

NORMS REGARDING PREPARATION AND SELECTION OF CANDIDATES FOR THEOLOGICAL TRAINING LEADING TO ORDAINED MINISTRY

Preface

In view of the growing linguistic and cultural diversity and the geographical spread of the Church, there is an imperative need to develop effective programmes to identify prospective candidates for the ordained ministry. There is also need to develop appropriate administrative structures to facilitate a process of personal and ministerial formation in the identified candidates so that an adequate number of competent and dedicated candidates would be available for the ordained ministry of the Church. The norms presented below aim at ensuring the above goals.

PART-A

PREPARATION OF CANDIDATES FOR THEOLOGICAL TRAINING

Introduction

In view of the changing socio-cultural and spiritual environment, special attention has to be paid to maintain quality in the selection and training of candidates for the ordained ministry. We live in an age wherein a large number of persons make their career options in their late teens. Encouragement to choose the Christian ministry should be given at an early stage and should not wait until the graduation of the prospective candidates. There is also need to provide appropriate nurture to those selected even while they are pursuing their secular education. Providing opportunities for gaining formative experiences at an early age would considerably lessen the issues involved in the transition from secular studies to theological studies.

Identification of candidates

1. Every year the Sabha Secretary shall invite applications from those who are interested in the full time ministry of the Church and who actively consider ordained ministry as their vocation. Those who have appeared for the Higher Secondary examination or are pursuing University education may register their names.
2. The announcement inviting applications shall be made through the *Sabha Tharaka* sufficiently early so as to enable the prospective candidates to register their names before the 30th of June every year. The applications shall be submitted to the Sabha Secretary in the prescribed form.
3. The Sabha Office shall maintain a register to enter the personal details of these candidates and keep it updated annually.

Nurture of Candidates

4. The Senior Vicar General shall be responsible for updating the data of the registered candidates and following up the life course of the candidates. He shall also be responsible for arranging periodical retreats, camps and conferences for the registered candidates.
5. During the summer or other holidays these candidates may be given an opportunity for exposure to the selected mission fields or institutions of the

- Church or avenues of the ministry of an ecumenical character so as to equip the candidates for taking up a challenging career of deep commitment. The Senior Vicar General in consultation with the Diocesan Bishop of the candidate shall make arrangements these exposures.
6. At the place of study the registered candidates may be nurtured through the local Vicar or, in the absence of a local congregation, through other appropriate persons who will be spiritual mentors of the candidates. The process is to be guided by the Diocesan Bishop and the Senior Vicar General.
 7. Besides relevant and authentic reading materials on the Bible, the doctrines and history of the Church, there shall be selected biographies or autobiographies which will encourage the registered candidates to gain an in depth understanding of the Christian faith and the ministry of the Church by the time they are eligible to apply for the B.D. Studies. The mentor of the candidate shall be responsible for providing material for guided reading. The reading list shall be prepared by the Principal, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary and updated periodically.
 8. The Senior Vicar General shall make arrangements for collecting annual feedback of the candidates from their mentors in order to assess their progress in the quest for God's guidance in the career they have willingly chosen for themselves.
 9. When the candidates who have been part of the preparatory programme complete their graduate/post graduate level of studies and are convinced of their call for the ordained ministry, they shall communicate in writing to the Sabha Secretary their intention to pursue theological studies as sponsored candidates. Those persons who have not been part of the preparatory programme outlined above and have a sense of call for the ordained ministry of the church also may communicate in writing to the Sabha Secretary of their interest and commitment to do theological studies as sponsored candidates of the church. The Diocesan Bishop, the local Vicar or other members of the church also may propose names of suitable candidates to the Sabha Secretary. However, these candidates also must communicate in writing to the Sabha Secretary of their interest and commitment to do theological studies as sponsored candidates of the church. Once these names are received by the Sabha Secretary, the Chairman of the Vaidika Selection Committee, the Diocesan Bishop and the Senior Vicar General in consultation with one another shall arrange for one year of field work, for these persons which would provide an opportunity for them to work in a challenging context and prepare themselves for theological studies. The Senior Vicar General in consultation with the Sabha Secretary shall submit every year a list of institutions to the Episcopal Synod where the prospective candidates will be able to do field work. The Synod shall approve the list with necessary modifications.

