blessed men, delivered in writing, as some breathing images of Godly living, for the imitation of their good works. Hence, in whatever respect each one feels himself deficient, devoting himself to this imitation, he finds, as from some dispensary, the due medicine for his ailment.” – St Basil’s letter to St Gregory the Theologian (Epistle 2)*

### **Target Audience**

Our Church is blessed with the fullness of the Truth, and inherits a great responsibility to share with all people - the Great Commission (**Matthew 28:16-20**). As a ministry of the Church targeted to adults who seek a deeper knowledge of Christ and the Orthodox Church, FOCUS serves the following:

- Individuals who are post MGOCSM
- Married couples
- Parents
- Individuals who are new to the church by way of marriage or conversion , or those who have returned to the Church

There is no “maximum” age limit to participate in FOCUS as it serves a broad spectrum of demographics with common spiritual needs. The love of Christ bears no barriers (ethnic, age, gender or political) or boundaries, and it is the purpose of the Church to encourage all those with a thirst for Christ, rooted in faith, to come and see that the Lord is good.

The demographics of adults in each region may be different, and therefore, it may be appropriate to minister to them in separate groups. However, it is important to always bring the groups together regularly for dialogue and interaction, as each group will benefit from the experiences of others.

## **Activities and Programs**

*“But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry” (2 Timothy 4:5)*

Every region’s FOCUS Ministry should strive to minister to all adults in the community, especially as they transition through their different life stages. Ultimately, all members of the Church need to grow in closer communion with our Lord Jesus Christ through the marks of the early Church – deeper understanding of our Faith, fellowship within the community, participation in the Holy Qurbana and other Sacraments, and Prayer.

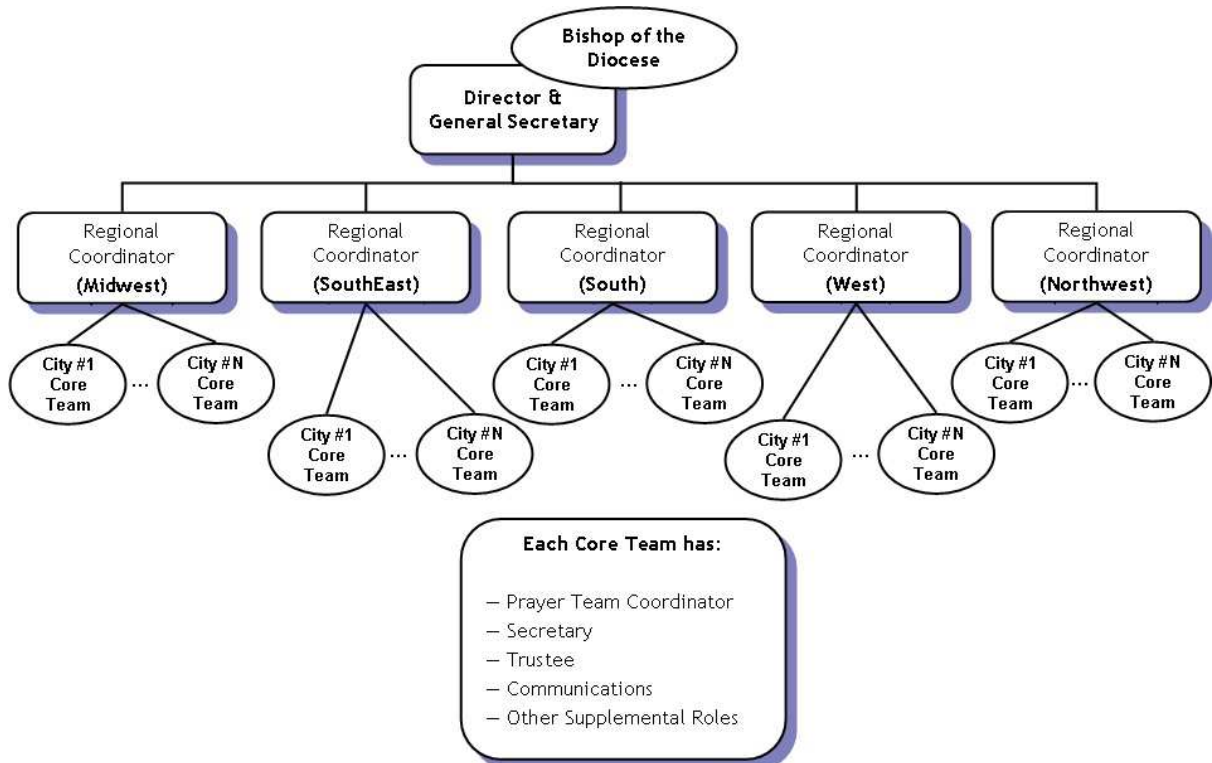
Some suggested activities and programs are as follows:

