

**PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS**  
**TO THE 50TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE STCG OBA**  
**SATURDAY 28TH FEBRUARY 2009, FOSTER MEMORIAL HALL**

Gentlemen, good evening. It is my privilege and my joy to be able to welcome you all back to Gurutalawa for the Old Boys' Reunion Weekend and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary AGM of our Association.

As you aware this Association was started due to an initiative taken by Dr R. L. Hayman. It was in response to that initiative and his invitation that a number of old boys of STCG, gathered in at the College Hall in Mount Lavinia in 1959 to start an Association on the model of that which was already in existence since 1885 for alumni of the parent School. The aims and objectives of the OBA as given in the Constitution adopted then were based on Dr Hayman's vision and I would like to quote them to you this evening to create a sense of history among us on this occasion.

'The objects of the Association shall be -

- a. to rally round the College all old boys and well wishers of the College who desire to uphold and assist the College in every way they can;
- b. to enable old boys to keep in touch with the College and with one another; and
- c. to afford guidance and encouragement to the younger generation.'

Even a cursory glance at the history of the STCG OBA over the past 50 years clearly shows that the aims and objectives have been amply realised despite occasional lapses that plague any society of this nature. Speaking for the almost two years that I have been Headmaster I would like to pay tribute to the OBA for encouragement and support given me despite times when we may not have always agreed about how some things should have been done. In addition our alumni who are part of old Thomian associations in the UK, California, Canada and Australia too have done more than their fare share of work on our behalf. The advice given to me by a number of local and overseas members over the past two years has been very encouraging. There is always a danger in mentioning people by name that others may feel left out, and I would not wish to leave out anybody so without mentioning any names may I say a heartfelt 'thank you' to those among you who have been active and constant in their support to offering not by giving money for various projects, but also giving their valuable their time, their advice and even constructive criticism. Thank you gentlemen and all those other unsung heroes of the OBA for your constant support and loyal service to your *alma mater*. That is what an OBA exists for – to offer guidance, support and constructive criticism, but to always allow the Head of the School to make up his own mind, even if what he decides is not what pleases all, even to make mistakes and to help him start again and afresh. It is not a duty only, but the paying back of your nurture fee to your *alma mater*.

## FINANCES & ADMINISTRATION

Since the last AGM we here at Gurutalawa have continued to journey on towards rebuilding what has fallen down and collapsed. It has not been at all easy. It is by no means complete and we continue to face difficulties. But the financial control and management systems brought in by Jacques Huyghbaert have proved most useful in keeping our heads above water. After many years we were in a position to prepare a budget for the year and the process revealed many areas that need attention with regard to cost controls etc. The Board of Governors has recently confirmed the appointment of B. R. de Silva and Co to conduct the audit of the 2007 & 2008 accounts and this will commence in the first week of March. Stocks have been taken and inventories of each section of the School are in the process of being compiled, again after many years of these very basic things not being done. With Jacques' withdrawal in December the Financial Controller employed by the Board for the four Schools has taken on the task of overlooking our accounts and will be coming up once a month for a day or two to look into things. Our accounts have been divided according to the different cost centres that has given us an insight into what our situation is. Hopefully all these measures will ensure that the finances of the College will be on track and that transparency will be assured. The accounting package MYOB was installed at School expense and the computers of the Office networked courtesy a generous old boy have helped to bring in a much needed system where the accounts are concerned.

