

HEADMASTER'S REPORT
TO THE 51st ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE STCG OBA
SATURDAY 20th FEBRUARY 2010, FOSTER MEMORIAL HALL

Gentlemen, good evening.

It is my privilege to be able to welcome you all back to Gurutalawa for the Old Boys' Reunion Weekend and the 51st anniversary AGM of our Association.

Since the last AGM Gurutalawa has continued to journey on towards achieving higher standards. It has not been at all easy. The journey is by no means complete and we continue to face difficulties caused by the lack of numbers more than anything else. We still need to have 500 students to break even, as of today we have 425 on roll. The Board of Governors has taken note of the problem and is looking into ways of raising the numbers. For myself, I am of the opinion that traditional methods are not going to work in recruiting children for Gurutalawa. We need to use more radical means of marketing the school, something I know worries some of the old boys and Governors, but that I am inclined to feel will yield the results. Some of these methods will be viewed as 'cheapening' the school, but we really do not have much choice if we are to raise our numbers. Of course having said that I shall have to balance our need for numbers with the need to ensure some sort of 'quality' in our intake to guarantee standards. Although there has been a recent hike in School fees, I don't think any parent can get anywhere else what we are offering here for a total of Rs. 8500/- a month. A number of students have left the school recently citing inability to pay our fees. While we cannot offer bursaries and scholarships as yet we also cannot move away from our mission as a church school and so we are looking at ways in which we can keep some of these boys from leaving us simply due to fees without it being a burden for us. The model of having a means test as has been proposed for some of our other fee levying church schools may well be the way forward. As I have said before STC at Gurutalawa is performing a service that no school within the Church's education system has performed - we offer children who will never otherwise have an opportunity to go to private church schools that apply strict criteria the chance to get a private school education. I repeat as I did last year, that for me what is important is not what sort of child comes into Gurutalawa, what sort of background the child is from etc, but the type of young man and young woman that goes out at the end – a fully integrated person of sound character equipped to stand against the false values of our generation.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

At the O/L examination of 2008, the results of which were released after last year's AGM, we fared quite well. The best results were obtained by A. W. S. T. Gomes, the Jayatilleke Scholar and Head Prefect of 2008, who secured straight As in all 9 subjects. L. S. Bandara obtained 6 As and 3 Bs while V. R. Premkumar obtained 7As,1 B & 1C. All three of them were in the first English Medium batch presented for the O/Ls by Guru. The best results in the Sinhala medium were obtained by C. N. Wijesinghe who secured 5 As and in the Tamil Medium by M. Fazmil who secured 3 As, 4Bs & 2Cs. Following the results 26 of the 52 Upper Vith class went on to STCML for their A/Ls in all streams while 1 went to Issipatana and 1 to Trinity. Those who have now gone on to Mount from the Classes of 2007 and 2008 continue to do us proud and as I was preparing for this Report I was made aware of the fact that almost all the boys sent by us to Mount from the Class of 2009 have been admitted while the Head Prefect of 2009 V. Wilfred has already started in the Biological Science stream at St. John's College, Jaffna on a full scholarship awarded by the Principal there. While the results of the O/Ls of 2009 will perhaps not be as excellent as 2008 we are still hoping for satisfactory achievements.

SPORTS & GAMES

In 2009 we did not do too well at sports although we did take part in the different tournaments that were held through the year. A serious problem has been the lack of competent coaches and adequate resident staff who are willing to help out with sports. The Prefect of Games has had a difficult task organising sports events without people to help him. As a result the OBA Ex Co accepted my request to help with the recruitment of a special Sports Coordinator who would work entirely towards developing sports at Guru. I am sure you will all agree with me that a Thomian education is incomplete and lopsided if we do not have sports and extra curricular activities as part of what we offer here. Many parents want their children to only gain good results, but this is not a tutory – we are a school with a long sporting tradition and we must continue to be so.

Despite the difficulties we experienced there were some areas where notable achievements were recorded. Our Horse Riding Club members took part in a Dressage Competition organised by the Sri Lanka Equestrian Association and two of them won silver medals while three won bronze medals. STC at Gurutalawa is the only School in the island that provides Equestrian Sports and we are now affiliated to the national body. Our swimming team trained by the indefatigable Fr Harold Goodchild did well to win events at the Swimming Tournament organised by the Sri Lanka Military Academy. One of our Karate boys won a gold medal at the all island Karate championships held in Colombo. Two of our Under 15 cricketers were selected to play for the Uva Province Under 15

Cricket team and fared well. Our Under 17 cricket team led by V. Wilfred also gave a spirited fight at the Uva Thomian Cricket Encounter between STC at Gurutalawa and STC Bandarawela held in May last years after a lapse of many years. Although Guru lost this match our boys gave a good fight and there was a moment or two when we may well have won it ourselves. Our boys also represented the School at Rugby, Badminton and Cricket in tournaments. My thanks to the Prefect of Games, Mr. S. Medawela and all those responsible for helping these boys to achieve these things.