- **Bible Study** that is led or supervised by clergy so that the Word is interpreted as per the teachings of the Church
- **Conferences, retreats, or seminars** with seminary-trained individuals or other professional speakers. Numerous “Faith Seminars” have been held in multiple cities and should be continued.
- **Mission Work**
  - Missions trips could be done in conjunction with MGOCSM
  - Community outreach such as: Toys for Tots, Soup Kitchen, Food Drive, Charity events (Talent Show, Car Wash, Sports Tournament, etc)
  - Selecting a local charity or service to support financially or volunteer time
- **Fundraising** (Restaurant Fundraising Night, Raffle)
- **Prayer Team** that regularly meets and prays for the needs of the Church and individuals
- **Gathering for songs of praise**
- **Guys/Girls Ministry** – Sports, Cooking Ministry, Small Group/Accountability
- **Resource Pool** – members of FOCUS well established in their professions being available as a resource to those coming from other countries or to those wanting to make a change in profession (e.g., develop a resource list with everyone’s professional information). Counseling is another important need in the Church, and should be considered for both personal and marriage.
- Support **Church special projects** (e.g., the Liturgical Translations project, etc.)
- **Language Classes** to learn Malayalam or Syriac
- Promotion of **regional English Qurbana**
- **Offering childcare** at all FOCUS activities

## Structure

The **Book of Acts** describes the early Christian Church, and is the foundation of our Orthodox Christian Church. It therefore becomes the ideal inspiration for the FOCUS ministry. The various roles and functions described in this section derive from this structure.

The diagram below shows the hierarchy of the various roles within the FOCUS Ministry:



### **Diocesan Director and General Secretary**

These people are to be appointed by the Diocesan Metropolitan and will serve as central points of contact for the Regional Coordinators. Both Director and General Secretary will be in regular communication with the Metropolitan on all administrative and management matters of FOCUS in the Diocese.

Responsibilities include, but are not limited to, summarizing updates and observations on the needs of the Regions, and helping the Regional Coordinators obtain resources.

It is recommended that those assigned to this role be in this position for no longer than four (4) years in order establish the continuity of fresh ideas.

## **Regional Coordinator**

Each Region must have one person appointed as Regional Coordinator, and this appointment will be made by the Diocesan Metropolitan. It is highly desirable that that these appointed people have formal Orthodox Theological training in order to perform their duties using a strong spiritual foundation rooted in the Scripture and Prayer and understand the skills required for effective ministry in America.

It is recommended that the person assigned to this role be in this position for no longer than four (4) years in order establish the continuity of fresh ideas.

The Regional Coordinator will assume various responsibilities such as:

- Prepare quarterly reports for the Diocesan Coordinator (this establishes accountability as well as historical documentation)
- Work closely with parish priests to appoint Administrative roles for FOCUS leadership.
- Encourage, participate, pray for, and support all programs of the FOCUS ministry.
- Collaborate with other Regional Coordinators within the Diocese (encourages fellowship, increases knowledge base, and promotes new initiatives/ideas)

## **Area Core Team**

The leadership team that is selected must consist of people who are active members of the Church and possess strong love and foundation within the teachings of the Faith. The leadership team must not only administer to the organization, but also serve through prayer and fasting.

It is very important that the individuals of the FOCUS Core Team must possess certain characteristics, including:

- Be able to represent the Parish to which they belong and the Church as a whole
- Possess strong organizational and communication skills
- Confess and receive Holy Qurbana regularly
- Be above the age of 23

It is recommended that the person assigned to this role be in this position for no longer than three (3) years in order establish the continuity of fresh ideas.

The situation within each city and region in the Diocese will be different and have unique needs and requirements. As a result, it may be necessary for one individual to perform multiple roles described below. Regardless of implementation, the basic functions must be performed and supplemental (or additional) roles may be required. All roles must always be performed with purity in heart and prayer, as well as commitment.

The roles that must be fulfilled include the following.

