

**UNIFORM BY-LAWS
FOR THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCHES
IN NORTH AMERICA**

CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL PRINCIPLES

ARTICLE I.

The Coptic Orthodox Church is a church founded by St. Mark, the Evangelical Apostle, in the city of Alexandria, Egypt, in the First Century. Accordingly, the Coptic Orthodox Church is an Apostolic Church which believes that the head of the Church is the successor of St. Mark the Apostle and as such is entrusted by God and the Church to oversee it and to preside over its' Holy Synod which is the highest priestly, legislative and executive authority in the Church. (*) Accordingly, the Coptic Orthodox Church is a hierarchical Church.

ARTICLE II.

The head of the Coptic Orthodox Church is the Pope of Alexandria and the Patriarch of the See of St. Mark. The Authority of the Pope and the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church extends to the entire See of St. Mark, both inside and outside Egypt. (**)

ARTICLE III.

The Pope of Alexandria, as the successor of St. Mark the Apostle, is the founder of all the churches in North America.

ARTICLE IV.

The "General Clerical Council" is presided over by his Holiness the Pope, with priests appointed by him as its members. It acts for the Patriarchate at Cairo.

(*) Constitution and by-laws of the Holy Synod, June 1985. Articles 1,4,8.

(**) Constitution and by-laws of the Holy Synod, June 1985. Articles 2,6.

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B. Paula
B. Sawabam
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Bishop
B. Ruzait
B. Koussa

ARTICLE IV (CONT.)

His Holiness the Pope, may delegate any Bishop from among the members of the Holy Synod to preside over the Council.

The "Clerical Councils in the dioceses" are headed by their Bishops with priests appointed by the Bishop as members of the Council of each diocese.

The "Clerical Council" acts as the Church Court.

ARTICLE V.

According to the Constitution and By-laws of the Holy Synod (article 51), "The Synodical committee for the coptic churches in immigration" is formed and presided by His Holiness the Pope of Alexandria from among the members of the Holy Synod, to assist him in marshalling the affairs of the churches abroad.

ARTICLE VI.

In accordance with the custom of the Church and the provisions of the laws of the Holy Synod, the Pope is the responsible Bishop of all new dioceses during the foundation period until Bishops are ordained for such dioceses. He is also the head of all Bishops of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the entire See of St. Mark, both inside and outside Egypt.

ARTICLE VII.

In the event that Bishops are ordained for new dioceses in North America and the boundaries of such dioceses are defined, it is understood that those Bishops will be members of the Holy Synod bound by its laws and together with the other members of the Holy Synod constitute members of one body in the holy Apostolic Church and specifically in the coptic Orthodox Church which is headed by the Pope of Alexandria.

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B-Sakubroman

Shenouda III

Bishop Tachros

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B. Ruwet

B Mousa

B. Paula

ARTICLE VIII.

The tradition of the Coptic Orthodox Church indicates that there is an important role for the people in the life of the Church. The members of the Church are members of one body and the Hierarchy of the Church is not a type of separation between the head and the members, since all of them are, through the sacraments of the Church, members in one body with Jesus Christ as the Head, gathering all local Churches and all the people of God in every age and place. That is why according to Church traditions and the constitution and by-laws of the Holy Synod Article No. 60, the new bishop who is the head of the local Church (a diocese) is chosen according to the following law:

"A new bishop is chosen after the consent of the people and after they recommend and acclaim him, and also with the approval of His Holiness the Pope of this acclamation, on condition that he fulfil the spiritual and personal conditions to the teaching of the scriptures and church rules. If the majority of the members of the holy Synod object to this ordination, then it must be stopped."

