

History of Jaffna Diocese

Church of South India Moderator, The Most Reverend S. Vasantha Kumar, visits Sri Lanka for historic consultations

Several leaders, clergy, laity and volunteers participated at which Bishop Daniel Thiagarajah presented a report on his bishopric, challenges and the visions ahead.



*The Most Rev S. Vasantha Kumar, B.Sc., B.D., M.Th is greeted by the
Rt Rev Dr Daniel Thiagarajah*

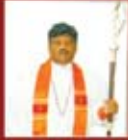
Special Edition



JAFFNA DIOCESE OF THE CHURCH OF SOUTH INDIA WELCOMES



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 COLOMBO,SRILANKA
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 "That they all may be one"

Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India (JDCSI) in Sri Lanka

Brief History

The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (**ABCFM**), the very first Missionary Society to be formed in the United Church Board for World Ministries (**UCBWM**) – New York sent out its first Missionaries to Ceylon in 1816.

The mission work started by them was progressing well from 1816 to 1831 when five churches viz. Tellippallai, Vaddukodai, Uduvil, Pandateruppu and Manipay were formed into an Association called "**CONSOCIATION.**" In 1833, the name was changed as "**THE PRESBYTERY.**"

The American Missionaries started work in many areas in the Jaffna District and later also set up Mission stations in South India. The Missionaries started two English schools, one in Tellippallai and the other at Vaddukodai. The Institution started at Vaddukodai in 1823 that was called the '**Batticotta Seminary**' later became '**Jaffna College**. In the following year, in 1824 an Institution for girls was founded in Uduvil by Mrs. Miron Winslow. This was called "**Uduvil Girls' College.**"

Daniel Poor went to Madura in 1834 and after founding American Mission there returned to Ceylon in 1841. This was the year a bilingual weekly newspaper called the "Morning Star" was launched. It was the very first bilingual newspaper and the second oldest English newspaper in Ceylon. Dr S.F. Green who arrived in 1847 started the first medical institution at Manipay. This was later came to be known as "**Green Memorial Hospital.**" Miron Winslow and Dr John Scudder went to India from Ceylon and started

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the 'Mission in Madras'. However, it was closed down due to the death of Winslow in 1864. But because of the dedicated labour of John Scudder 'Arcot Mission' sprang up. His family was instrumental in founding the Christian medical College (CMC), Vellore and the Hospital attached to it. This was later transferred to the Dutch Reformed Churches (DRC) of America.

1855 was a remarkable year when the Nationals were for the first time ordained as Priests. By this year some more churches viz. Chavakachcheri (1837), Uduppiddy (1847) and Karainagar (1855), were recognized.

1866 was the 50th year of the arrival of American Missionaries in Jaffna. It was at the anniversary celebrations in this year on the 24th May the expressed desire for an orderly structure came to fruition when a body called the "**EC-CLESIASTICAL ASSOCIATION**" was formed.

In 1898, through the dedicated services of Leitch sisters (Mary and Margaret), McLeod Hospital was founded for women and children at Inuvil. This was the second important medical institution by the Missionaries.

On the 20th May 1904, "**CONGREGATIONAL COUNCIL OF CEYLON (CCC)**" was set up at Tellippallai and it adopted its Constitution on that day.

In the following year (1905), the churches of the London Missionary Society (LMS) in Travancore and of the American Madura Mission (AMM) along with the **Celon Congregational Council (CCC)** came together as **UNITED CHURCHES OF THE SOUTH INDIA** and CEYLON. In the same manner the churches of Arcot Mission of the Dutch Reformed Church and the United Free Church Mission of Madras came together as **THE SOUTH INDIA SYNOD OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**. Hence there was determination for an organic unity. As a result, the **SOUTH INDIA UNITED CHURCH (SIUC)** came into being on the 25th July 1909 paving way for the Congregational Council of Ceylon to change the name as the **JAFFNA COUNCIL OF THE SOUTH INDIA UNITED CHURCH (JC-SIUC)** in 1910.