OTHER EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

While we continue to struggle with reactivating all our societies and clubs 2009 witnessed the revival of the Sinhala Literary Society and Tamil Literary Society, both of which are doing quite well. Our Oriental Dancers came second at the All Island Dancing Competition 2009 while our Oriental Musicians also emerged in second place at the all island competition. Our Fire Dancers and Drummers performed at Kinnara 2009, the Hewisi Band Festival organised by the Hewisi Band of STC ML in September and while they were the youngest participants and the smallest group to take part their performance was well received.

Our Scouts have been regrouped by Fr Harold Goodchild and received their membership badges at the hands of the District Commissioner Mr L. A. M. Chandrasekera.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure work has continued to go on as and when funds have been made available by old boys, friends and well wishers. The most significant work during 2009 was carried out with funds collected for us by the students of Harper House of Sherborn School in the UK, Dr R. L. Hayman's *alma mater*. We were able to do many things with this money.

The Swimming Pool refurbishment project got under way in December 2009 and Phase 1 has been completed in time for Old Boys' weekend. A special sub committee guided me in making the decisions that needed to be made and my thanks to them for their input. Phase 2, i.e. the tiling etc will be embarked upon once we have received the funds for the purpose. Once it is completed we will have a modern pool that will bring us a little extra income as well. My thanks to the four old boys who sponsored Phase 1 of the Pool and I appeal to all of you to contribute to Phase 2 soon. My target for the completion of the pool and its re-dedication to the memory of Dr R. L. Hayman is the inter House Swimming Meet scheduled for 6th August 2010.

Thanks to the Education and Membership Directory sub committees of the Ex Co of 2009/2010 the

School now has a multi media projector and screen that were used a few moments ago for the first time and new white boards for the classrooms.

THE FARM

In 2009 the Board of Governors successfully separated the operations of the Farm from the College. From July 2009 under the guidance of my Manager Administration, Ananda Gallearachie the Farm has picked up quite well and is now running entirely independently of the School. We are hoping that as we go on the Farm will be able to subsidise the Hostel.

LINKS WITH STCML

The links with our parent School at Mount Lavinia continued to be greatly strengthened in 2009 with the appointment of the new Warden, the Revd John Puddefoot, who is keen to help us at all times. We are looking at ways to further strengthen our links while maintaining our distinct characteristics and perhaps compliment each other in the years to come. You will all be happy to hear that Gurutalawians who have been admitted to Mount for their A/L courses are bringing us a very good name by their achievements in all spheres. The senior Boarding House at Mount is now almost entirely made up of Guru boys and the Warden informs me that this year's intake has been one of the best from Guru according to their evaluation.

GURUTALAWA'S UNIQUENESS AS A SCHOOL

I have become convinced over the past two and a half years that unless we offer something very different to other schools here at Guru our numbers target will never be reached. We need to find what makes an education at Guru unique and special – not merely a Boarding school where parents or guardians who sometimes do not have much choice leave their children – sometimes as though we are a Reform School or an SOS Childrens' Village. There are a number of options that I have been thinking about.

We could offer vocational education & training especially for students who are not academically capable of facing our public exams. This would be enhanced by the facilities we have here for carpentry, agriculture etc. There is a niche for this type of education among our church schools. In fact the subject known as PTS or Practical Technical Skills that we teach from the Lower 4th to the Middle 6th could be taken forward to the O/L and even A/L stages. We are even hoping to start paper making as part of a programme to make this campus an eco friendly place.

We have the potential to be a 'Sports School' but we lack the staff and resources for this as of now.

One of Jacques Huyghebaert's last proposals before he withdrew in 2008 was that we go up to A/L at Guru and the Board granted permission for me to start A/L for Pure Arts subjects in Sinhala and Tamil. The financial side of the proposal required a minimum of 50 students to make the plan viable. We have not started it yet due to that number not being available. However, one of the possibilities that may be considered is for us to provide the Pure Arts courses in Sinhala and Tamil for the entire Thomian network that will certainly ensure numbers, of course only if both Mount Lavinia and Bandarawela send us their students offering Arts in Sinhala and Tamil while they offer the other disciplines. This is something that will have to be looked at seriously.

The bottom line is we need to offer something unique for which we will have a name in this Country while still being very much a part of the Thomian and Diocesan network of Schools. Your ideas, suggestions and indeed support would be welcome. Remember if you make a proposal you may well be roped in to help us take it forward!!

HAYMAN FOUNDATION

The Hayman Foundation to honour the memory of both Dr R L Hayman and Mrs Mary Hayman was begun last March and as at date we have raised 1 million for the Trust Fund that is invested with the Incorporated Trustees of the Church of Ceylon and managed by a Board of Trustees on behalf of Guru. Mr. P. S. Duleepkumar and Mr Bandu Wanigasekera are the OBA representatives on the Board of Trustees. Membership of the Foundation is open to anyone who donates at least Rs 100,000/- to the Trust Fund.

