

American missionaries arrived here in 1813, almost two hundred years ago
Jaffna's long golden links with the US cherished and honoured



Traditional courtesies and rituals complete with melodious nathaswaram music to the accompaniment of rhythmic thavils, nilappavadai welcome, garlands especially of cloves and cardamoms and Golden Shawl honour greeted the US Ambassador in Sri Lanka Her Excellency Ms. Patricia Butenis when she arrived at the Green Memorial Hospital, Manipay Tuesday January 25.

She was welcomed by the Rt Rev Dr Daniel Thiagarajah, Bishop in Jaffna of the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India and Chairperson of the American Ceylon Mission that counts a long relationship with the people of Jaffna. Bishop Thiagarajah is also the Chairperson of the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka.

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Among those who welcomed the Ambassador was the Tamil National Alliance Member of Parliament, Mr M A Sumanthiran, In the field of modern medicine, the Green Memorial Hospital has a monumental history. Founded in 1848 by the American Missionary Dr Samuel Fiske Green, it was Sri Lanka's first Medical College. Associated with its sister hospital, Inuvil's McLeod Hospital, it did yeoman service until it was ravaged by the recent civil war.

It is a matter of great relief that the JDCSI headed by Bishop Daniel Thiagarajah is determined to bring both hospitals back to their pristine glory.



Marking the visit of the Ambassador, a public meeting was held in Centre for Holistic Healing at the hospital premises at which Bishop Thiagarajah gave an indication of the hospital's development goals. He briefly traced the pioneering efforts of the early missionaries and their visions and the elements that uphold democratic values they propagated in North Sri Lanka. It is these values that will guide us, observed the Bishop Thiagarajah as we help create a new nation for the generations to come.

Mr. Sumanthiran added to these sentiments with welcome greetings and emphasized the need to effectively continue the mission carried out by the dedicated missionaries who came from New England, USA. Her Excellency also chose the occasion to visit the Uduvil Girls College, the first girl's school with a hostel in Asia founded by Harriet Winslow, in whose memory a Girls Home has been established at Pandatheruppu.

Following the visit to Manipay, the Ambassador and her party briefly called at Jaffna College whose origin goes back to the 1820s with the founding of its forerunner the Batticotta Seminary.

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Managed by a Board of Directors with fraternal relationship with JDCSI, it is headed by Bishop Thiagarajah as the Chairperson of its Board of Directors. Jaffna College receives funds from its own fiduciary body, the Trustees of Jaffna College Funds in Boston, Massachusetts.

The history of the JDCSI goes back to 1813 with numerous firsts in education and health when missionaries from the US committed themselves to the command to go out into the world and preach the gospel. Her Excellency Patricia Butenis made many references to the work of the American missionaries in the North counting many firsts in their achievements when she declared open the American Corner at Jaffna City the previous day.

In her speech she said: "Not everyone may realize that Americans have a long relationship with the people of Jaffna. American missionaries arrived here in 1813, almost two hundred years ago. They taught English and learned Tamil, founded the first printing press in Jaffna (American Ceylon Mission Press), started the first Tamil language newspaper anywhere (The Morning Star), and established Sri Lanka's first medical school. Last June, during my first trip to Jaffna, I visited a cemetery in Uduvil where several Americans lie in rest. There I learned that former Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, one of the United States' most renowned diplomats, visited the gravesite of his great-grandmother Harriet Winslow, founder of Uduvil Girls School whose choir sang earlier in the ceremony. This was the first girls' boarding school in all of Asia."



"The opening of the American Corner," she said, "is a symbol of our sustained commitment to the people of Jaffna. And, with its opening, we add another American "first" to the list for the American Corner is the first facility in Jaffna to have an operating ADSL internet connection.

"An American Corner is much more than a small library where people can read books, magazines, or current newspapers. The American Corner is a place that will connect Jaffna with the rest of Sri Lanka, and with the world. Through digital video conferences, the Jaffna public can now interact with American scholars or business leaders in New York, Los Angeles, or Washington D.C.