PART-B

NORMS FOR SELECTION OF CANDIDATES FOR B.D. STUDIES

The selection of persons for theological training as sponsored candidates of the Mar Thoma Church is the responsibility of the Vaidika Selection Committee of the Mar Thoma Church.

ELIGIBILITY

1. General

Applicants should have a deep sense of commitment to Jesus Christ and his Gospel, the Church which is his body and the ministry entrusted to the Church by the Lord. They should also intuitively feel the call of the ordained ministry.

2. Experiential

One year of practical work experience after graduation/post graduation in a field of ministry approved by the Church as specified in para 9, Part A of the 'Norms' will be an essential requirement for selection as sponsored candidates. Those who have completed nine months of the one year training shall be eligible to apply. However they should have completed one year of training before they appear for the Entrance Examination for selection

3. Academic

Those who hold a Bachelor's Degree from any recognized university, or the Bachelor of Theology Degree in second class from a Seminary affiliated to Serampore University and approved by the Church are eligible to apply. In the case of the latter, the candidates should also have passed the two papers in English as required by the Serampore University.

AGE LIMIT

4. The applicant should be above 20 years and below 35 years on the last date for submitting the application.

RECEIVING APPLICATIONS

5. The Sabha Secretary shall invite applications for selection from eligible candidates through an announcement in the *Sabha Tharaka*. The last date for receipt applications shall be the 30th of June every year.
6. The application in the prescribed form shall have the following as attachments:
 - a. Baptism Certificate
 - b. Membership Certificate from the Vicar of the parish
 - c. Copies of other documents asked for in the application form to substantiate the claim of the candidate for selection.

PROCESSING BY THE SABHA SECRETARY

7. After ensuring through a preliminary scrutiny that the candidate meets the eligibility criteria for selection, the Sabha Secretary shall ask the Vicar concerned that his (candidate's) name be announced in the parish and that any objection to the candidate being selected as a sponsored candidate be communicated to the Sabha Secretary.
8. Applicants who have not been selected on two previous occasions shall not be considered for selection again.
9. The Sabha Secretary shall, on receipt of the application, obtain the following additional documents before the 15th of August.
 - a. A confidential report in the prescribed form from the Bishop of the Diocese to which the applicant belongs. If the applicant has dual membership and the parishes concerned belong to different Dioceses, confidential reports may be obtained from both the Bishops.
 - b. A confidential report in the prescribed form from the Vicar of the parish and the Vicar immediately preceding or another Achen who has had an opportunity to know the applicant at close quarters. In the case of candidates who have dual membership confidential reports should be obtained from both the vicars and their predecessors.
 - c. Confidential reports from three persons as decided by the Chairman of the VSC and Sabha Secretary who have known the applicant and his family closely in a pro forma prescribed by the Vaidika Selection Committee. One of the reports, if possible, may be obtained from a Sunday School teacher who had taught the applicant.

ENTRANCE TEST

10. The Principal of the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary shall be asked to conduct an entrance examination in accordance with the requirements of the Senate of Serampore College. The Vaidika Selection Committee may issue guidelines consistent with the requirements of Serampore Senate regarding the entrance test. The Principal, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary shall also arrange for the evaluation of the answer scripts and shall report the result to the Sabha Secretary.

GRADING SYSTEM

11. Selection of candidates shall be based on the following grading system:

Academic qualification	15
Written test	15
Church activities	20
Other extension activities	5
Interview, objective component	15
Interview, subjective component	30
Total	<hr/> 100 points

12. Explanatory notes regarding the grading system

- a. A separate system for arts and science streams is to be used for converting the marks obtained at the University level into points on the grading system for selection as given below:

Marks of the Bachelor Degree

1. Science Students

The aggregate percentage to be converted into ten and the figure will indicate the points

2. Arts and Commerce Students

115% of the aggregate percentage to be converted into ten

Post Graduate level

1. Science Students

The aggregate percentage to be converted into five. This will indicate the points on the grading system

2. Arts and Commerce Students

115% of the aggregate percentage to be converted into five.

- b. The marks obtained in the written test will be converted into the points on the grading system by converting the aggregate percentage into 15.