MY THANKS

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 over the past year 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 Manager Lincoln Fernando, who although, like me, is not an old Gurutalawian, has got Guru under his skin and our interests at heart. I also wish to place on record my thanks to the Board Treasurer Indrajith Fernando who has Guru very much at the forefront of his plans and Merrill Aluwihare the only Guru old boy on the Board of Governors who represents our Staff on the Board. I want to record a very special word of thanks to Mahen Ranasinghe who served as Senior Vice President for three years. Last year he continued to be a dynamo but had to give up due to personal reasons. We have missed him this year although the training he gave the kitchen staff over the past years has proved to be excellent as our food over the past two days has

proved! His tenacity and focussed leadership always resulted in the OBA completing much of its goals. I am grateful to him for his contribution to Guru. We need to acknowledge his dynamic leadership tonight. Also I need to thank Prabhath Jayasundere who took over as Senior VP after Mahen's departure and Dinusha de Costa our dynamic Secretary together with those members of the Ex Co of 2009/2010 who actually worked during the year for all that was made possible. Thanks to Moorthy and Ziard, two of the most dynamic of our Ex Co, and their teams for having handled the Directory Cricket Sixes Projects so efficiently. Thanks also to Rajmohan and his team for the hard work put in to organise the Fellowship Dinner at such short notice.

My staff – academic, administrative and support have continued to be very cooperative. The three academic Sectional Heads Mrs Sita Jayasekera, Mr V. W. Dikkumbura and old boy Mr K. M. T. Pushpakumara have done a lot of work to develop systems in their respective sections that have been useful and productive. I am able to leave the School on working days confident that work in the classrooms will go on without any problems. We now have a very committed group of young graduate teachers who are rendering great service to the School. My thanks to all my staff for the work they are doing. My staff, especially the teachers, are next to the children the most important people in this School. I remain 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 urge, as I did last year too, that the OBA looks at ways to enhance staff benefits as the OBA at Mount Lavinia is doing for the staff there.

What can I say about Fr Harold Goodchild, so beloved of many of you here? He continues to serve as Senior Boarding House Master. I don't know what I would have done without him these past two years. At 86 he is fitter than I am and is still coaching swimming and training the scouts as well as presiding over 6 junior and intermediate dormitories. I have to thank him and his team of House Masters and Dorm Masters for keeping the Boarding House on track, despite many difficulties.

I have reserved an extra special word of thanks, last but not least, to one of your own, Ananda Gallarachie, who has been an able second in command since July 2009 as Manager Administration. Very few of you will know that in April last year I had an unexpected bout of ill health following which the Bishop and the Board were very keen to appoint a Deputy Headmaster for the School to help me. I objected on the grounds that we did not need a person in that position, but I did request someone to be appointed who could take some of the administrative work off my shoulders for unlike the other schools there is much more administrative burden at Gurutalawa. Ananda was selected and appointed by the Board and has rendered great service in bringing in

much needed systems of administration that were non existent, bringing the Farm out of the red and overlooking the general administration of the School on my behalf. I owe him my thanks and wish to record it here tonight.

CONCLUSION

All of what I have said I hope convinces you that despite continued problems our School here at Guru is in good heart. As I said last year, things still 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 before. 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, very crucially the problem of our numbers, that we are constantly dealing with we are in good heart and I believe we will get there.

We have achieved much as a School and as an OBA this past year, despite numerous obstacles. There is much to be done. My letter to the members of our fraternity sent out earlier this year has identified much of what has been done and what we hope to do in the coming year. The support and solidarity of all old boys is not optional, it is mandatory. 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. If some of you were to come to us as sports coaches, hostel masters etc on even a semi voluntary basis that would be worth more than all the money donated. Your school needs you. Come on board. Join the cause. Be part of the change.

Last Friday I attended the AGM of the STCML OBA. The concluding words of the Annual Report presented by the Hony. Secretary Mr Udaya Guneratne reminded me of our priorities to our *alma mater* as old boys and I wish to conclude with those words. They are words spoken by the 15th Warden of S. Thomas' College and my guru, the late Mr Neville de Alwis, at his farewell assembly in 1998 and they are very apt.

“You boys must never forget STC because STC is your mother, your alma mater. At physical birth you went through a symbolic separation from total dependence on your mother when the umbilical cord was cut. However, when you leave College, your Alma Mater, there will never be any such separation. Rudyard Kipling said 'there is nothing except a good mother, more worthy of esteem than a good school.' STC is your mother, never forsake her, always stand with her and by her,

through thick and thin. Be willing to do anything for her without question.” It would be a good test of our loyalty to our alma mater to measure ourselves by that yardstick from time to time.'

Thank you & Esto Perpetua!