The JC-SIUC had a career of 37 years. In 1947, 4 Churches of Anglican Church (Madras, Dornakal, Thirnelvely and Travancore); 4 South India Provinces of Methodist Church (Madras, Trichirappally, Hyderabad and Mysore) and 7 Congregational Churches of the SIUC (Madras, Madurai, Malabar, Jaffna, Telungu, Travancore and Kannada) came together as the **CHURCH OF SOUTH INDIA (CSI)**. Hence, Jaffna Congregational Council of the SIUC became the **JAFFNA DIOCESAN COUNCIL OF THE CHURCH OF SOUTH INDIA (JDCSI)**.

[The Churches founded by the Mission which came to be called the American Ceylon Mission (ACM) was incorporated in 1908. These churches became part of United Churches formed in 1908 and later in 1947 Anglican, Methodist, Congregational, Presbyterian and Reformed Churches united in South India to form the Church of South India (CSI). From that date the American Mission Churches in Ceylon came to be designated as the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India (JDCSI)]. Thus, the Mission and the Diocese became one.

The final meeting of the Ex-Co of the ACM:

The inauguration of JDCSI was held at Vaddukoddai on the 10th October 1947 where the Bishop's chair was presented by Mr. Sam J.C. Kadirgamar, Q.C. The American Ceylon Mission (ACM) had its last Executive Committee meeting on the 20th October 1947 where it was decided unanimously to transfer all properties to the newly formed JDCSI along with the mission personnel. Among others who attended this important meeting the prominent people were Bishop Sabapathy Kulandran (first bishop); Rev. Sydney Bunker (Chairman of ACM) and his wife; Mr. Lymon S. Kulathungam; Miss Ariam Hudson Paramasamy (1st national principal of Uduvil Girls' College), Mr. K.A. Selliah (1st national Principal of Jaffna College and the Rev. B.C.D. mather.

The very first Diocesan Council of the JDCSI:

The very first Diocesan Council of the JDCSI was held on the 25th October 1947 where the former Chairman of American Ceylon Mission (ACM) the Rev. Sydney K. Bunker was elected into the first Executive Committee of the JDCSI and also as one of the delegates to the CSI Synod from the JDCSI. This is clear proof that the ACM has by now absorbed into the JDCSI. The name ACM was continued to be used for the purpose of fulfilling the obligations of the parliamentary Act of 1908 with regard to the properties.

The JDCSI has become the decision making body to recognize the Bishop, the Secretary and the Treasurer of the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India by virtue of their election and appointment respectively to those offices by the Diocese as having been appointed by the UCBWM (now, the WCM) as President, Secretary and Treasurer respectively of the American Ceylon Mission (ACM) for the purpose of the Act of Incorporation of 1908. This is in terms of the Minute of the Mission and Property Committee of the Prudential Committee of the American Board held on the 23rd of November 1951.

A major landmark case on holding of properties and Bishop being recognized as the President of ACM was given on the 23rd April 1987 in the District Court, Point Pedro (vide. Case no. 1178/Misc.) The Learned Judge has also made a ruling that the nominations of the JDCSI Officers to be appointed as Officers of the ACM need not be communicated to the UCBWM. This verdict has been used in determining other land or property cases.

The JDCSI:

The Rt. Rev. Dr Sabapathy Kulandran was the first Bishop of the JDCSI (consecrated in 1947). Rt. Rev. Dr D.J. Ambalavanar succeeded him in 1972. The Rt. Rev. Dr S. Jebanesan became the third Bishop in 1993. The present Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr Daniel S. Thiagarajah was consecrated Bishop on the 21st August 2006. The Jaffna Diocese of the C.S.I. is one of the National Churches in Sri Lanka and is a member Church of the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka (NCC-SL) and also of the Christian Conference of Asia (C.C.A.). The present Bishop of the JDCSI is the Chairperson of the NCC-Sri Lanka.