"Of equal importance, you can also connect with a network of universities throughout Sri Lanka and with our American Corners in Kandy, Oluvil, and Colombo, as we are doing today. We will engage young people via the internet, web casts, and programming to develop their communication and leadership skills. Our online databases, English language library collection, regularly scheduled book clubs and film screenings will provide educational and cultural resources to both children and adults. We hope and expect that the American Corner will quickly become a vibrant community center, and provide a space for dialogue between Sri Lankans and Americans.

The American Corner is only one of the ways we are engaging with the people of Jaffna. The U.S. Agency for International Development created 20,000 full-time jobs in the North and East through an innovative series of partnerships with private companies.

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We have also given many small grants to youth organizations for projects such as training translators, promoting the performing arts, and addressing domestic violence. I even gave the Jaffna Public Library some books from my own collection of detective stories and mysteries."

Bishop Thiagarajah recollected the glorious days when these two mission hospitals along with the one at Murasumodдай, Paranthan gave their best to the community. He further added of the importance of traumatic counseling for the people who suffered the war and those who are now being resettled in the Wannı. Special mention was made about the contribution of the JDCSI Centre for Holistic Healing which has now become an inseparable part of diocesan mission to the people at large. The function was organized by this Centre on behalf of the JDCSI. Dr Ms. Thaya Thiagarajah, Director, Centre for Holistic Healing, has made all arrangements with the assistance of the students. She had earlier garlanded the Ambassador and adored her with a golden shawl. Mr S.R. Jesupalan, Secretary of Mission Hospitals and Mr Noel Vimalendran, Chairperson of Medical Board were among those who were present and helped to make the visit a memorable one.

The Ambassador made a quick tour of the Green Memorial Hospital and appreciated the commitment of JDCSI to carry forward the ideals of the early American Missionaries.

Bishop Thiagarajah presented a copy of the Centenary Souvenir of GMH and a write-up titled "The Challenge Before Us." The Ambassador, in response, presented the diocese a copy of Mr Thiru Arumugam's "Nineteenth Century American Medical Missionaries in Jaffna, Ceylon."

Project clean, fresh water A second plant established at Vaddukodai



Clean, fresh potable water is a basic necessity and ensuring this is freely available is a primary responsibility of any community. This must be firmly backed by the government through its local councils, said the Rt Rev Dr Daniel Thiagarajah explaining the fresh water mission of the JDCSI.

A trial plant was opened at the JDCSI Church House in Wellawatte two years ago and this provides good drinking water not only to the residents of the Church House hostel but also to the famines in the neighbourhood.

Good, clean water is available without any cost to the consumer.





Tuesday 24 January, a second such plant was opened by Bishop Thiagarajah at Jaffna College, Vaddukoddai a region plagued by high salt content water, peculiar to some areas in the peninsula, from the underground limestone caverns.

One of Bishop Thiagarajah's goals is to ensure fresh, clean water is available to the people and the plant opened at Jaffna College may be the answer for the entire district. Such technology will not need expensive structures and can be localized efforts.

The event started with words of welcome by Mr Noel Vimalendran, Principal of Jaffna College which was followed by welcome and introduction by the Chairperson of Jaffna College Board of Directors Rt Rev. Dr Daniel Thiagarajah who gave a brief description of how he got to know the Water Missions International (WMI) few years ago and the work WMI has been doing in Sri Lanka. Water, he said, is a source of life and sustenance. Our Lord has said that he is the living water and those who drink of him will never thirst. The WMI's sole purpose is to make available fresh and living water to as many as possible. The emphasis is, he further added, 'Changing Lives Through Sustainable Water Systems.' The Bishop thanked the present Director of WMI Dr Josue Mapayamaguru. Ms Thakshila Jayawichrama, Community Development Coordinator, Richard Gobinath, Junior technician and Ravi Kumar, Technical M&E Officer who were present for their support to this historic institution and to the people living in Vaddukoddai who will benefit from this plant.

