

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 Diocesan Bishop 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.

It is required to submit the application for theological studies (BD) to the Sabha Secretary and the last date of receipt of such applications at Sabha Office will be 20th July. The forms will be scrutinized by a committee appointed by the Vaidika Selection Committee and the eligible candidates are required to attend the Entrance Test and the successful candidates will be called for an interview which will be in the month of August. Those who qualify in the interview will be sent for 6 months special training from the month of September to February under the guidance of the respective Diocesan Bishops.

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.

I. 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. Academic

Those who hold a Bachelor's Degree in Second class (50%) or equivalent grade from any recognized University.

or

Post Graduate Degree in second class (50%) or equivalent grade from any recognized University.

or

Bachelor of Theology Degree in second class (with a pass in two papers of English) or equivalent grade from a Seminary affiliated to Serampore University or other Universities approved by the Church are eligible to apply.

II. AGE LIMIT

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

III. RECEIVING APPLICATIONS

4. The Sabha Secretary shall invite applications for selection of eligible candidates through an announcement in the Sabha Tharaka on or before the June issue. The last date for receipt of applications shall be the 20th of July every year.
5. 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.

IV. PROCESSING BY THE SABHA SECRETARY

6. 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.
7. Applicants who have attended written test three times or interview two times and not been selected shall not be considered for selection again. However, those who have

passed written test and not selected after interview are eligible to appear directly for interview during the next chance, provided they have submitted application.

8. 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. Applicant should undergo practical training under the supervision of concerned Diocesan Bishop not less than six months before submitting application.
 - 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.

V. ENTRANCE TEST

- 9.a. The Principals of the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Kottayam and Dharmajyothi Vidyapeeth, Faridabad shall be asked to conduct an entrance examination in accordance with the requirements of the Senate of Serampore College. They shall also arrange for the evaluation of the answer scripts and shall report the result to the Sabha Secretary. The Vaidika Selection Committee may issue guidelines consistent with the requirements of Serampore Senate regarding the entrance examination.
- b. Entrance examination shall be conducted in the subjects viz., English, General Knowledge and Bible Knowledge with a maximum mark of 100 for each subject. Option may be given to write Bible knowledge in mother tongue. Different persons shall be entrusted for setting question papers, conduct of examination and evaluation of answer scripts. Double valuation of answer scripts shall be arranged. If there is a difference of more than 10 marks for a subject, a third evaluation shall also be arranged for that subject. The average of the nearest two shall be counted as the marks of that subject. Register number shall be assigned to each candidate and shall be informed to the candidates along with the call letter for entrance examination. False numbers shall be assigned to the answer scripts before sending them for evaluation. False numbering, coding and decoding of the same shall be done confidentially by the Principals or under their direct supervision.
- c. Candidates securing a minimum of 40 marks for Bible Knowledge and a minimum of 35 marks each for other subjects and an aggregate of 120 marks out of 300 will only qualify for attending interview.

VI. GRADING SYSTEM

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

Academic qualification	20
Written	15
Church activities	20
Other extension activities	3
Interview, objective component	12
Interview, subjective component	30
Total	100 points

11. Explanatory notes regarding the grading system

VII. PERSONAL INTERVIEW

12. 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 September every year.

13. Through the personal interview the applicants shall be assessed using objective as well as subjective methods.

14. The twelve points for the objective component of the interview should be awarded on the assessment of the candidates' 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.

15. 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.

15.a. Three points shall be awarded to those candidates who are members of the Parishes formed as a result of Church's missionary work.

VIII. MEDICAL EVALUATION

16. 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.

IX. PRELIMINARY SELECTION

17. 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.

18. Other things being equal, the candidates who have been part of the preparatory programme for theological training shall be given preference in selection.
19. 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.

X. APPLYING FOR ADMISSION IN COLLEGES OTHER THAN MTTTS

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

XI. INTENSIVE TWO MONTHS' TRAINING

21. Those who have received the preliminary selection shall be given intensive training for two months (March and April). This will include classes for personality development, spiritual mentoring and practical experience of a relevant nature.

XII. FINAL SELECTION

22. The Vaidika Selection Committee shall hold a final interview after the **two** 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 two 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.

