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Title: Charisms and Co-Responsibility: Reimagining Leadership in the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church in Australia

Abstract

The Syro-Malabar Catholic Church in Australia is a migrant community that treasures its Eastern Syriac liturgical heritage while navigating the challenges of living in a Western, predominantly Latin-rite Catholic environment. The problem this paper addresses is that leadership in the Syro-Malabar community often mirrors hierarchical and clerical models inherited from both the Latin Church and traditional migrant patterns, leaving limited space for women and laity to participate meaningfully in leadership. This tension—between preserving tradition and embodying synodality—creates a unique opportunity to reimagine ecclesial leadership.

This paper argues that the Australian Syro-Malabar Church can cultivate a renewed model of leadership by grounding it in the baptismal theology of co-responsibility and the Pauline theology of charisms. Such a model both responds to the global Catholic call to synodality and attends to the pastoral realities of a migrant Church, where issues of gender equity, intercultural dialogue, and lay participation are pressing. The thesis advanced is that leadership in the Syro-Malabar Church must move beyond clerical categories and instead emerge from discernment of charisms as gifts of the Spirit, enabling both men and women to share responsibility for mission.

To ground this claim, the paper focuses on two theological sources in depth. First, *Lumen Gentium*'s teaching on the People of God emphasises the baptismal dignity of all the faithful and their universal call to holiness (LG 9–12). This vision destabilises purely hierarchical frameworks, affirming that the Spirit distributes gifts for mission across the whole community. Second, St Paul's theology of charisms (1 Cor 12; Rom 12) provides a biblical foundation for leadership that emerges not from office alone, but from spiritual gifts discerned for the building up of the Body of Christ. Paul insists that no gift is redundant and that every member—regardless of social status or gender—contributes to the Church's mission. These two sources, read together, offer a robust theological foundation for a leadership model that integrates tradition with innovation.

From this foundation, three dimensions of a renewed leadership framework are proposed. First, parish governance should be reshaped to reflect baptismal equality, embedding co-responsibility into decision-making. Second, structured processes of charism discernment should be introduced into catechesis and pastoral planning, allowing women and men alike to recognise and exercise Spirit-given gifts. Third, heritage-focused pastoral practices should sustain the liturgical and cultural identity of the Syro-Malabar Church while making space for intercultural dialogue and lay leadership in the Australian context.

In conclusion, reimagining leadership in the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church through co-responsibility and charism discernment advances both theological and practical insights. It addresses the entrenched clericalism that sidelines women, offering instead a Spirit-led vision where leadership is shared, relational, and missionary. For migrant communities negotiating identity and belonging, this framework preserves tradition while fostering inclusivity. Most importantly, it contributes to wider Catholic conversations on synodality and women's

leadership, showing how an Eastern migrant Church in Australia can model a participatory, Spirit-driven future for the whole Church.