- **Prayer Team**: This role oversees all activities of the FOCUS Core Team. It is important for the FOCUS ministry to be grounded in prayer, fasting and participation in the Sacraments of the Church just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed throughout His ministry and teachings. FOCUS leaders need to meet regularly for prayer and planning, and it is important when starting a FOCUS ministry to not overlook this important function. The Prayer Team must also be aware of the Church's Liturgical Calendar and remind the core leadership team of Scripture readings, fasts and other spiritual activities that the Church has instilled to help with the Christ-like transformation of Her members.
- **Secretary**: This role ensures that other administrative activities of the ministry are planned, reports are taken, and that the Regional Coordinator is always apprised of the current status of FOCUS.
- **Trustee**: This role oversees any and all financial aspects within the ministry. Accountability, visibility, and organization of funds is vital to any entity.
- **Communications**: This role will manage all types of communication FOCUS decides to put forth. It is important for the Ministry to be in regular communication with the members through:
  - **Email** - A mailing list should be maintained, and popular e-mail services such as Gmail (<http://www.gmail.com>) allow for grouping of contacts so that members can be sorted by their Church. Other mailing services such as ListServ can also be used.
  - **Facebook** - A growing number of people are using Facebook, and there is a feature that allows for the creation of a Group. Various cities including Chicago, Houston, NY/NJ, Philadelphia and others have groups on Facebook.
  - **SMS and Twitter** - SMS and Twitter are new ways to distribute news and information and should be explored
  - **Website** - Each Region or area should maintain their own website, and these will in turn be linked from the Diocesan website. The website can be used as catechism resources on our Faith. Previous FOCUS Faith seminars are available at <http://www.indian-orthodox.net>, and will be used for future seminars as well.

Additional or supplemental roles may need to be assigned so that goals and objectives may be achieved. Examples include the following:

- Adult Men's and Women's Coordinator
- Fellowship Coordinator
- Charity and missions Coordinator
- Fundraising Coordinator
- Welcoming Coordinator

As explained earlier, the makeup of each FOCUS Core Team in the different cities and regions may multiple roles may be performed by one person or different people for each role.

### **Financial Resources for the Ministry**

FOCUS is a ministry under the umbrella of the Diocese of Southwest America of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. It is funded primarily through contributions from members or through various charitable programs.

### **Financial Responsibilities**

The Focus Core Team is mainly responsible for creating an environment of healthy financial accountability. The Core Team is accountable to all other FOCUS members for ensuring that the ministry is fulfilling its financial obligations, reporting its financial condition accurately, investing its resources wisely, and planning for its financial future. The role of the Core Team is to manage the daily finances of the organization and to ensure that the board and its various committees have timely and accurate information when needed.

Meeting financial obligations, reporting regularly (including a public reports prepared for The Bishop and the public), investing wisely, and planning for the future are keys to success for every FOCUS program/ministry. Financial accountability is a Core Team responsibility. All FOCUS Leaders have important roles to play, but the Core Team has the legal authority and responsibility to provide financial oversight for the whole FOCUS Ministry.

### **Financial Support**

To support various activities or programs under the ministry, it is crucial to have continuous revenue flow in and out of the ministry. While tithing is the preferred method of the church (1 Corinthians 16:2), the church recognizes that members have many other financial obligations to fulfill. Therefore, in lieu of the preferred method, the ministry has recommended a monthly subscription amount of \$10 for all FOCUS members. This will help ensure that adequate funding for all ongoing programs/ministries under FOCUS ministry.

The local Churches could also consider funding the FOCUS ministry, especially in the beginning stages in areas where members of the key demographics are relatively inactive.

Any FOCUS member who is unable to fulfill their financial obligations should take concerns directly to their church priest or specific member of the Focus Core Team. Exceptions can always be made subject to the authority of the Church. Anonymous or public donations of any amount will always be accepted and is highly encouraged. Individual financial contributions are not/will not be available for public opinion.

FOCUS will host various fundraisers to supplement the in-flow of funds. Fundraisers, as well as all other events held under the FOCUS name, shall be subject to the mission and goals of the FOCUS ministry.

FOCUS ministry should be a registered non-profit entity under the state in which it resides. All revenue brought into the program will be used solely for administration of FOCUS and FOCUS related events. FOCUS ministry, subject to the approval of the FOCUS Core team, will make annual charitable donations to various needs around the world. Individuals who wish to make charitable contributions are entitled to the tax benefits subject to the state they reside in. Receipts of donations shall be provided as necessary.

“And whatever you do, in word or deed,  
do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,  
giving thanks to God the Father through Him”  
(Colossians 3:17)