Dr Josue made comments about the ministry of WMI and explained how the system should be maintained. The rev. G. Nadarajah, Vice Principal, read the Scripture Lesson prior to the dedication of the Living water Treatment Systems (LWTS) by the Bishop. Children and staff present at that time expressed their satisfaction and gratitude when they drank water from this purification plant

"No child should ever be exposed to any kind of abuse," said Bishop Thiagarajah. "Such a conduct towards any child is utterly detestable and the society should censure such with zero tolerance."

A courageous task we face with utmost faith

Bishop Thiagarajah comments on our children's homes



Those who are familiar with Charles Dickens' novels especially David Copperfield would be too well aware of the conditions that existed in the orphanages of his time and how the children eventually ended up in mines and squalid factory floors.

In the post-war era in Sri Lanka needy children from oppressed backgrounds especially from the plantation regions in the hills ended up as slaves in elite homes. Far too often they were deprived of their basic rights and forced into extreme conditions of slavery. They had no one to speak for them.

Hostels of well known schools catered to the rich and such parents could choose the hostels for their children anywhere in the country and be assured of comfortable circumstances even preferential treatment.

Jaffna College was very much in demand for such a facility and so was Uduvil Girls College as well with the kind of hostels they had.

Today the story is different. But for what the JDCSI is doing for needy children in Nuwara Eliya in the central hills, boys and girls, many of them if not all would have ended as slaves in elite homes especially in Colombo and the suburbs.

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The children in the two hostels there live in almost home-like circumstances with their rights ensured and are going through their educational paces in regular schools with a great many ambitions. They are all bent in seeking careers for themselves in some field or other from medicine, engineering and accountancy to law.

Almost the same scenario is true of our children in the City of Jaffna, Uduvil, Manipay, Pandatheruppu and Vaddukoddai. This has been possible because of the dedicated commitment to the best interests of the children by the JDCSI and the generous support these homes receive from our well-wishers especially from the US and Australia and from other regions as well.



Children from these homes are doing well in their studies and sports at Jaffna College and Uduvil Girls College as well as at the Pandatheruppu Girls College which was formerly a mission school and Central College, Jaffna.

Managing these homes to the determined standards is no easy task especially to find the right kind of staff and workers with so much migration out of the country and the ravages caused by the civil war that lasted more than thirty years.

Ironically it was the civil war that led to thousands of children and young people needing immediate and instant help.

Thanking the friends of the JDCSI who have come forward to help, Bishop Daniel Thiagarajah said we are most intensely focused on the needs of our children especially those who were war-orphaned and the injured.



Children from the Harriet Winslow Home at Pandatheruppu participating in the Unity Week Worship Service recently. This home receives generous support from Pastor Lucky Kanagasabai from Australia and is managed to the standards required in Australia to familiarize a role model in Sri Lanka in this field and a good training opportunity for our workers

Furthermore, he added, the staff that looks after these children from the cook and the cleaners to the wardens must be of exemplary behaviour and conduct and our rules are very strict in this respect.

"No child should ever be exposed to any kind of abuse," said Bishop Thiagarajah. "Such a conduct towards any child is utterly detestable and the society should censure such with zero tolerance."

"Our task is enormous. There are thousands of children especially from the Wanni region who need help. But we remain undeterred and have the courage to help any child in need and is deserving of it in various ways. We do this in great faith that God will guide us along if we move forward with hope," observed Bishop Thiagarajah.

He also expressed his gratitude to those who have come forward to help and also for appreciating the tremendous responsibility we have undertaken in the lives of so many children.

"We have a status of being their parents and they are our children and very dear to us," he concluded.

Likewise, the Samuel Home in Jaffna City is managed on the same lines. The support for this comes from Mrs Anto Samuel of Melbourne who during her visit to our children's homes November 2009 opened her heart out and was determined to do something good for the needy ones. "These children are ours too, God's gift to us and we must take care of them," she said when she decided to adopt this home.