- c. The 20 points provided for Church activities will be computed using the following criteria:

No.	Church Activities: Distribution of Points	Grade points
I.	Sunday School	
	1. Completion of Yuvavakup	1
	2. Completion of Jeshtavakup (Certificate essential)	1
	3. Prizes won at the Diocesan Level	½
	4. Prizes won at Kendra level	½
	5. Teaching Experience	
	i. One to two years	½
	ii. Above two years	1
II	Yuvajana Sakhyam	
	1. Active membership	
	i. One to two years	½
	ii. Above two years	1
	2. Served as office bearer (a minimum of one term)	
	i. at parish level	½
ii. Centre level	½	
	iii. at the Diocesan level	1

III.	Students Association	
	1. Active membership of a minimum period of one year	½
	2. Office bearer	1
IV.	Choir	
	1. Member	
	i. One to two years	½
	ii. Above two years	1
	2. Choir leader for a minimum period of one year	1
	3. Played organ or other instruments for the choir for a minimum of one year	1
V.	Edavaka Mission	
	1. Membership	
	i. More than one year	1
	ii. Office bearer	1
VI.	VBS	
	1. Teacher/Convenor	½
	2. Leader	1
VII.	Parish	
	1. Assists vicar during communion	½
	2. Preaches at prayer meetings or at church	½
	3. Office bearer/Mandalam member/Assembly member/Lay leader	1
VIII.	Mission field experience/Chaplaincy	
	i. Six months to one year	½
	ii. More than one year	1½
IX.	Theological Training,	
	i. six months to one year	1
	ii. More than one year	1½

Total 20 points

d. In the case of candidates from geographical areas where they do not have the possibility for Church activities, they may be awarded up to five points.

e. The five points provided for other Extension Activities will be assigned using the following criteria. A candidate will get a maximum of five points only.

I.	YMCA	
	1. Active member of YMCA	½
	2. Office bearer/Secretarial experience	1
II.	SCM/EU/other	
	1. Member	½
		1

	2. Office bearer	
III.	NCC/NSS/Scout (minimum of two years)	1
IV.	Sports and Games 1. Represented College at Inter Collegiate/University level/ Member of the College team	1
V.	Artistic/Literary Activities 1. Articles publishes in a periodical 2. Prizes won at District, Inter Collegiate or University level	$\frac{1}{2}$ $\frac{1}{2}$

PERSONAL INTERVIEW

13. Those who pass the entrance test shall be required to appear for a personal interview before the Vaidika Selection Committee. The interview shall be arranged before the 1st of October every year.
14. Through the personal interview the applicants shall be assessed using objective as well as subjective methods.
15. The fifteen points for the objective component should be awarded on the candidates is of an objective assessment of their proficiency in soft skills such as communication, reading, writing, listening, speaking, group discussion, team leadership, interactive abilities etc. This assessment shall be done by a competent body of experts appointed by the Vaidika Selection Committee.
16. The thirty points of the subjective component of the Personal Interview shall be awarded based on the candidate's performance in the interview by the Vaidika Selection Committee. However, the Vaidika Selection Committee shall arrange for an assessment of the mental health and the emotional maturity of the applicants utilizing the services of a team of experts in psychology. Their assessment shall be taken into account while awarding points for the subjective component of the personal interview. The data received by the Sabha Secretary through the pro forma from various sources shall also be taken into account while awarding the points.

MEDICAL EVALUATION

17. A detailed medical history of the applicant must be prepared by a competent medical officer appointed by the Vaidika Selection Committee. In addition to this, the current health status must be assessed by two different doctors appointed by the Vaidika Selection Committee including the one who has taken the detailed medical history. The detailed medical report should be in the prescribed pro forma.

PRELIMINARY SELECTION

18. The preliminary selection of candidates is to be made on the basis of the scores on the grading system and in the light of the medical evaluation. Regardless of the points acquired on the grading system, the Vaidika Selection Committee shall not select an applicant he is found lacking in the expected commitment for the Christian ministry or has behavioural or personality characteristics unsuitable for an ordained minister in the Mar Thoma Church.
19. Other things being equal, the candidates who have been part of the preparatory programme for theological training shall be given preference in selection.
20. Once the candidates have received preliminary selection for theological training for the ordained ministry in the Church, the Vaidika Selection Committee shall assign the selected candidates to the various theological colleges.

APPLYING FOR ADMISSION IN COLLEGES OTHER THAN MTTs

21. Those who have received the preliminary selection and have been assigned by the Vaidika Selection Committee to study in Seminaries other than MTTs, shall apply to those colleges through the Sabha Office.