The JDCSI is engaged in negotiations with other churches in Sri Lanka – The

Church of Ceylon (Anglican) and the Methodist Church of Sri Lanka for the formation of the Church of Sri Lanka. Thus a body called the **COUNCIL OF THE CONFEDERATION OF CHURCHES (CCC)** has been formed and a Task Force on Christian Unity is working towards a closer union among churches in Sri Lanka. From 1816 onwards the American Ceylon Mission has had a strong emphasis in Social and Community Welfare work. More than 150 primary schools were established in the Jaffna Peninsula within the first twenty years. A number of Secondary Schools were also established. The Batticotta seminary, later to be known as Jaffna College, was established in 1823. A College for women, the Uduvil Girl's College, was established in 1824.

The first Western Medical Hospital and training programme in Ceylon were established by the Mission. Dr. John Scudder started medical work in Pandaterruppu in 1820, and after him Dr. Samuel Green established a Hospital in Manipay in 1848 which is now known as the Green Memorial Hospital (GMH). Dr. Green also conducted a Medical College at Manipay which produced the first batch of Doctors trained in Western Medicine to practice in Ceylon. This Medical College continued till the Government opened the Ceylon Medical College in the 1870s.

At the end of 1960 with the nationalization of schools, the Diocese's role in primary and secondary education was restricted to one High School for Girls College Board of Directors.

The Growth:

The Diocese continues to carry out these ministries. It has grown in recent years setting up Churches and Service Projects throughout the Northern Province, the Eastern Province, the Hill Country, in the city of Colombo and later in 2009 in the down South of Sri Lanka, where, for the first time in the history, two Sinhalese congregations were founded. Thus, the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India is no longer a 'parochial' church. It has now grown to witness as a National Church.

Some important clues to understand the present scenario:

- 1 On 28th March 2005 Rt. Rev. Dr. S Jebanesan retired as the Bishop in Jaffna of the CSI when he reached 65 years of age.
- 2 The new Constitution of the CSI, adopted in 2003, required that a person ought to have reached 50 years of age to be eligible for election as Bishop. Prior to that it was 45 years.
- 3 It was widely believed that one of two presbyters of the JDCSI, Rev Dr Daniel S Thiagarajah or Rev S Jeyanesan would succeed Bishop Jebanesan as the Bishop of the JDCSI. However, Rev Dr Daniel S Thiagarajah would have attained 50 years of age only on 9th November 2005.
- 4 The CSI Synod issued a mandate to the Executive Committee of the JDCSI to hold the election for Bishop. This mandate was valid for 6 months.
- 5 At about this time a presbyter of the JDCSI, Rev Sebastian Anthony, filed an action in the District Court of Jaffna and obtained a restraining order against the Executive Committee of the JDCSI from holding a meeting to decide on the date of the election. If the Ex Co had decided to hold the election prior to 9th Novem-

ber 2005, Rev S Jeyanesan would have been the only choice for Bishopric as Rt. Rev Dr. Daniel S Thiagarajah would have been ineligible to stand for election. Rev Anthony had previously made serious allegations of sexual immorality against Rev S Jeyanesan at a Diocesan Council meeting.

