



Despite the number of Muslims in Abu Dhabi, a lot of people are familiar with the Christian churches that meet in the city block near the immigration department between 17th and 19th Streets and between 2nd Street (Airport Road) and 24th street (Al Karama Street). Last time – volume 2 issue 28 – we covered the Evangelical Community Centre, St Andrews Anglican Church, and St Joseph’s Catholic Church. Here are the places of worship for some other major denominations.

The Orthodox Churches

St George Indian Orthodox Cathedral

The Indian Orthodox Church is believed to have been founded in Kerala by the Apostle Thomas in 52AD. Abu Dhabi’s branch at St George Cathedral, located next door to the Evangelical Community Centre on Street 1 between Airport Road and Al Karama Street, began as a humble prayer group in the mid-1960s. That tiny congregation has since grown to support a large number of worshippers, including 300 children.

The parish pays particular attention to observing the feasts of St George, St Mary, St Gregorios, and all the Maranaya feasts. The cathedral is open to members of all faiths – irrespective of caste, religion, and nationality – for prayer and meditation from 5.30am to 7.30pm.

Information: www.iocad.com or 02 446 4564. The website gives an extensive explanation of the beginning of the church in India and its diocese in the Middle East and provides locations and contact details for almost a dozen individual prayer groups.

St Antony Coptic Orthodox Cathedral

With its roots in ancient Egypt, the Coptic Orthodox Church was founded by St Mark and is currently the largest Christian community in the Middle East with about six million adherents. Though local believers for many years worshipped using St Andrew’s Centre, the new St Antony Coptic Orthodox Church and Library was inaugurated in April 2007 by Pope Shenouda

Ill of Alexandria and UA E Minister of Higher Education Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al-Nahayan. Daily masses are conducted throughout the week, and weekend masses are held on Friday (7am – 10am) and Saturday (7.30am – 10.30am) in the main cathedral, the gorgeous building located beside Al Khubairat British School on 17th Street between Airport Road and Al Karamah Street.

Information: www.stantony.ae. Be warned though – much of the website is incomplete or in Arabic.

St Stephen's Syrian Orthodox Church

One of the oldest Christian denominations, the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch was where "the disciples [of Christ] were first called Christians" according to the New Testament, Acts 11:26. The original is recorded to have been founded by the apostle Peter; the St Stephen's Syrian Orthodox Church in Abu Dhabi is composed mainly of believers from Kerala.

Though St Stephen's doesn't have its own building, the Holy Qurbana is conducted every Friday from 6.30 to 9.30am at St Andrews Centre and every Monday from 7.30 to 9.45pm at St Joseph's Church Hall. Sunday School is also held on Fridays from 1pm to 3.30pm at the St Joseph's Church class rooms.

Information: go to www.ststephensauh.com or call 02-642-2535.

Greek Orthodox Church of St Nicholas

About a thousand Greeks live and work in the UA E, most of whom are in Dubai; there is a small but committed community in Abu Dhabi, worshipping at the church of St Nicholas in the St Andrews compound. The church is officiated by a priest who has been assigned from the Syrian Orthodox Church; services are held only in Arabic.

Information: call 02 446 4578

Hindu, Buddhist, and other worship

There are no Hindu, Buddhist, or Sikh temples in Abu Dhabi. Any religious group that does not have its own building, however, is free to use the facilities of other religious organisations or to worship in private homes – the police and other security forces will not interfere with such gatherings.

There is no formalised method for granting religious groups official status, no government authority for the recognition and regulation of non-Muslim religions, and no licensing or registration requirements.

Non-Muslim groups can own their own houses of worship, in which to practice their religion freely, by requesting a land grant and permission to build a compound from the local ruler.

There is no federal-level method of approving these land grants. Instead, the rulers of the individual emirates will decide whether or not to grant access to land and permission to build houses of worship within their emirates. For more information, call the Ministry of Information and Culture on 02 446 6145.

If a group chooses to worship in a private home, keep in mind that the UAE government doesn't allow any attempt to convert people from the Muslim faith. Non-Muslims who have been caught proselytising or distributing religious literature may face criminal prosecution and imprisonment for engaging in behaviour offensive to Islam.

The Christian Churches of Al Ain

St Mary's Catholic Church

The first Catholic church was built in Al Ain in 1969 by Fr Barnabas; thanks to an increase in the number of worshippers, 1981 saw an addition to the original building plus the construction of a more spacious residence for the priest and a parish hall. In addition to daily masses at 7pm, there are three masses every Friday and every Sunday plus a children's mass on Fridays at 10.30am. You'll find St Mary's on 147th Street opposite Oasis Hospital.

Information: For timings for other sacraments and catechism, go to www.stmarysalain.com or call 03 721 4417.

Anglican Church

Though the Anglican church in Al Ain doesn't have its own building, services are held at 5.30pm on the second and fourth Monday of every month at St Mary's.

Information: To arrange a wedding or baptism in Al Ain, call St Andrew's Centre in Abu Dhabi on 02 446 1631.

The Evangelical Church of Al Ain

Located on the campus of Oasis Hospital on 147th Street opposite St Mary's Cathedral, the Evangelical Church of Al Ain is home to some 26 congregations. Services are conducted in English at 10am on Fridays and in 19 other languages at other times. Call 03 722 3337 for specific timings. The website, www.aaec.ae, is currently under construction.

If you find these instructions have changed or have any useful information to add, let us know via editor@AbuDhabiWeek.com and we'll post an update.

[Caption] St Antony Coptic Orthodox Cathedral

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