There still much that needs to be done to ensure financial stability. We need to have 500 students to break even, at present we have 435 on roll. A number of strategies and options are being considered to raise number and here is where every old boy can help by directing parents to send their children here. No parent can get anywhere else what we are offering here for 8000/- a month. We cannot move away from our roots as a mission and diocesan school and start to charge exorbitant fees nor can we aspire to be an international school for to do so will be to go against the purpose for which this School was founded. STC at Gurutalawa is performing a service that no school within the Church's education system has performed - we offer children who will never have an opportunity to go to STCML, Trinity or any of our other church schools that apply strict criteria the chance to get a private school education. Justice Noel Gratian was speaking of STCML when in 1950 he spoke these words: *'What I conclude on behalf of S. Thomas' is that year in year out, she has sent out into every walk of public life so many men not necessarily born with the advantage of wealth and influence, not too well endowed with the enviable gift of superior intellect but nevertheless decent men, who marry decent wives and by their own endeavours set up decent homes; men who represent the right kind of public opinion who will stand firm against the bogus doctrines which emerge from time to time in the life of every nation; men who stand for common sense, integrity, courage and faith in the traditions of liberty and fair play'* We are able to offer boys and girls from modest homes that chance to be decent persons. This has come about not by intention but by necessity to increase our numbers, but that aim has proved to serve a higher purpose – the fulfilling of our

foundational principles as a School – to produce men and women of character and integrity for Sri Lanka. I maintain, without apology, that for me what is important is not what sort of child comes into Gurutalawa but the type of young man and young woman that goes out at the end an integrated person equipped to stand against the false values of our generation.

### **ACADEMIC ACHIEVMENT**

At the O/L examination of 2007 the results of which were released after last year's AGM we fared much better than had been expected. Following the results a number of our boys went on to STCML for their A/Ls in all streams while 1 of our three girls, the daughter of one of our support staff received a full scholarship to continue her studies at Hillwood College, Kandy. The best results were obtained by S. B. Dodanwala – 8 As, 1 B and 1 C while Miss Chathuranganie obtained 7 As 2 Bs and 1 C. Three members of the Class of 2007 brought honour to Guru at Mount during the year under review. Two were part of the 1<sup>st</sup> XI Hockey Team that toured Malaysia in December and 1 is already Vice Captain of Squash. I am proud of my boys who have gone there and are shining for Guru. The former Warden Dr David Ponniah spoke very highly of the discipline and character of the boys who went to Mount in 2008 and we can be sure that those who have gone there this year too will keep the name of Gurutalawa high. Our O/L results for 2008 are expected to be even better than those of 2007.

### **SPORTS & GAMES**

In sports our Athletes fared well at the Zonal and District Games, while our Under 13 cricketers went right up to the semi finals of the Astra Cup before being beaten. Our Under 18 Ruggerites too fared very well last year being defeated only in the All Island Cup Quarter finals to a school far superior in size and skill. Our Volley Ball teams also fared well at the District events.

Mr Gerald de Alwis has done us a great service to help develop cricket. Through his good offices we have received from Sri Lanka Cricket an Astro Turf, a new matting and over Rs 350,000/- worth of new Cricket gear. In addition he has raised funds to develop the College Grounds and to restore the Turf Wickets. The money raised has also paid for a water pump for the tube well on the grounds and he has also helped us to restore electricity to the pavilion. Thanks to Mr Nawaz Cafoor the pavilion has also had a facelift. Once the Turf Wickets are restored we will have a grounds fit to let out to others to use that will bring an income to the School. Our thanks are due to Mr de Alwis for what can only be described as a labour of love and a solo effort.

One of our four horses Scooby Doo did well to win two races at the Carlton Derby held in Tissamaharama yesterday. This was a significant boost to the image of the School. Although horse riding is popular it admittedly does not bring in much of an income and there may be need in the not too distant future for us

to take some decisions with regard to the horses.

## **OTHER EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

Our Oriental Dancers came second in the All Island Dancing Competition held in Matara while our Oriental Musicians have qualified for the finals of the all island competition to be held next weekend in Colombo. STCG was the only School in the District to qualify for a national dancing competition in 2008. In addition our musicians have started a beat band that had its debut performance at the annual Christmas party in December 2008.

