



ԱՌԱՋՆՈՐԴՈՒԹԻՒՆ ԶԱՅՈՑ ՄԵԾԻ ԲՐԻԴԱՆԻՈՅ ԵՒ ԻՈՒԱՆՏԵԱՅԻ
DIOCESE OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND
25 Cheniston Gardens • Kensington • London W8 6TG

Գերաշնորհ Տ. Վահան Եպս. Յովհաննէսեան, Առաջնորդ եւ Հայրապետական Պատուիրակ
His Grace Bishop Vahan Hovhannessian, PhD, Primate and Pontifical Legate

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Compiled and answered by the Primate's Office based on questions and comments addressed to the Primate and/or our clergy and Parish Council members.

1. Church, Diocese, Parish?

The word Church is used generically to refer to the worldwide institution that was created by our Lord Jesus Christ, as the fellowship of those who believe in Him, who are baptised based on His Gospel and come together to partake of the Holy Communion in remembrance of the Lord. The universal Church was established in many countries and among many nations. The Church founded in Armenia, which for over two thousand years continues witnessing and preaching the Gospel to the Armenians in Armenia and around the world is the “Armenian Church.” Administratively the Armenian Church, like many other Orthodox and Catholic churches, is divided to dioceses according to large geographical boundaries, i.e. by countries or large sections within a country. Each diocese is further divided to smaller communities according to cities, villages or neighbourhoods within the city, known as parishes. Each parish is under the supervision of a priest.

2. What is Parish?

A parish (Փուխ) is the community of baptised Armenian Christians and their families who regularly worship at the same church building, and are affiliated with that Church community. A Parish is under the pastoral care of a priest who is the “Pastor” of the parish (Հովիւ). Usually the parish is made up of the faithful living in a certain geographical location or a territorial unit. This could be a country, city, village or neighbourhood. In the city of Istanbul, Turkey, for example, there are over 30 Armenian Churches with their own Parishes. In the canonical structure of the Armenian Church a Parish is an administrative unit typically having its own church building. All Orthodox, Catholic, and Anglican Churches have parishes.

3. Pastor or Priest?

A Pastor according to the Armenian Church traditions and canons is usually a priest ordained according to the canons and rituals of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church, and responsible for the Armenian Church ministry at a specific parish. A Pastor is assigned by the Diocesan Bishop to a parish or community, to serve as the spiritual father and head of the specific parish community. The parish may have several Armenian priests living within the parish boundaries and participating in the church ministry. However, only one priest is the head of, and responsible for, the Parish, who is referred to as “Pastor.” A priest who lives within the parish cannot participate in the church services of a parish without the Pastor's knowledge and permission.

4. What is a Diocese and why do we need one?

A diocese (Թեմ) is the association of several parishes in a certain geographical location, which is spiritually and administratively under the jurisdiction of a Bishop. A diocese as

such is a larger administrative unit of the Armenian Church than that of the Parish. The Diocese is a forum for the various parishes comprising it to work together on pursuing the wider and overall objectives of the Armenian Church mission in the larger geographic area, i.e. the diocesan boundaries. Within the diocesan context parishes share experience, resources and information, and work together on strengthening each other's ministry. Meanwhile, the diocesan headquarters, i.e. the Primate's Office, functions as the resource centre training human resources needed for the ministry, preparing teaching and preaching tools and materials, e.g. books, CDs, DVDs, ...etc., and developing diocesan-wide programmes and ministries such as retreats, courses, pilgrimages... etc. In the Orthodox and Catholic family of churches a parish cannot exist on its own. It must report to a Diocese under the jurisdiction of the Bishop in Charge. A diocese and the diocesan Bishop are accountable to the Synod of Bishops and the Catholicos and Supreme Patriarch of All Armenians.

5. Bishop or Primate?

A bishop (Եպիսկոպոս), as the Greek origin of this English word means, is an ordained priest who is consecrated as an overseer or supervisor (*Epi-Scopos*). Bishops serve within the Armenian Church in various capacities, such as deans of seminaries, heads of departments in the Mother See and the Patriarchal Offices, and as heads of dioceses around the world. The Bishop in charge of a Diocese who serves as the spiritual father and head of that diocese is known as the Primate. There may be more than one bishop within the administrative boundaries of a diocese. However, only the Primate is in charge of the spiritual ministry and the administration of the Diocese. Other bishops can serve in the Diocese only with the knowledge and permission of the Primate (Առաջնորդ).

6. Why do we need a Parish?

According to the Armenian Church ecclesiology, and following the deeply rooted Biblical teaching, a church is the fellowship of the faithful coming together to worship, praise and remember the Lord, and celebrate our victory through Him. As such, the Armenian Church mission is realised with and through the people who worship in the Church building. The Bible clearly attests to the fact that there were Church parishes first before Church building were built (Acts 1:13-14). A parish is the organisation of programmes and activities to promote the teachings and mission of the Armenian Church headed by the pastor of the parish. It is the Parish pastor, for example, who leads the community in worship every Sunday and on festive days. The Pastor organises also teaching lectures, Bible Study groups, spiritual retreats, Armenian Christian youth programmes. In a parish setting where people know and, usually, care for each other, it is the Pastor who based on the information he receives from his parishioners that visits the elderly and the sick and those who need pastoral comforting, and joins his parishioners in blessing and celebrating their happy occasions. In all the above, according to the Armenian Church teachings, the input and feedback of the people are essential. Obviously, it is impossible to envision one priest supervising this kind of a ministry of the Armenian Church to over 15,000+ people spread from London, to Manchester, to Birmingham, Cardiff and Dublin. It is also impractical to assume that this one priest will be able to incorporate the feedback, need and input of the 15,000+ Armenians into the formation or programmes and activities and in offering them to the people. Finally, it is very difficult to imagine the priest alone doing all the above without the help and advice of representatives of the community for whom the ministry is being formed and offered. It is based on the above that all the traditional Orthodox,

Anglican and Catholic Church have adopted the parish as an administrative unit to organise the church ministry in a certain country or region.