- 6 When the Moderator's Commissary at the time, Rev Navendranugoolan and Rev S Jeyanesan tried to hold a special council meeting to circumvent the order of Court, the Court issued another restraining order restraining the holding of the special council meeting. Despite this an attempt was made to hold the meeting by keeping the Commissary under wraps (literally covered by bed sheets!) to avoid the service of the court order on him. But when the Fiscal Officer managed to serve it on him inside the Cathedral premises, Rev S Jeyanesan assaulted the Fiscal in frustration and the matter was reported to Court. Consequently Court issued a warrant for the arrest of Rev S Jeyanesan for acting in contempt of Court.
- 7 Rev S Jeyanesan went underground and managed to obtain stay orders in the Court of Appeal against Rev Anthony's actions proceeding in the District Court, mainly to avoid being arrested and treated for contempt.
- 8 However, while the court proceedings were stayed two other events came to pass: the mandate issued by the CSI Synod to hold the election for the Bishop lapsed and Rev Dr Daniel S Thiagarajah reached 50 years of age.
- 9 The CSI Constitution is unambiguous as to the consequences if no election is held for whatever reason within the time specified in the mandate. According to Clause 37 of Chapter VI, the only way in which a Bishop could be appointed thereafter is by the appointment of a nominations committee.
- 10 The CSI Working Committee that met on 29th July 2006 decided unanimously to appoint the nominations committee. Rev A Jeyakumaran, who supports Rev S Jeyanesan and who left the CSI and formed another church with him and is the Jaffna co-ordinator of that new church, was a member of the Working Committee that took that decision (He is now the Chairperson of the so-called 'Church of the American Ceylon Mission – CACM).
- 11 The nominations committee acting strictly in accordance with the provisions of constitution, nominated Rev Dr Daniel S Thiagarajah to be appointed as the Bishop of the JDCSI. The Synod Executive Committee also endorsed this nomination and decided to appoint him as the Bishop.
- 12 On 21st August 2006, Rt. Rev. Dr. Daniel S Thiagarajah was consecrated as the Bishop of the JDCSI in Chennai, according to the Constitutional provisions of the CSI.
- 13 Just prior to that another presbyter of the JDCSI, Rev T Thevanesan, instituted legal proceedings in the High Court of Madras, numbered, OA 641 of 2006 seeking a stay order against the said consecration. This was refused by the High Court as being devoid of merits. The Moderator and the General Secretary of the CSI were also cited as defendants.
- 14 After the consecration he again moved the Court for revision and an Order was made on 30th August 2006 in case No. OSA No.269 of 2006, acknowledging the fact that the Bishop has been consecrated and directing the parties to maintain the status quo with regard to the consecration of the Bishop until further orders.

- 15. When that action failed, a person claiming to be a worshipper in the Colombo Church of the JDCSI instituted an action in the District Court of Mount Lavinia, in Case No. 976/2006/SPL and on the 28th of August 2006 and obtained an ex parte enjoining order restraining the Bishop from functioning in that office.
- 16. A second action based on the very same matter seeking the very same relief was initiated by fourteen Plaintiffs again in the capacity of worshippers on 13th September 2006. This second action bore Case No. 979/2006/SPL in the District Court of Mount Lavinia.
- 17. In the meantime an application was made to the Court of Appeal on 26th September 2006, in Case No. CALA 384/06 by the Bishop on several grounds including the failure of the learned Additional District Court Judge to appreciate the lack of jurisdiction over the matter in the first action. The Court of Appeal made an interim order suspending the enjoining order issued by the Additional District Court Judge on 28th August 2006.
- 18. Thereafter the learned Additional District Judge dismissed that action with costs (case No. 976/06/SPL) for lack of jurisdiction.
- 19. On the 18th of October 2006, the second action by Case No. 979/06/SPL was supported. Although the Plaintiffs sought an enjoining order and an interim injunction against the Bishop, the learned Additional District Court Judge did not grant it but only issued summons on the Defendants named in the second action.
- 20. Thereafter the Defendants objected to the maintainability of the said action on the basis of jurisdiction. The Learned Additional District Judge dismissed the second action also with costs on 25th May 2007.
- 21. In the meantime, the Plaintiffs in the second action (Case No. 979/06/SPL) had moved the Court of Appeal against the refusal to issue enjoining order and notice of injunction. The Court of Appeal dismissed their application with costs on 24th May 2007, castigating the Plaintiffs for attempting to mislead court.
- 22. Thereafter the Annual sessions of the JDCSI were duly convened to be held at Vaddukodai on the 4th and 5th of July 2007. Realizing that all their efforts at challenging the appointment of the Bishop had evaporated, a few dissidents again tried to obtain an enjoining order in the Jaffna District Court staying the Council meeting from being held. However, Court refused to grant the stay and the Council meetings were duly and properly held. The said action No 181/Misc has now been withdrawn.
- 23. Once their last ditch attempt had also failed, the aforesaid dissidents, who had been campaigning with the Wider Church Ministries (WCM), a partner of the JDCSI, caused a letter dated 3 July 2007 to be addressed to the Bishop at his official residence in Vaddukodai, and was received by email on the next day, while the Diocesan Council meeting was in progress, seeking to interfere in the internal affairs of the Diocese and directing that no changes be made to the management structures of the property holding body, the American Ceylon Mission, and that the status quo ante to the Bishop taking office should prevail in relation to the assets held by the said American Ceylon Mission.
- 24. The Bishop responded to the said email on 5th July 2007 in his capacity as the Chairman of the American Ceylon Mission as well and informed the UCCWM