In the same manner, a deacon is ordained and hence could be eligible to be a member of the Board of Deacons after the consent of the people of his church and after they acclaim him, and also with the approval of the bishop, on condition that he fulfil the spiritual and personal conditions according to the teaching of the holy scriptures and Church rules. The acclamation is an expression of the congregation's approval of the person selected by the bishop to be appointed to the board of deacons and his elevation in the degree of service to the Church. Any member of the congregation is entitled to submit objections against any person acclaimed by other members. The bishop has the right to reject the acclamation presented by the congregation if he feels that the congregation did not make the right choice. It is the bishop who initiates the process of entrusting the congregation to submit the acclamations. He is the only one with the right to administer the process of selecting the board of deacons and to make the final decision in that regard. The objective of this process is to select those who can assist the bishop in some of his services and they have to be bound by his rules and regulations and cannot take any action without consulting with him and obtaining his approval in accordance with the rules and regulations of the Holy Synod and Apostolic laws of the Church.

Scerapion B. Sarubumoun

Shenouda III

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B. Paula

B. Rewit

Bishop
B. Mourso

Bishop Tadros

CHAPTER 2.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA
AND THE MOTHER CHURCH OF ALEXANDRIA

ARTICLE I. (This article cannot be changed)

Each coptic orthodox church in North America (whether or not incorporated) is an indivisible part of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria (Egypt) which has as its supreme head the Pope of Alexandria , and derives its authority to function in every aspect from the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt.

ARTICLE II.

His Holiness the Pope of Alexandria as the founder of all the Churches in North America , shall appoint priests from the mother Church in Egypt to serve the churches in North America.

Priests could be also appointed whether from among the qualified persons in North America or elsewhere in the See of Saint Mark.

His Holiness the Pope has the right to transfer any of the priests who are assigned by him to serve in North America.

In the event a bishop wishes to transfer any priest assigned by His Holiness the Pope to serve in North America, he may do so only with the consent of the Pope.

If a priest is unaccepted by the majority of the spiritual members of his church, the responsible bishop-together with the Clerical Council of the diocese take the suitable decision concerning his situation.

Selafion B. Sarabamanna

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Bishop

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B. Paula

B. Ruweid B. MOURA
Bishop Tadros

CHAPTER 3.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA AND THE DIOCESES TO WHICH THEY BELONG

ARTICLE I.

The bishop is the responsible head of his diocese and, in accordance with the laws and customs of the Coptic Orthodox Church, the priests and deacons cannot perform any act without his advice and approval and they are bound by his spiritual and managerial advice.* The priests and deacons are accountable to the bishop of the diocese where they are serving. The bishop is responsible for organising their affairs and activities in accordance with the best interest of each church. He cannot render any judgment on any priest or deacon except through the Clerical Council of the diocese. In the event there is no Clerical Council of such diocese, the matter has to be referred to the Clerical Council of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Cairo.

ARTICLE II.

The General Board is an advisory body which assists the bishop in determining the needs of the churches in his diocese, spiritual as well as financial.

The bishop presides over the General Board of his diocese. The members of the General Board are the presidents and the secretaries of the boards of each church in the diocese.

* Nicean and Post Nicean Talbers op-cit., p. 596

Apostolic canon No. 39 states:

"Let not the presbyters or deacons do anything without the sanction of the Bishop; for he it is who is entrusted with the people of the Lord, and of whom will be required the account of their souls."

Apostolic canon No. 41 states:

"We ordain that the Bishop have authority over the goods of the Church: for if he is to be entrusted with the precious souls of men, much more are temporal possessions to be entrusted to him. He is therefore to administer them all of his own authority, and supply those who need through the presbyters and deacons in the fear of God, and with all reverence."

Handwritten signatures and names: B. Paula, Serapim B-Sarapumera, B. Dew... Bishop Bishop... B. Mousa

ARTICLE III.

The bishop of each diocese is the head of the churches in his diocese and is the one responsible for all the churches, the priests, the monasteries and seminaries in his diocese with the exception of the monasteries and seminaries which belong to the Patriarchate *. He is also responsible for all spiritual, financial and administrative matters in his diocese and in all of the churches in his diocese.

ARTICLE IV.