Swimming got a new lease of life with the pool functioning again thanks to Krishantha Weerawardene and company and Scouting too has been restarted by Fr Harold Goodchild. Both are very popular activities among the students. We have recently received the honorary services of a swimming coach from the Police Training School in Boralanda and together with Fr Goodchild's help we are hoping to participate in the Public Schools' Swimming Championship later this year after a long break.

Our English Quiz Team performed very well at the Inter-Thomian General Knowledge Quiz Competition for the Piyasena Trophy sponsored by the Thomian Society of Colombo that was held at S. Thomas' Preparatory School, Kollupitiya in March 2008 by emerging victorious beating even our parent School.

## **DISCIPLINE**

Where discipline is concerned the programme started in June 2007 continues to prove effective. The era of inter-class wars is over. The amity between the different year groups has been cemented due to the reintroduction of the House system in the dormitories. Peer discipline, a feature of Thomian life has been encouraged with the reintroduction of the traditional Thomian Prefect system. While there will always be inevitable problems when people are thrown together for three months at a time on the whole discipline is much improved. Visitors to the College always comment about how neat and well behaved and polite our children are – sometimes coming from modest domestic situations does help to create a spirit of respect and orderliness. Despite initial fears that having girls being resident on the campus would lead to discipline problems this has not been the case and I am more than satisfied that we have the necessary system in place to maintain the discipline. The usual situation that exists in mixed schools of the occasional love letter being exchanged does take place but that is perhaps healthier than such letters being exchanged by two boys! The Board is watching the situation of the girls very carefully and the Bishop has warned me that the first sign of a serious problem and they would have to rethink the School offering hostel accommodation to girls too.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE**

Infrastructure work has continued to go on as and when funds have been made available by old boys, friends and well wishers. Subsequent to the junior dorm night toilets being gifted by the local OBA and the new wash rooms and toilets being gifted by Ladies' College for the Blanchard Dormitory for girls we received gifts of a new set of night toilets for the senior dorms courtesy the Australian OBA, a new set of night toilets for the Keble Dormitory courtesy the OTAUK, new toilets for girls and boys of the Middle & Upper Schools from Brandix, new toilets for the Staff room also from Brandix and most recently the washrooms and toilets for the junior dorms. In addition we were given a donation to convert the old chummary into a stable to house the horses by a well wisher and a dough mixer for our bakery donated by one of our old boys Mahinda Ranasinghe of Finagle Breads to increase the quality and production of our bakery.

## **THE FARM**

The College Farm was reorganised under a new Manager last year. Mrs Kalpana Kandage was with us for a brief period but helped to put our cultivation programme in place before leaving to take up a new job in Dubai. She has been replaced by Mr Mahendra Ranasinghe, a product of the Aquinas College of Agriculture who was a Manager at the Ambewala Farms prior to coming to us. He knows his stuff and is proving to be an asset. The Board of Governors has been concerned to separate the operations of the Farm from the College and has some plans for the future, a project being spearheaded by our new Manager Mr Lincoln Fernando. I am often reminded that as a Priest I do not have a business man's outlook and so I am happy to accept any proposal to develop the Farm so long as the College will not lose out in any way or lose control of a part of the School that must always be so in keeping with our Benefactor, Leslie de Saram's wish. Quite apart from all this the Farm provides us with all our eggs, milk and chicken for the use of our kitchen and our cultivation plots bring us fresh vegetables as well.

## **LINKS**

With Fr Andrew Gnaniah's departure at the end of 2008 the Bishop appointed Mr Michael Grace, a Lay Franciscan Brother from the Archdiocese of York as Lay Chaplain from January 2009 for a two year period. This has resulted in a close link with the Church in England.

Through a personal contact of mine we have been able to establish a link with Sherborne School in Dorset that happens to be Dr Hayman's *alma mater*. This School has undertaken a large scale fund raising project to enable the development of our infrastructure. Sherborne is also sending us gap year students who although they spend only two to three weeks here have a very creative impact on our community.