that the Diocesan Council had duly appointed the Bishop as the Chairman, Rev. I Rajkumar as the Secretary and the 2nd Plaintiff as the Treasurer of the American Ceylon Mission. This was the practice for 60 years since the American Ceylon Mission and the JDCSI merged into one in 1947.

- 25. The Moderator of the CSI, Rt. Rev. Dr B P Sugandhar also wrote to WCM, tracing the historic development that culminated in the American Ceylon Mission becoming one with the JDCSI and assuring them that no untoward events have taken place in the CSI as alleged by the dissidents.
- 26. The Moderator, in his address to the 31st session of the CSI Synod, 11-14 January 2008, stated thus:

Jaffna & Karnataka Northern Dioceses

Both the Dioceses were without Bishops for a long time due to the prolonged litigations, which prevented the process of election of panel for Bishopric resulting in leadership vacuum in the Dioceses. Secondly the crisis situation in Sri Lanka, namely ethnic war, the Sunami & Local litigation-lists had delayed the process of election. Similarly in Karnataka Northern Diocese, the litigations and continued methods of sabotage prevented the election. As per the CSI Constitution, Chapter VI – 4, the election should take place on a day not earlier than three months and not later than six months of the date of the Moderator's mandate and no diocese should be kept vacant for long time. The Church at large is getting the blame because of vacancies for Bishoprics to the vacant Dioceses resulting in lack of Episcopal leadership in the respective diocese.

- As per the Constitution of the Church of South India Chapter VI – 37 (page 63) and in pursuance of the decision of the Synod Executive Committee, the selection Board for appointment of Bishops for Jaffna and Karnataka Dioceses have met and prayerfully selected the following:

- a. Rev. Dr. S Daniel Thiagarajah for the Jaffna Diocese and
- b. Rev. J Prabhakar Rao for the Karnataka North Diocese.

Members of the Synod Executive Committee were informed of the decision of the selection Boards and that as many as 58 for Jaffna and 56 for KND were received which was more than the minimum required for the subsequent process of consecration. To avoid further litigations the Consecrations were undertaken at the Synod Centre. No Constitutional provision is bypassed or violated, but on the other hand, the constitutional responsibility to appoint Bishops to the vacant Dioceses was fulfilled.

- 27. In the meantime, several persons including, Rev S Jeyanesan, Rev A Jeyakumaran and Rev S Thevanesan, circulated letters on forged letter-heads of the American Ceylon Mission, stating that it has now been re-established in the year 2007, and informing other church leaders and partners that they have severed their ties with the CSI and are in control of the American Ceylon Mission and giving lists of names as constituting the American Ceylon Mission in

violation of its statute of incorporation.