The bishop defines the relationship between the churches in his diocese and sets up the boundaries of the services of each church. As such, he can divide some of the parishes or combine others. He also has the right to combine several churches in one diocese and to define the geographical boundary of the combined church and the religious organisations attached to such churches, such as monasteries and seminaries.

The Pope of Alexandria is the supreme head of all monasteries and seminaries in the entire See of St. Mark. He has the right to assign these religious organisations to the Patriarchate in Alexandria, Egypt, or to the diocese in which they are located.

ARTICLE V.

No new monastery or seminary can be founded except with consent of his Holiness the Pope of Alexandria.

ARTICLE VI.

The bishop of the diocese has sole and exclusive authority for, and power over, the spiritual, financial and administrative matters in his diocese.

He has the right to dispose of any properties owned by the churches in his diocese for the good of the church.

However in some states or provinces of North America, if a church is incorporated, the state or provincial laws may require more than one trustee for the management of various aspects of a church. In such cases, the bishop as the person responsible for church administration, will appoint two or more trustees from among the priests or priests and deacons who are members of the board of deacons of the church to form together with himself the legal number of trustees for that certain incorporated

* Article 58 in the constitution and by-laws of the Holy Synod.

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church. The board of trustees appointed for an incorporated church is bound by the provisions of these by-laws and it is mandatory that they follow and comply with the provisions of these by-laws. The bishop has the right to appoint a new board of trustees at any time.

Also, if the bishop does not carry the citizenship or the permanent residence permission of the country in which his diocese is located, or if he is not living in his diocese, in such cases whether the state's law requires trustees beside the bishop or not, he will appoint a board of trustees not less than three members (two members beside the president) with at least two thirds of its members from among those who carry the citizenship or a permanent residence permission of the said country. This board of trustees is presided over by the bishop himself. No sale, mortgage or disposition of any properties of the churches in that diocese can be carried out without the consent of at least two thirds of the board of trustees. The consent of the bishop is always also needed. This board of trustees will follow the same regulations mentioned before in this article.

ARTICLE VII.

In the event a church building and/or related structure and adjoining property is to be sold or mortgaged, the bishop cannot take any action in that regard without the consent of the Pope of Alexandria.

ARTICLE VIII.

The bishop or the board of trustees presided by him is entitled to purchase for the diocese, for a monastery, a seminary, or a church in the diocese any real property. No such property can be purchased without his consent.

ARTICLE IX.

In the event a church (whether or not incorporated) is dissolved, the bishop decides within his diocese the church to which the property of such dissolved church will be distributed.

In the event no bishop has been appointed for it, the Pope of Alexandria decides the church to which the property is to be distributed in the same country of the dissolved church.

Scopim B - Salupamallah — Shenouda III
Bishop Tadros
B. Paula — B. Reweis
Bishop
B. Moussa

CHAPTER 4.

THE BISHOPS OF THE DIOCESE

ARTICLE I.

In the event a bishop is to be ordained or appointed in any diocese in North America, the boundaries of such diocese shall be defined by the Pope of Alexandria and included in the official appointment which is to be signed by His Holiness the Pope.

If a bishop is to be seated in his diocese, His Holiness the Pope delegates some bishops to seat the new bishop.

ARTICLE II.

The bishop is in charge of the ordination of the priests and deacons in his diocese, consecrating churches, altars, baptismals, icons and all the instruments of the altar and is responsible for the religious services in his diocese. He shepherds his people as he receives the staff of shepherd from His Holiness the Pope. He shares the Pope in his apostolic services and in ordaining new bishops* as he is also a member in the Holy Synod as all other bishops of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

ARTICLE III.

The bishop attends the meetings of the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church both the regular meetings as well as emergencies, so long as he receives notice in sufficient time to travel to the place where the Holy Synod is convening.

ARTICLE IV.

The bishop is accountable to the Holy Synod. the Holy Synod being the highest canonical authority in the church has the right to try any bishop, as well as any person who holds a priestly rank or any layman if accused of going against the church or its teaching*.

