

# **Introduction to the Assyrian Church of the East, Diocese of California**

## **The Apostolic Foundation of the Church**

The mission of the *Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East: Diocese of California* is to carry on the salvific Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ and his blessed apostles, as contained in the Holy Gospel. Perpetually and diligently keeping its communion with the *Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East* worldwide, the 'Diocese of California' is one part of that Church. The Gospel, as received from the apostles of our Lord preserved and proclaimed to her faithful, namely St. Thomas from the Twelve, and Ss. Addai & Mari from the Seventy-Two, was proclaimed by these blessed apostles of Christ to the ancient Assyrian people, residing in different parts of Mesopotamia very soon after the Ascension of Jesus into heaven. Our ancient forefathers believed in, received and spread the holy Gospel to all of the inhabitants living within the confines of the ancient Persian Empire, beginning from the apostolic era before the end of the first Christian century.

The *Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East* evangelized many other non-Assyrian nations as well, having through a great missionary enterprise spread the Gospel to all of the known parts of Asia before the end of the 7th-8th centuries. Notably, the first to evangelize the Chinese people was the *Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East*, having proclaimed the Gospel to the Chinese of the T'ang Dynasty, in the year 635 AD. Further, not only is the Church's mission to spread the Gospel of our Lord to the four corners of the earth, but to celebrate and administer the holy sacraments (*Raze*) and to preserve the apostolic and patristic teaching of these same apostles and their successors in the Church with great care and diligence, with the express intention of passing all these spiritual treasures down to our future generations of faithful.

Not only is the Church's mission to proclaim the Gospel and salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, but the Church also seeks to aid her faithful in their day-to-day lives. The Church desires to maintain and to create new programs that will cater to the needs of her elderly, middle-aged and youth and adolescent faithful. These programs are multi-faceted, including but not limited to elderly daycare programs, youth programs, schools and child-care programs, are at this point wholly funded by the generous donations of her faithful. The Church seeks to continue to evangelize to her faithful, and with regard to the youth to pass on

the Faith and her holy apostolic Tradition, and to develop social programs that will better the spiritual and family lives of the community at large. Thus, the Church is not only the voice of God in the heart and soul of man, but also the conscience of her faithful and the 'Spiritual Mother' who seeks to always care for her children in matters regarding both the soul and the body. Therefore, the Church has in the past and present, and will continue in the future to create and develop programs that will provide for the proper social and human development of her faithful in their various stages of life and human development and growth.

### **The Assyrian Church of the East in the United States**

The Assyrians living in the United States are still at times viewed as a 'minority' ethnic group in the country. With this kind of an erroneous understanding on the part of non-Assyrians, many times our people/faithful are found to be marginalized in the general society of American daily life. Having migrated to the United States officially since the late 1800's, the Assyrian-Americans (predominantly belonging to the *Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East*) are an important and industrious part of life of the United States.

The Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East began to develop in the United States as early as 1843, when the Bishop of Urmia, Mar Youkhanan, was brought by the missionary Justin Perkins of the American Presbyterian Missionary Board to the United States. Then, in 1919 Bishop Mar Yahwalaha of Barwar visited Chicago in 1919. However, the Assyrian Church of the East was formally organized in the United States in 1925, when the then Metropolitan of India Mar Abimalek Timotheus came to Chicago and formally began the ecclesiastical community there by ordaining priests and deacons, and begin the first American parish. Later, the late His Holiness Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII, Catholicos-Patriarch (1920-1975) finally immigrated to the United States in 1940. Under his leadership, the Church grew in America, and parishes were formally established in the East Coast: in Chicago in 1940, Gary (Indiana) in the 1940's, Philadelphia in the 1950's, New Britain (Connecticut) in 1953 and Yonkers (New York) in 1966. Ever since then, the Assyrian Church of the East has grown worldwide under the leadership of the present Catholicos-Patriarch His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV (1976-) to three archdioceses: Iraq & Russia, India and Australia/New Zealand & Lebanon, and nine dioceses: Eastern USA, Western USA, California, Canada, Europe, Syria, Iran, Lebanon, Nohadra (northern Iraq), including two auxiliary bishop for the archdiocese of India. All of the archbishops and bishops are in full communion with the universal head of the Church, who is the Catholicos-Patriarch; collectively, they make up the 'Holy Synod' of

the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East, and this is the highest source of authority for the Church on a worldwide level. The Assyrian Church of the East boasts over half a million members worldwide.

### **The Formation of the Diocese of California**

The Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East began in California in as early as 1940/41, when the first parish was formally established in the West Coast of the US, west of the Mississippi. This parish was the present Mar Addai the Apostle Parish, in Turlock, California. The community built its present church structure in Turlock in 1947, which was formally consecrated in January of 1950 by the then Catholicos-Patriarch, the late His Holiness Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII (patriarch 1920-1975). Then, the Patriarch moved to California in 1952, settling first in Keyes (near Turlock) and making the Mar Addai parish his cathedral. In 1953, the Patriarch moved his see to San Francisco, and established the Mar Narsai parish there in 1955, and the present church building there (with rectory being bought later) was bought and renovated in 1958. Gradually, the Assyrian Church of the East community grew and a parish was established in Los Angeles (St. Mary's) in 1967, with the first church building being bought there in 1979. In 1967-68, a number of American non-Assyrian converts joined the Church and they bought a church building and rectory in Seattle, Washington in 1968; this is the present St. Thomas parish in the same city. Slightly later, a parish was established in San Jose (Mar Yosip Parish) and a building was bought and renovated in 1989, and the St. George parish was established in Ceres in 1998, with a church building in that city. The cathedral parish, Mar Zaia, was formally established in Modesto in 1984, and the present church building and hall (with adjacent land) were constructed and consecrated in December of 1990 by the late Catholicos-Patriarch, His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV (patriarch 1976-2015).

The Diocese of California first began as part of the Diocese of Western United States (bifurcated from the then 'Diocese of United States & Canada), which was created by mandate of the Holy Synod of the Church (universal) in October of 1984. The see of the first bishop was Modesto, and later moved to San Jose, California. In 1999, the Diocese of Western California was created, being bifurcated from the Diocese of Western United States. Finally, the Diocese of California was created in November 2008 by mandate of the Holy Synod, with the consecration of its present bishop, His Grace Mar Awa Royel, on November 30, 2008 at Mar Zaia Cathedral in Modesto. Since then, the see of the present bishop of the Diocese of California has been in Modesto, California.