

# The Global Johnian Community

**Purpose:** To reflect the past, capture the present and hope for the future.

**To whom:** All lovers of St. John's, both young and old.

**Aim:** To evoke a deep sense of longing to give back something of what we got at this crucial time of need.

**Key people:** Main architects in every era of the 185 years of the history of St. John's. (N.B. Names will not be mentioned)

**Key places:** Favourable and hostile places in and outside the peninsula.

**St. John's College:** "A citadel of education". The Sunday Times of Sri Lanka published this article on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 1998.

St. John's College Jaffna, one of the oldest schools in Sri Lanka is currently celebrating the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding. Its reputation for excellence has remained undiminished despite repeated and extensive destruction in recent years. In fact, its response has been to go beyond reconstruction to the ambitious planned programme of development that is now under way. Here a retired Vice Principal looks back.

## **The new Science block will be declared open on May 8, 1998**

### **Extracts from and addition to this article:**

It is confined to 28 years from 1953 – 1980. It is long enough for any teacher (who has been at St Johns) to become a part of the very ethos of the school community. St Johns reached peak performance in many facets of school activity. In 1963 our athletic team very narrowly missed the Tarbet Challenge Cup in the Ceylon Public Schools Championship – a trophy given to the best school in the island. The combined Jaffna Schools cricket team in 1958 had 6 Johnians. This team defeated the Colombo Schools combined team played on St Peter's grounds. Cricket has been our forte during the late 50s, the 1960-decade and early 70s. Also St Johns reached peak performance as best in the island for university entrance for medicine, allied subjects, and agriculture and biological science. Medicine and allied subjects continued to maintain high standards for another 2 decades. High standards in engineering, commerce and Arts also followed later but standardization by the government prevented many from entering the university. However, any student who passed through the portals of St Johns was able to imbibe a feeling of self-worth. This potential is usually utilized in any work he/she undertakes anywhere in the globe. In the late fifties and early sixties hostellers including about 50 from up country overflowed the 250 mark. This is the highest on record. There were 8 hostels including Peto hostel, which was just across the road. Hostel discipline sets the tone for the whole school. An educational landmark for further education was in early sixties when St Johns Academy was opened to Johnians and others opposite the school. Amalgamation of Lower School to St John's in 1954 was another educational milestone.

**Discipline** is the best intangible factor that any institution can have. Freedom of responsibility and transparent honesty are hallmarks of self-discipline. Education is that which is left behind after the facts are forgotten.

Discipline has been the motivating factor for students to join St. John's. Considered as one of the best in the island many Sinhalese students from the south joined St. John's in past decades till the communal problem raised its ugly head in 1958.

A school's academic standards are measured as comparative performance with other schools. St. John's maintained high academic performance throughout its history.

**Values and Priorities:** In 1960 schools were taken over by the government and St. John's had to take a crucial decision. We opted to be a non-fee levying school. The educational well being of St. John's was not sacrificed at the altar of financial benefits. This great institution launched out into the unknown future. With great faith the manager of the school with a band of dedicated old boys, parents and teachers saw great visions of the distant scene. The school strained every sinew to find the money. Even the rich mahoganies and compound buildings were sold. **When the mind opens its portals, paradise is unfolded.** Gradually the nets were cast on the right side, and the money to run the school did not pose a serious problem. St. John's today after 38 years continues to stand as a citadel of educational caliber, thanks to principals, teachers old boys and parents all over the globe who rally round to keep the school at its best in every turn of changing scenes.

## Reflecting The Past

In every era of the 185 years of Johnian history educational stalwarts, principals and teachers, dedicated old boys both individuals and families, benefactors and OBAS have contributed copiously to the welfare of St. John's. This includes expertise, money, new buildings, renovation of old buildings, playground expansion and equipment etc.

Many old students who during their St. John's days contributed behind the scenes had or have reached Himalayan heights in varied fields both locally and in international circles.

We dip our Johnian flag and salute these great and noble men and women who have gone beyond the veil, and they hear the voice "well done my good and faithful servant.....".

At present times the aroma of St. John's smells right round the global community, each Johnian longing to get together with his/ her old schoolmates/ and colleagues, relating nostalgic stories and thanking God for the education received or imparted at St. John's.

## Copy of the letter sent to Johnians by the Principal

(A recent example of Johnian's heartfelt obligation for up country students)

Dear Johnians,

### Admission to St. John's College Jaffna from Up Country

I observe that the students in the up country are now keen to seek admission to St. John's College once again.

In this regard I visited Badulla District and conducted an admission test for 2008 on 29 December 2007 and selected 9 students to grades 6 – 11 and 4 students to Chundikuli Girl's College (Tamil Medium).

Many of them are from low-income group and living in reduced conditions. Johnians desirous of supporting this programme by means of financial assistance are requested to communicate with me.

The students will be provided hostel accommodation. The college will have to incur additional expenses as we embark on our noble venture to extend a helping hand to those who have been deprived a sound education. The details are as follows:

Annual school fees Rs. 6,000.00

Annual hostel fees Rs. 36,000.00

Stationeries Rs. 2,500.00

Annual gift Rs. 2,500.00

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Rs. 47,000.00

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The estimated cost is Rs. 47,000.00 to support a child for one year.

May I also write to inform that the Christian Children's Fund of Canada is winding up their operations in the North from April this year. Three hundred and thirty needy children have been beneficiaries of this programme.

Payments may be made directly at the college office (account details of which are given hereunder) or alternatively, funds could be remitted through the respective OBA's. If payments are sent through the banking system, we request you to inform us. This would enable us to acknowledge receipt.

### **Bank details**

Name of Account: M/S ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, JAFFNA, SRI LANKA.

Account Number: 0494301-2

Bank Branch: Hatton National Bank Pvt Ltd.,

No. 212 & 214, Hospital road, Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

Swift No. HBLILKLX.

Rev. N. J. Gnanaponrajah

Principal

St. John's College, Jaffna.

**Hope for the future – Johnians near and far**

*(A Johnian prayer of Petition and Thanks)*

O God our help in ages past

Our hope for years to come

We praise St. John your patron saint

Guard us from any taint

Our school we did enjoy the past

Now civil war the creed

But with your mercy we held fast

A leading school indeed

Bless all her leaders one and all

To burn with torches bright

Give wisdom to the principal

To steer our school aright

We Johnians living far and near

Through Alma Mater's door

We had our grooming with a cheer

Now yearn to help her more

Giving back something of what we got is both an obligation and a privilege.

Compiled by:

**V R Amarasingham**

(Rtd Vice Principal)