The link with our parent School at Mount Lavinia has been greatly strengthened since 2007. All those

who qualify in the final exams of year 11 at Guru and pass the O Levels are granted automatic admission to Mount Lavinia. The Board of Governors has decided to waive admission fees for Guru boys going to Mount. In addition STCML has guaranteed these admission and the Board has decided that this practise will continue. In addition any of our staff, boys or teams going to Colombo for any events are given hospitality free of charge by STCML.

## **ASSESSMENT**

All of what I have said I hope convinces you that despite continued problems our School here at Guru is in good heart. Things take a little time to get done, we are not always able to do things instantly due to many constraints but we do get things done. Our academic standards still have to go higher and our teachers need to be more focussed but the situation is certainly much better than the end of 2006. Our sports and other activities need to be developed and the welfare of my staff needs to be considered but despite all of this and other issues that we are constantly dealing with we are in good heart and I believe we will get there.

Your support and solidarity is crucial and necessary. I invite all old boys, as I did last year, who are interested in joining with us to come forward to pledge not just your money but also your expertise and knowledge to help me in building this School. I have made many mistakes so far but I hope that the achievements outweigh the mistakes. Your school needs you. Come on board. With this end in view I intend proposing to the incoming Ex Co that we consider small three to four man sub committees to advise the Head on Infrastructure Development, Faculty Development, Fund Raising, Sports Development and the Farm. I am a Priest and a Teacher I am not an expert in all things – I am here to do what I can. If you can help me to reach my goals then you will be serving your *alma mater*.

## **MY THANKS**

Ours is culture where saying 'Thank you' for good work is something we find very difficult to do. It is just not in our culture. This evening I want to pay special tribute to a few people who have made a significant contribution to what has been achieved by us as a School for it has been a joint team effort to which many have contributed. First and foremost I must thank the Bishop and the Board of Governors, very specially our former Manager Mr Christo Gonawala who was a tremendous source of strength during my early days here and also to our new Manager Lincoln Fernando, who although like me is not an old Gurutalawian has got Guru under his skin and our interests at heart. What can I say about Mahen Ranasinghe that will be adequate to express our thanks. He has continued to be a dynamo – sometimes going too fast even for me but always getting the job done. His tenacity and focussed leadership has resulted in the OBA completing much of its goals as the Secretary's Report points out. I am grateful to him for his contribution to Guru. We may not have always agreed on method and modality but we have

developed a good relationship that is essential if we are to work together for the common cause of raising our beloved Guru. I lost the services of a fine teacher of English with the departure last August of old boy Panini Edirisinghe. For those of you who do not know this, Panini was the person responsible for getting Jacques Huyghebaert involved in Guru – an involvement that saved the school from closure. Panini and I did not always agree on certain things but as a teacher our loss is the British School's gain. Jacques Huyghebaert himself withdrew as Advisor to the Board on Gurutalawa at the end of 2008 at his own initiative as he felt that after two years the School should now be able to manage without him. I disagreed with his assessment but he felt the time was right to withdraw and I respect his decision. I want to lay to rest any misconceptions created in your minds that his departure was due to differences of opinion or conflict between us. We had a very healthy working relationship, I learnt much from him, he continues to help us out from outside from time to time and I place on record here my thanks to Jacques for his contribution – that cannot really be measured adequately – to Guru. The Board of Governors is planning an appropriate event to express thanks to Jacques at a future date about which I shall keep the OBA informed.