CSI BISHOPS' COUNCIL 2011



A meeting of the CSI Bishops' Council was held on Epiphany Day, January 06, 2011 at Hotel Adarsh Hamilton, Richmond Road, Bangalore. The programme started with the devotions conducted by the Moderator Most Rev. S. Vasanthakumar. Bishops' spouses were also invited to the devotions along with the General Secretary and the Honorary Treasurer. The Moderator based his thoughts on 14th and 15th Chapters of the Acts of the Apostles and chapter two of Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. He carefully narrated how the church was growing amidst all odds facing problems from within and from outside. He cited the apostles who were obedient to God's call and ventured forth to proclaim the good news in the midst of stiff resistance and opposition and called forth the Church to be mindful of the call of God and to depend on God's grace to be involved in the Mission of God.

A special choir consisting of the staff of Bishop Cotton Boys' School rendered special anthems and led the sing-song session.

A lengthy discussion took place on 'accountability', 'transparency' and 'being obedient to God's call'. A special session on various issues affecting the church was also held.

Rt. Rev. Dr Daniel Thiagarajah, Bishop of the Church of South India in the Jaffna Diocese gave a response to Moderator's address bringing out the mind of the writer of the Acts of the Apostles and substantiated to what the Moderator has enumerated.

A special dinner was hosted by the Officers of the Karnataka central Diocese. Bishops Dyvasirvadam and Thiagarajah proposed a vote of thanks for the elaborate and friendly atmosphere arranged by the KCD where the bishops enjoyed a friendly and spiritual fellowship.

A tribute to the Rev and Mrs A C Thambirajah



By Brothers Christie Richards and Victor Karunairajan

The year 1945 was a major landmark in our lives. We were village boys of a widowed mum who hardly had any connections that were crucial to the kind of lifestyles that were wished and pursued at that time. What mattered those days was who you were and not what you are for influence to seek opportunities and achieve progress. This was generally an essential factor.

Our mum neither had that nor sought it, she wanted her boys to grow up and earn the successes they desired. Her goal was to give us a good moral and Christian education and committed this in her prayers. Her life was to be our model. And she never "sissied" us into a selfish possessive trap. Parental possessiveness is the most debilitating virus in a child's life.

In 1945 she pulled us out of the local vernacular school, the Saiva Tamil Vidyalai and enrolled us at Jaffna College a mile and a half away instead of at the Hindu English School next doors to us. Today this school is a large educational complex, the Vaddukoddai Hindu College.

Elite children largely attended Jaffna College and the hostel facilities, unlike today, were open to mostly the richer kids from the outstations. Thanks to the visions of the Rev John Bicnknell sustained by Principal K A Selliah, poorer and needy children especially from the neighbouring community of Natchandi were able to secure places too; these however were very limited. The fortunate and privileged were the elite children and those of the teachers.

Once when the story of the miller and son was staged, one of us was the donkey; the father and son were teachers' children, two heavy over-sized boys. This largely reflected our station at the school.

Elite children from Colombo, some of them semi-delinquent, also propagated the Bambalawatte slang English unconcerned about the horrible meanings of some of those words. They created a fad of it and looked down on us, the bare-footed village boys who spoke Tamil but our written English unlike theirs was perfect.

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We really had to struggle against various odds. The privileged had more than the lion's share even with scholarships indiscriminately granted to favourites sometimes more than one to the same family. Only certain children could use the three pianos at school. Our ambitions were limited to rote learning and securing marks and we were the receiving ends of the ire of some teachers.

Discipline to them meant smashing up the spirited children. One used his hands like helicopter blades when beating up the students immaterial whether boy or girl. Malaysian coconut pluckers use such a method to train monkeys for that job. Elite children and those of the teachers were spared of such humiliating treatment.

Fortunately for us there were a handful of exceptionally committed teachers and even more, there were the Rev and Mrs A C Thambirajah who were in charge of the Vaddukodai Parish at that time.

Until we joined Jaffna College our family was members of the Chankanai Church and going to church walking through the paddy fields was a cumbersome Sunday task. But our grandmother made sure we did attend church.