- 28. Later, the dissidents announced that Rev S Jeyanesan is the Chairman of the newly established church, CACM. In recent times, however, Rev S Jeyanesan, has been remanded and then enlarged on bail twice by the Magistrate's Court in Batticaloa in two separate proceedings in which he is accused to have sexually abused young girls who were inmates of a girls' home run by him in Batticaloa forcibly occupying the premises belonging to the JDCSI. The said proceedings in the Batticaloa Magistrate Court are B/1065/09 and B/1386/09 and are still pending.
- 29. Similar to the Batticaloa premises, the dissidents are still unlawfully occupying several church premises belonging to the JDCSI despite their stance that they have "left" the CSI and have formed a new church of their own with Rev S Jeyanesan as their Chairman.
- 30. In these circumstances, it was necessary for the JDCSI to initiate court proceedings to recover its church premises from the dissidents who have left the church. Wherever separate proceedings were filed, as in the case of Atchchuvely and Pandathareppu, Courts have recognized the ownership rights of the JDCSI over these premises and they have been returned to the JDCSI.
- 31. In the action filed to take control of all the properties through asserting control over the American Ceylon Mission, the Jaffna District Court, in October 2009, dismissed the whole action for the sole reason that the name of the Plaintiff has been stated as "American Ceylon Mission" and not "The American Ceylon Mission"! However, the Court of Appeal has now permitted the American Ceylon Mission to appeal against that Order in the Court of Appeal in Colombo rather than in the High Court in Jaffna, in the exceptional (or strange) circumstances in which this dismissal took place.
- 32. Whilst the above litigation is pending, the head of the breakaway faction, Rev S Jeyanesan was forced to step down from the post of Chairman owing to the criminal charges of sexual abuse of young girls, referred to above.
- 33. Thus, the person who aspired for Bishopric and was the cause for the eventual breakaway has been found not fit to even lead his own breakaway faction. This reality should urge others who left the JDCSI in support of him, to consider returning to the fold.
- 34. As far as the JDCSI and Bishop in Jaffna are concerned, they are willing to accept the return of those who left the Church in July 2007, misled by the false propaganda that there were irregularities in the appointment of the Bishop. Apart from those who challenged the decision of the CSI Synod in courts, the others can be reintegrated into the life of the JDCSI.
- 35. The Bishop, JDCSI is willing to have dialogue with those who express a desire to return to the Diocese under the banner 'The Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India (JDCSI) and under the guidance of the leadership of the duly consecrated bishop the Rt. Rev. Dr Daniel S. Thiagarajah.

Presented by the Officers of the JDCSI on behalf of the JDCSI to the Officers of the CSI Synod, Colombo. June 2010

Editorial

The visit of the Most Rev S Vasantha Kumar, Moderator of the Church of South India has great significance. He was accompanied by the Deputy Moderator, the Rt Rev Dr G Devakadasham, the General Secretary Dr M M Philip and the CSI Treasurer Dr Bennet Abraham primarily for consultations with the officers of the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India (JDCSI).

The JDCSI has historic links with churches in South India from the time of the early missionaries especially in Madurai and North Arcot. In the search for church unity, the predecessor church of the JDCSI played a key role.

Today the JDCSI is being a catalyst of great inspiration in the search for church unity in Sri Lanka. During the bishopric of The Rt Rev Dr Daniel Thiagarajah, it has transformed itself within such a short time into a national church encompassing people from all walks of life from north, south, east, west and central hills.

Appreciative of the circumstances following the Civil War and the utter devastation our people suffered, the JDCSI led by Bishop Daniel Thiagarajah has committed itself to grass root social, cultural and economic development as one of its major involvements. He has a team of young active clergy and laity very much dedicated to this task.

Any organization or institution that embarks on a dynamic track faces obstacles from forces and interests that are unable to adjust to the needs of the times. Commitment to the mission and its ideals just like it was for the early missionaries demands hard work and immense sacrifices; there cannot be any soft pedaling or free wheeling.

Bishop Daniel Thiagarajah's dedicated commitment is total and it was also in his compassionate nature, the hallmark of the Good Shepherd, he has openly invited those who have been misled into leaving the fold. Discipline and loyalty are keynote factors and every society is entitled to have that ingrained in any action whether spiritual, social and otherwise.

Jaffna Diocese