XIII. PERIODIC EVALUATION

23. 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 MINISTERIAL CANDIDATES FROM THE DIOCESES OUTSIDE INDIA

Taking into consideration the practical difficulties involved, applicants for ministerial training in the Mar Thoma Church from Dioceses outside India may be selected through provisions outlined below: -

1. Dioceses outside India shall have a sub-committee of the Vaidika Selection Committee.
2. The sub-committee shall consist of seven members constituted as follows:-
 - i. The Diocesan Episcopa
 - ii. The Diocesan Secretary
 - iii. Two members nominated by the Metropolitan
 - iv. Three members nominated by the Diocesan Episcopa
3. The quorum for the sub-committee shall be four.
4. The selection process followed by the sub-committee shall be in conformity with the norms and admission requirements followed by the Vaidika Selection Committee.
5. Candidates selected by the sub-committee shall be reported to the Sabha Secretary by the Diocesan Secretary. The Sabha Secretary shall present these names with relevant details to the Vaidika Selection Committee. The selection of a candidate becomes final only when approved by the Vaidika Selection Committee of the Church.
6. Candidates for ministerial training selected from the Dioceses outside India shall preferably be trained at the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Kottayam so that they are equipped for ministry anywhere in the Church. However, in cases where the Vaidika Selection Committee recommends training outside India the concerned sub-committee shall review the candidate annually and report to the Vaidika Selection Committee of the Church.
7. The applicants be given practical training in management, administration skills, accountancy, constitution of the Church, liturgy and other relevant topics if they have not had such training earlier.
8. The final interview and selection prior to ordination shall be conducted by the Vaidika Selection Committee of the Church as in the case of all ministerial trainees.
9. Those trained outside India shall have six months of special training at the MTT Seminary, Kottayam prior to their final interview so as to train them in the practice of the liturgies and familiarize them in the constitution and administrative practices of the Church.

Grading system for selection and points for academic qualifications will be applicable to the candidates from Dioceses outside India also.

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 in every year in the month of August. The Sabha Secretary shall also forward confidential reports in respect of each applicant collected from their respective Principals where the applicant studied for BD.
4. The Episcopal Synod shall give due consideration to 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.
- 7a. The Principals of Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Kottayam and Dharmajyothi Vidhayapeeth, Faridabad shall be asked to conduct a written examination for the candidates based on the recommended books endorsed by the Vaidika Selection Committee. They shall also arrange for the evaluation of the answer scripts and shall report the result to the Sabha Secretary.
- b. Written examination shall be conducted in the subjects viz., English, Bible Knowledge, History of the Church and Faith & Practices of the Church, with a maximum mark of 100 for each subject. Different persons shall be entrusted for setting question papers, conduct of examination and evaluation of answer scripts. Double valuation of answer scripts shall be arranged. If there is a difference of more than 10 marks for a subject, a third evaluation shall also be arranged for that subject. The average of the nearest two marks shall be counted as the marks of that subject. Register number shall be assigned to each applicant and shall be informed to the candidates along with the call letter for entrance examination. False numbers shall be assigned to the answer scripts before sending them for evaluation. False numbering, coding and decoding of the same shall be done confidentially by the Principals or under their direct supervision.
- c. Applicants securing a minimum of 40 marks for Bible Knowledge and a minimum of 35 marks each for other subjects and an aggregate of 160 marks out of 400 will only qualify for attending interview.

- d. 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:
 Selection of candidates shall be before 31st October and 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 one year field training in a parish under the supervision of another Bishop.
 The Bishop under whom the candidate has received training should send a report regarding the candidate to the Sabha Secretary at the end of six months. The Vaidika Selection Committee shall review the progress of the candidate and if satisfied, the candidate may be asked to continue training in a parish under the supervision of the same Bishop. Either six months probation or one year practical training shall be under the Diocesan Bishop of the candidates.
10. At the end of the 1 ½ year period the Bishop under whom the candidate has received the last training shall forward a report to the Sabha Secretary.
11. On completion of 1 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.
12. If the candidate is selected for ordination, two months training shall be arranged preferably at the Karukachal Campus and the candidate should be given lessons in management, Church administration, accountancy, practice of liturgy and the constitution of the Church and organisations of the Church. This training should be arranged by the Sabha Secretary under the guidance and assistance of the Principal, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Kottayam and the expenses shall be met by the concerned Diocese.
13. Applicants who have attended written test three times or interview two times as a non-sponsored candidate and not been selected shall not be considered for selection again. However, those who have passed written test and not selected after interview are eligible to appear directly for interview during the next chance, provided they have submitted application.
14. The applicants should be below the age of 40 years on the date of submitting the application.