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Bishop Tadros *Bishop*
Paula *mura* *B. Roush* *B. Moussa*

The bishop may be deposed by the Holy Synod in case he is found guilty according to canon laws of the Coptic Orthodox Church. In this case it is understood that his membership in the Holy Synod is consequently dropped, and has no more to carry on his responsibilities as a bishop.*

Also the Holy Synod has the right to review the acts of the bishop and take any appropriate action in accordance with the traditions of the church.

ARTICLE V.

In the event a bishop dies or the seat of his diocese becomes vacant for any of the reasons mentioned in the laws of the Holy Synod, the Pope of Alexandria will have the right to replace him or if the Pope finds it better he can divide his diocese into any number of dioceses and to define their geographical boundaries, churches, properties and religious organizations attached to them.

ARTICLE VI.

The Patriarchate does not inherit any property, real or personal, left at the bishops death belong to and are bequeathed to their respective dioceses. The Pope becomes the fiduciary of the property left by the bishops until it has been delivered to their successors, taking into account the provisions of the preceding Article of this Chapter.

ARTICLE VII.

A bishop could appoint a vicar or deputy for his diocese to be in charge of some of his obligations during his absence or inability to act. His Holiness the Pope of Alexandria may select a vicar or a deputy for any diocese for so long as no bishop has been appointed to such diocese. In some cases, the bishop may appoint a person similar to a vicar or deputy in each church in his diocese as the need may arise.

* Constitution and by-laws of the Holy Synod June 1985 articles (7) and (9).

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CHAPTER 5.

OBJECTIVES OF PARISH CHURCHES

ARTICLE I.

Parish churches shall :

A. Promote a christian way of life according to the faith and doctrines of the Coptic Orthodox Church through :

- (1) Administering the liturgy and the sacraments;
- (2) The pastoral work of the clergy;
- (3) Christian education, publication and sunday schools;
- (4) Spiritual meetings and Bible study;
- (5) Group activities, such as cultural clubs, sports, religious plays, bazaars, social gatherings, trips and similar activities;
- (6) Social services to members of the church and others everywhere.

B. Cooperate and assist other coptic orthodox churches.

C. Carry on evangelistic and missionary work.

D. Promote christian unity all over the world guided by the work of the Holy Synod in this respect.

Serapion

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B. Moura

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CHAPTER 6

BOARD OF DEACONS

ARTICLE I

Introduction and definitions

A. The board of deacons of each church shall consist of the priest or priests of the church and of deacons selected in accordance with the provisions of these by-laws.

B. According to Biblical teaching and the Apostolic Canon laws, the bishop is the person who is in charge of the affairs of all the churches in his diocese, whether they are spiritual, administrative or financial. No decisions are to be taken or executed by the board of deacons without his permission and approval. The bishop may charge the priests and deacons to assist him in carrying out some of his responsibilities within the common laws of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

C. Each member of the Board of Deacons shall serve for a term of three years or until his successor is duly appointed. (See item J in chapter 9)

D. The church Board of Deacons, by virtue of its member's ecclesiastical status, will work in such manner as to assist the bishop in carrying his responsibilities.

ARTICLE II

Selection of Board of Deacons

A. The bishop, or his duly appointed representative, attends the meetings at which the members of the Board of Deacons are selected. No layman is acclaimed to be a member of the Board of Deacons unless he is ordained as a reader or a subdeacon. The congregation presents the acclamations to the bishop as well as any objections to such acclamations. The bishop, or his duly appointed representative, attends personally to the writing of the acclamations to ensure accuracy. The bishop selects the members of the Board of Deacons from among those who obtain the consent of the majority of the spiritual members of the church (see chapter 6 art. 1-D) and also from among those who do not have valid objections against them. The bishop selects six or more deacons to serve with him and/or with the priest or priests as members of the Board of Deacons of the church. The board

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