At that time Catechist Carpenter Canagasigam was in charge of the Chankanai Church. One Sunday in the month he had an evening service at the nearby Pilawatte ANTM School, the headmaster of which was a dedicated man, Mr Chelliah. Every morning Monday to Friday he would gather children from manual worker families and lead them to school. The circuit priest stationed at Pandateruppu was the Rev G D Thomas. His wife and he were great friends of our family.

Once we began attending Jaffna College we came under the inspirational influence of the Thambirajahs, Pothagar uncle and Arul aunty to us. We developed a great deal of love and affection towards them and they became very special to us. It was at this stage, the Christian impact seeded by our mum and grandma on us, spontaneously took roots. Even in our growing up years we never realized how deeply it was developing within us. Their energy, enthusiasm, wit, love and visions were tonic to us. Church-based activities became meaningful.

We were saddened when they left the church opting for Navajeevanam – New Life - in the far off Wannai. It was a remarkable calling for them.

We soon realized God was leading their lives in this foundational task and both of us

stayed close to them. Wherever they went and whatever they did they remained our family Pothagar uncle and Pothagar aunty. Very often Navajeevanam was our refuge when we needed a retreat into self-introspection. In later years, whenever we visited Sri Lanka Navajeevanam would be our first call. Today when Bishop Daniel Thiagarajah leads his mighty efforts to help the Wannai to rise up again, the dream that Pothagar uncle and Arul aunty pursued some fifty years ago gives us great hopes. They were the pioneers who showed the way for us to the Wannai and involved the church in this mission of socio-economic activities and also provided educational skills to needy boys but more than that, a home for them.

It was a tragedy that in the near total destruction of the Wannai, Navajeevanam too became a victim.

How we brothers wish that one day Navajeevanam will rise up as a unique School of Agriculture as part of the Jaffna College complex and hope the Board of Directors of Jaffna College will pursue this ideal. The Navajeevanam family will honour the visions of their parents if they opt for an educational complex in their parents' memory. The Thambirajahs were always loyal to the JDCSI and would never have tolerated any charlatan element to affect their faith. It is but right Navajeevanam becomes the socio-economic arm of the JDCSI in the Wannai.

In the years past children went to school but now the school must go to the people to provide education for all especially to teach skills needed at the grass roots. Jaffna College and Uduvil Girls College have to face this challenging demand by opening up off-campus educational programmes and the Wannai where Navajeevanam was started need this more than any other region in the country. This feature is our humble tribute to Pothagar uncle and Arul aunty for their inspiring impact on us from our childhood years and what they have meant to our family.

It must truly be God's plan to move the Thambirajahs out into the world amidst wild animals and venomous reptiles for such a task and Navajeevanam's ideals have greater meanings today than ever before. Education for development is what we want not the formal kind only that ignores our development potential but facilitates migration that aggravates our problems. We have to pursue solutions and progress.

Peace Pooranampillai: A mortal charter faithfully completed

By Bishop Daniel Thiagarajah



Peace Pooranampillai who passed away on January 6, 2011 in Folkestone, Kent, the UK having completed the highly commendable journey as a faithful steward, was a dear friend of our family and a source of steadfast inspiration to us. So much so, in appreciation of this warm relationship, my sister Nirmala Rajasegaram's daughter was named after her as Peace Menaka.

A lady of immense peace as truly befitted her name, patience and forbearance was her fortitude. One can imagine without an iota of doubt what kind of strength she must have been to a dynamic educationalist like Mr K Pooranampillai, her children Shanti, Jeyakumar and Vasanthi and all those who knew the Pooranampillais. I can testify to this from my own heart and experience.

Quite significantly, she and her husband served both traditions, Methodist and Anglican with excellence especially with the headship of her husband at Hartley College and later St John's College. In both Mr Pooranampillai led from the front ably supported by his wife even in spheres outside the responsibilities demanded of the two schools. He had been head of the All Ceylon Principals Association and has played a committed role with sports in Jaffna schools.