INTENSIVE THREE MONTHS' TRAINING

22. Those who have received the preliminary selection shall be given intensive training for three months. This will include classes for personality development, spiritual mentoring and practical experience of a relevant nature.

FINAL SELECTION

23. The Vaidika Selection Committee shall hold a final interview after the three month period of intensive training. The Vaidika Selection Committee shall interview the candidates in the light of the reports received on their performance during the three month intensive training. The final selection for theological training as sponsored candidates of the Mar Thoma Church shall be on the basis of this interview.

PERIODIC EVALUATION

24. Sponsored candidates shall be evaluated every year by the Vaidika Selection Committee through a personal interview. Their continuation as sponsored candidates shall be on the basis of this evaluation.

SELECTION OF NON-SPONSORED THEOLOGICAL GRADUATES FOR TRAINING TOWARDS ORDINATION

1. Persons who hold the B.D. or a higher degree from the Serampore University or have equivalent theological degrees may apply to the Mar Thoma Sabha Secretary expressing their desire to enter the ordained ministry of the Church. The application should be submitted in the prescribed form with relevant documents.
2. The applications may be submitted to the Sabha Secretary at any time during the year. However, it should be endorsed by the Vicar of the parish/parishes where the applicant has membership and by the Diocesan Bishop/Bishops.
3. The Sabha Secretary shall forward all such applications to the Episcopal Synod once every year in the month of June.
4. The Episcopal Synod shall give due consideration these names, but forward to the Sabha Secretary only those names which are found to be prima facie worthy of consideration by the Vaidika Selection Committee.
5. The Sabha Secretary shall write to the Vicar/Vicars of the parish/parishes where the applicant has membership inviting objections, if any, to the candidate being selected for special training towards ordination. The Sabha Secretary's letter shall be read in the Church/Churches during regular Sunday service. Objections, if any, should be sent to the Sabha Secretary. The Vaidika Selection Committee shall take such objections into account while processing the application of the candidate.
6. A detailed medical history of the applicant shall be furnished by a competent medical officer appointed by the Vaidika Selection Committee. In addition to this, the current health status shall be assessed by two different doctors appointed by the Vaidika Selection Committee including the one who has already furnished the detailed medical history.
7. The Sabha Secretary shall arrange for the interview of the applicants by the Vaidika Selection Committee and shall make the report of the vicar and the medical reports available to the Vaidika Selection Committee.
8. If an applicant had applied twice for selection as a sponsored candidate and was not selected, the case should be studied with special care both by the Episcopal Synod and the Vaidika Selection Committee before selecting him for training leading to ordination.
9. Names of candidates selected by the Vaidika Selection Committee shall be forwarded to the Metropolitan for presentation at the Episcopal Synod. The Episcopal Synod shall arrange for the training of candidates as described below:

There shall be a probationary period of six months in a field of ministry under the supervision of a Bishop. At the end of this period the Bishop shall give a report to the Sabha Secretary in the light of which the Vaidika Selection Committee shall interview the candidate. If the Vaidika Selection Committee is satisfied, then the candidate may be given two years of field training under two different Bishops. At least one year of this period should be in the setting of a typical parish to enable the candidate to receive pastoral experience in the context of a parish. The Bishop under whom the candidate has received training should send a report regarding the candidate to the Sabha Secretary at the end of the six month probationary period, at the end of 1½ years and at the end of 2 ½ years. The Vaidika Selection Committee shall review the progress of the candidate at the expiry of each of the three periods of training.

10. During the 2 ½ year period of training, the candidates should be given lessons in management, church administration, accountancy, practice of liturgy and the constitution of the church. This training should be arranged by the Sabha Secretary.
11. At the end of the 2 ½ year period the Bishop under whom the candidate has received the last training shall forward a report to the Sabha Secretary.
12. On completion of 2 ½ years of training, the Sabha Secretary shall arrange for a medical examination for the candidate and the final interview for the selection and ordination. The Vaidika Selection Committee shall interview the candidate in the light of the report from the Bishop and the medical reports. The Vaidika Selection Committee shall forward its recommendation for or against the ordination to the Metropolitan. The report is to be placed before the Episcopal Synod for appropriate action.
13. Application from the non-sponsored candidates for ordination may be considered only twice in each case.

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(APPROVED BY THE SABHA COUNCIL DATED ON 30.04.2010 AND EPISCOPAL
SYNOD DATED 18.05.2010.)