7. Who can become a parish member?

All Armenians baptised according to the canons of the Armenian Catholic Apostolic Church are members of the Armenian Church worldwide. As such they can participate in liturgical services, baptisms, weddings and funerals at any Armenian Church anywhere in the world, without having to be a member of that parish. Furthermore, Baptised Armenians can themselves get married in a different parish than theirs and have their children be baptised in yet another Armenian Church than their parish and the one they got married at. Finally, any Armenian can financially support any and as many parishes as he or she wants, without being affiliated as a member of any of these parishes. A baptised Armenian is welcome to join a specific parish by becoming a dues-paying member only if he or she wants to be involved in the administration of that parish and have a vote in the decision making in that parish. As such, a dues-paying member of on Armenian parish cannot be a dues-paying member in another Armenian parish.

8. Why should I become a member of a Parish? What are the advantages of becoming a dues-paying parish member?

Dues-paying membership, as indicated above, are only for those who want to be involved in the parish administration and have a vote in the decision making regarding the programmes and finances of the parish. As such, dues-paying membership is a service and partnership in the ministry, more than a means for receiving advantages. Having said that, a dues-paying member has the power to vote at a parish assembly, which is the highest body making decisions regarding local parish ministries. A dues-paying member, for examples, votes in confirming a new pastor, discussing and confirming the budget of a parish, and can be elected as one of the officers of the parish administration, e.g. Parish Council, auditing committee, nomination committee, ... etc. Most importantly, the main advantage of becoming a dues-paying member of a parish, is to be able to shape and support the ministry of the church in that location and to make sure that the Armenian Church grows stronger in preaching and teaching our children and grandchildren the faith of our fathers and mothers, the Love and Gospel of the Lord and the hope of eternity.

9. What is the parish going to do for me?

As mentioned above, it is through the parish structure that the individual Armenian and his or her family members receive the Armenian Church teachings, and learn about the faith and doctrine of our forefathers, and be part of the worshipping community. Through the parish, Armenians form a community with a spiritual father, the pastor, which offers the community a spiritual and pastoral support needed in times of joy and celebration as well as challenges and bereavement. Parishes also organise programmes and activities such as retreats, annual pilgrimages, workshops and targeted ministries, e.g. for the children, youth, married couples and elderly of the community. Finally, it is the local parish office that keeps all the records of its members including

10. Can I become a dues-paying member of more than one parish?

As mentioned earlier, an Armenian can worship, get baptised and married in any church that he or she prefers. His or her spiritual and liturgical life is not limited to the parish where he or she is a dues-paying member. However, a person cannot be a dues-paying member of two parishes in the same Diocese. Becoming a dues-paying member

of a parish makes a person qualified to be elected Parish Council chairman or treasurer or one of its administrative officers. Obviously, it will be very unworkable to have the same person elected to such administrative offices in two different parishes. Needless to say, it is very impractical to assume that in today's society one person can devote enough of his or her time to be effectively involved as a voting member in the administration of two church communities.

11. Can a registered member switch parishes?

Absolutely, "yes". However, the dues-paying member must first clearly resign from his or her previous parish by informing the pastor of the parish in writing. The new parish has the right to enquire about the applying member to understand why he or she left the previous parish. The pastor of the new parish makes the final decision in receiving the member in the new parish.

12. Can I attend church in any parish?

Absolutely, "yes". By the virtue of his or her baptism according to the canons of the Armenian Church, any Armenian who has not denounced his or her faith, can attend church services in any parish in the UK and around the World. A baptised Armenian has the right to participate in any church service or get married or have his children baptised in any Armenian Church parish in the UK or around the world. No one can prevent him or her from attending church services at any of the parishes.

13. Can a parish member request sacrament in another parish?

Absolutely, "yes." Any person can request a sacrament at any Armenian parish. The pastor may refuse a request for baptism depending on the faith-standing of the person requesting it.

14. Can a non-registered member request sacrament?

Absolutely, "yes." Any person can request a sacrament at any Armenian parish.

15. Why do I need to pay & where does the money go?

Membership dues are guaranteed income to the Parish upon which the Parish Council and Pastor can plan church activities, programmes and events. It is the funds raised by the parishioners, including the annual membership dues, that support the Parish to pay the salaries of the clergy and office staff, including the archiving of the parishioners data, publication of a weekly and monthly newsletter and e-mail correspondence.

16. How do I register and become a member?

To become a member you can contact the pastor of the parish. In his absence you can talk to any parish council member.

17. What is a Parish Council?

A Parish Council is a group of dues-paying members of a specific parish, who are actively involved in the life of the Parish and are who elected by the Parish assembly to work with the Pastor on pursuing the ministry and mission of the parish and securing the funds needed. They also represent the voice of the faithful to the Pastor.