Around her, Peace Pooranampillai had a wide circle of friends, relatives and colleagues of her husband and their families and they drew on her counsel a great deal in the best traditions of a steward in the service of the Master, a mark of her spiritual discipleship.

She has faithfully completed her mortal charter so ably and that she enjoys an unfailing fragrant presence of the Lord. May Peace's soul rest in peace.

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“Fear not, God guides us through the darkest of valleys,” Brother Paul Dhinakaran at the Uduvil JDCSI Church.

Sunday January 29, the renowned evangelist, Brother Paul Dhinakaran preached to a congregation that overflowed the Uduvil Church of the JDCSI.

His powerful, thought-provoking and indeed comforting message was based on Psalm 23 emphasizing how God guides us and the challenges he throws on our paths are blessings to strengthen us as good Christians to overcome whatever hurdles we may face, as he said through the darkest of the valleys. “No enemy can distraught us,” he said, “because God has anointed us with oil and the cup overflows.” He also prayed for individuals including a person who could not walk and was brought to the church in an auto.

During a tea following the service at the residence of the principal of Uduvil Girls College, Bishop Thiagarajah’s offer of support for this ministry was gladly welcomed. Bishop Thiagarajah also said that Uduvil soil rejoices reminding Brother Dhinakaran and his family of their visit to this very place 38 years ago.

On the previous day, a 24-hour Prayer Tower of the Jesus Calls Foundation was opened for private prayer and meditation at Old Park Road. Thirty-eighth of its kind anywhere in the world, this was founded by his late father, Brother D B S Dhinakaran a preacher of international repute.

This was ceremoniously declared open by the Rt Rev Dr Daniel Thiagarajah (JDCSI), the Rev S D Thayaseelan, chairman of the North-East Methodist Conference, the Brother Paul Dhinakaran, his wife Evangeline, mother Stella Dhinakaran and Pastor Sam Rajasooriyar of the Assembly of God Church, Jaffna.

Following that, a plaque commemorating the event was unveiled by Bishop Daniel Thiagarajah who also pronounced the benediction. Coincidentally, the 38th Prayer Tower was opened on the visit of Brother Paul Dhinakaran to Sri Lanka after 38 years of his last visit when he accompanied his late father as a youth.



Editorial

An appeal to our Diaspora friends

Increasingly large numbers of our folks who left or fled our shores and have made their homes in foreign climes are visiting their homeland for various reasons. Many return with the idea of disposing whatever properties they have and bid a final adieu to the land of their birth and ancestors. Some come to visit their dear and near ones and there are others who view Sri Lanka as an ideal holiday destination for their families. Sadly only a few come to offer their talents and resources. Excuses to evade are easy but they will necessary be lame and certainly short-sighted. There are others who are determined to do something good for their people but not quite agreed what are more useful and worth for the nature of the help they can offer. What we certainly do not need is a mass feast farce for a day in the memory of a dear one but support for constructive projects that will help s the resurgence of a new nation. These can come in many forms and there are organizations in Sri Lanka that are already working with a great deal of commitment in this field. We of the JDCSI will welcome any inquiries in this direction and be able to advise how best any-

one could be associated with our projects.

We welcome partnerships in some projects, fund support in various ways, expertise in several and also involvement as volunteers.

We are setting up an information bureau of the JDCSI which will readily furnish whatever information that may be required from us. Young leaders especially those affected in the civil war are being trained to handle this operation. At this moment we are heavily concentrated in the Wannu, the need being such but there are other areas particularly in the East and the Hill Country where we are hard at work too.

Those who have the opportunity to motor down to Jaffna on the A9 when visiting Sri Lanka should visit our several churches along the way once they get to Vavuniya. They are also welcome to spend moments of meditation in any of those churches, and keys to which can be collected from the respective priests.

We are strongly focused on a socio-economic development programme from the grass roots which we want as a model for the entire country. This is our commitment inspired by the hope and faith that are precious to us.

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