My staff – academic, administrative and support have been very supportive, despite the one or two who from time to time try to create small problems for me. The three Sectional Heads and other Supervisory Staff are doing their bit to improve standards at various levels. Our new Works Supervisor for example has proved to be very good at getting the work that is required completed without much ado and the compliments I have received over the past two days about the way the campus looks so much better must rightfully go to him and his team of workers. My thanks to all my staff for the work they are doing. Since 2007 the Staff have got all statutory dues paid up to date and we now have to only pay some arrears which we will make arrangements to do as soon as we have some money forthcoming. I don't think any staff member can say that where salaries and allowances are concerned they have been treated unfairly, however, I concede that other aspects of welfare such as proper living quarters, insurance and medical schemes etc are areas where we lack what the other private schools provide. To be able to offer these are goals for the future. I am convinced that if the welfare of the Staff is adequately looked after the support of all the staff will be more forthcoming. I want to propose as I have been doing that the OBA looks at ways to enhance staff benefits as the OBA at Mount Lavinia is doing for the staff there.

## **HAYMAN FOUNDATION**

Mrs Mary Hayman passed away in November 2007. In her last will she provided for a bequest of approximately Rs 300,000/- for the School. This is an indication of the love she had for Guru and is an example of the type of benefactor we desire. Despite years of separation she did not forget. At times of special celebrations we would do well to remember and to cherish the memory of the School that nurtured us and made us who we are today. Some forget and remember only when they need something from the

School but most remember and despite distance and separation do their bit to help us from time to time. The Hayman Foundation to honour the memory of both Dr R L Hayman and Mrs Mary Hayman is a society that will maintain a Trust Fund. This will be an Endowment Fund that we hope to use in the future to fund scholarships and bursaries and staff welfare. The Board of Trustees of the Foundation will be three members of the Board, one of whom must be the Manager, the Headmaster of the School and two nominated members of the STCG OBA. Mrs Hayman's bequest will form the kernel of the Trust Fund. Membership of the Hayman Foundation is open to any old Thomian who is willing to donate a sum of not less than 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of Mrs Hayman's bequest. The funds will be invested with the Incorporated Trustees of the Church of Ceylon and disbursed by the Trustees as and when possible. I appeal to members of this OBA to consider this as a worthy cause and apply to join the Hayman Foundation. I hope to also start an annual Hayman Lecture on Education to be delivered by eminent persons in the field of education in Colombo that can continue to keep alive the legacy of the Hayman's and the ideals that this School was founded to preserve.

## CONCLUSION

All those who know the culture of this place will agree that whenever someone starts to do something right many people get affected and try to sabotage. I appeal to you not to listen to stories about what is going on here without clarifying matters with me as and when you do. I have already had my share of such things and no doubt will continue to do so as I go on. Mine is not a post that receives bouquets rather an abundance of brickbats. During the year under review there have been attempts to remove me citing my inexperience, attempts to undermine my authority by persons affected by the change in culture and by my desire to play with a straight bat and when those have failed indeed attempts to assassinate my character and reputation – but I am a Thomian and Thomians are made of sterner stuff! Furthermore my training as a Priest of the Church has given me the tools and the resources I need to face these challenges and so I will bat on, bat on and stay the course regardless until my time here is up. I know I have the support of the majority and am confident of their solidarity.

What of the future? 50 years ago at the 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of this OBA Dr Hayman himself asked this question and also provided an answer that I fully endorse and would use to conclude my report tonight as I did last year too.

*'What of the future? With the rise of prices it is more and more difficult to make our fees cover our expenditure, and there is no possibility of our devoting any of our fees to college improvements. I myself am unable to provide any substantial financial help, and it is up to the friends of the School to do what they can to continue what has been begun.'* I know you will not let us down as those who were present at that first meeting did not let Dr Hayman down.

I end with the words of Sir Henry Newbolt familiar to those who enjoy poetry and know anything about Trinity College, Kandy where they form part of the College Song. They are words that express what Old Boys must surely

evoke nostalgia when they return to their *alma mater* from time to time.

‘We will honour yet the School we knew,

The best school of all;

We will honour yet the rule we knew,

Till the last bell call.

For working days or holidays.

And glad or melancholy days,

They were great days and jolly days,

At the School we handed on - THE BEST SCHOOL OF ALL!’

Thank you & Esto Perpetua!