

## **The Late Rev AJC Selvaretnam - As I knew him.**

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I had the grace of God and good fortune to meet and be part of Rev AJC's life. I came to know him when he returned to Chundikuli, Jaffna in the early seventies as the Vicar of St John the Baptist, Anglican Church and as the Chaplain of St John's College Jaffna - the leading Anglican School in Sri Lanka. He was tall, handsome and very stately in his appearance, but he carried within him, a caring and gentle Christian character and his sense of humour would put anyone at ease.

As Chapel prefect, I had the privilege of serving under him and watching him closely, his immense commitment and loyalty to the church and to his maker. If mistakes were made he would correct it then and there and if he found students, behaving in any inappropriate manner within the church, he made sure the such issues were dealt with and also he took great pleasure in seeing students serving in the church and helping out as altar boys. Rev AJC Selvaretnam also made sure that the Wednesday St Johns and Chundikuli combined services, were held in a true spirit of worship and not as an extended part of the friendship between the students of the two schools. I remember many a days talking to him in the vestry, about the service, after the five a clock even song at St Johns Anglican Church at Chundikuli. During his conversations, he sincerely inquired about our schoolwork and what our ambitions are and what our goals were, when we left school. He was always willing and humble enough to find time to exchange a few words, when he met students down Kandy road or Old Park Road. Rev AJC was a familiar site at all the cricket matches played at the St Johns College grounds. He and His wife Rathy Selvaretnam, were a perfect combination, they served God together and reaped the rewards of a long and fruitful ministry. The long nights of Choir practices and the Christmas plays, which they produced together brings memories flooding back of happy December evenings in the comfort of the Selvaretnam vicarage down Kandy Road Chundikuli, Jaffna. I can remember an incident at St Johns The Baptist, Anglican Church Chundikuli, which proves his strength of character to stand up for the under privileged and the down trodden. There were some "Christians" in the church who refused to take part in communion along with the lower caste people, but Rev AJC firmly reminded them, in the eyes of God all were equal and made sure that everybody in the congregation were allowed to take part in the holy communion. I left School in 1973 and while AJC was still the Vicar at St John Anglican Church.

Since I left college, I did not see him, until 1988 when I migrated to Australia after the anti- Tamil riots, perpetrated by the Sinhalese government in Sri Lanka. On my arrival I went to worship at the Tamil Christian Congregation Church at St Peters Murmbeena in Carnegie. During my first meeting, after so many years, his first question was, to find out which Church I attended on a regular basis. He was very disappointed that I had strayed from the Anglican tradition, in which I was brought up and had joined one of the many populist churches. But his gentle advice took root in me and finally I was able to take the long trek back to my roots and to where I belonged. Rev AJC and Rathy Aunty took a personal interest in our family lives and we made it our duty to visit them at least once or twice year. In his conversations I was able glean that there was never a sign of bitterness or anger against anyone, his forgiving spirit is an example for modern day Church leaders. His commitment to the building up of the Tamil Christian Congregation in Victoria was an example of his self less dedication to the passions of his life-to serve his people. He drove many miles from the outskirts of Victoria every fourth Sunday to lead the services of The Tamil Parish without any monetary rewards. It Must said that without the help of his

Wife Rathy Aunty and Children Salo, Peter and John, Rev AJC could not have excelled in his ministry, and served the Tamil Community.

His rendition of the Tamil Lyric “ஸ்தொதிரம் இயேசு நாதா ” will always ring in my ears, the lyric in itself reflects Rev AJC’S thankfulness to God, for his life and his many blessings. Rev AJC may not be among us, but the ideals he preached and strived for will always be a guiding light unto those of us, who had the privilege to know and learn of him.

In conclusion I would like to Quote from **Thirukkural** to depict Rev AJC’s major Characteristic of kindness and gentleness.

“அந்தணர் என்பொர் அறவொர்மற் எவ்வுயிர்க்கும் செந்தண்மை பூண்டொழுகலான்”

Which means “The virtuous are truly called Andanar because in their conduct towards all creatures they are clothed in kindness”