

An Appreciation on the 1st death anniversary

Born: 09/08/1943

Entered Glory: 15/08/2006

Mr S Thanapalan

A legendary life leaving a trail of legacy and a pattern for posterity

Purpose of this appreciation is not to catalogue the manifold contributions he has made to the College and community, both local and foreign, but to highlight the legacy he has left behind. However, it is inevitable that reference should be made to my close association with him from the time he joined St Johns as a small boy, not only till I left St Johns as vice-principal, but even up to the time of his passing into glory. I will also have to refer to some basic facts about him which will reinforce factors that can lead to his trail of legacy.

His Leadership: The hallmark of a leader by example, characterised his personal life. St Johns is 184 years old. He had a continuous period of sixteen years to head the oldest Anglican School in North Sri Lanka. It is the longest during severe ethnic disturbance. Thirteen years of his headship was as Principal. Mr Thanapalan was able to see the extraordinary in the ordinary, having an intuitive sense of what the situation demanded, studying the ground situation and taking quick and appropriate action. He captained the ship of St Johns when tossed about in very turbulent ethnic waters, never abandoning his crew of devoted teachers and loyal students. He moved them three or four times outside Chundikuli and even outside the Peninsula, continued with the school curriculum and returned when conditions slightly improved. On other occasions, he together with the other teachers resident in the school compound, slept at nights in sheltered school buildings to avoid the shells that were fired by the army that had destroyed some of the school buildings.

Work was worship for him. However, he was not a workaholic. Worship is the attitude of a man to the presence of God. His spiritual life did not lead to the work he did. Instead, it was the work he did that gave him greater spiritual strength. The spirit of his work as worship permeated in and outside St Johns. This spirit, which was poured into him by the Divine, made him pour it out into others who worked with him. The students, even without their knowing, osmotically absorbed this. As a Principal he found the time to know his students by name. **Surely we can say that commitment coupled with confidence in his leadership and work, is a legacy and a pattern for posterity for generations to come.**

Personal relationship worth emulating. Except for a short period when he entered the Peredeniya University, he was associated with St Johns for a continuous period of 52 years as Student, teacher, boarding master, master in charge of games, middle school supervisor, vice principal, acting Principal and finally Principal. He will be remembered with gratitude by tens of thousands of his classmates, students, colleagues, parents, old boys and well-wishers of the school in various parts of the globe. The refined relationship of all those he came in contact is worth emulating. Nostalgic feelings always crops up with his long lost friends and colleagues. When he met them on future occasions he was able to remember the names and initials of many of his past students and friends. This asset in relationship always uplifts a recipient's ego. The portfolios he had at St Johns and outside gave him a wide spectrum for contact with others. He was versatile in the spoken usage of Tamil and English. As a student, he played for the 1st Team in soccer and cricket. In later years he was an encyclopaedia of inter-collegiate cricket matches. The SLBC chose him as the first Tamil commentator for the first All Ceylon Test Team against England Test Team. As a Principal he constantly came in contact with higher officials and dignitaries both local and foreign.

Maintaining traditional values – Tradition that gives priorities and value to life leaves an indelible mark for future generations to follow. Discipline has always been the bottom line for Johnian success. Thousands of

students who have passed the portals of St Johns have vouched that it was their student discipline period which has given them the ability to choose their priorities in later life. This discipline has never wobbled or stalled during Mr Thanapalan's headship.

New buildings - The largest numbers of buildings were put up or renovated during Mr Thanapalan's period, always maintaining the traditional architectural design. This gives a nostalgic flavour for old students and teachers when they visit the school after many years with their children and grand children. They in turn proudly refer to the next generation as the institution in which their forefathers and mothers studied. Maintaining such traditions and traditional values **surely is another trail of legacy and a pattern for many to follow even in other educational institutions.**

Lastly – With appreciation and admiration I salute my student and colleague who has given us a pattern for posterity. May it be the prayer of all lovers of this great institution that God in His mercy will always make the school to be true to her Motto that 'The light shines on in the dark'.

V R Amarasingham
Former Vice Principal
St John's College, Jaffna