



## **THE ALUMNI AWARD OF DISTINCTION 2005**

### **DR. C. POONNOOSE MATHEW**

From the land of coconuts and tapioca came a young post-graduate to CMC. The year 1961. With a postgraduate degree in Organic Chemistry, Poonnoose Matthew knocked at the doors of CMC, seeking to work with the renowned Professor James Verghese in the Department of Organic Chemistry.

Awarded a CSIR research fellowship and guided by Dr. James Verghese, he established the chemical structure of a long disputed terpenoid hydrocarbon, sylvestrene. This paved the way for the phenomenal growth of research in this area in the following years. It also earned him a doctorate. Soon after, he was able to spend a year at the Purdue University in the USA as a post doctoral fellow, working with Professor H.C.Brown, a Nobel laureate. They were able to synthesize some valuable and commercially important selective reducing agents in organic chemistry. Back in CMC, Dr. Poonnoose quietly built up a reputation as a good teacher as he lectured to the first and second year medical students. His classes and his jokes, though not comparable to the legendary prowess of his guru, were popular with them. He also continued his research work in the field of terpenes, taking on postgraduate and doctoral students. He accumulated twenty research publications in peer-reviewed national and international journals. It was at this point when Poonnoose was already a fairly accomplished Organic Chemist, that the Organic Chemistry Department had to be wound up in CMC due to changes in the medical curriculum. But instead of following his academic specialty elsewhere, he chose to adhere to the loyalty that he had developed to CMC and its ethos.

Thus Poonnoose put himself at the service of CMC in the Department of Clinical Biochemistry in the hospital, though this meant starting afresh at the bottom of the ladder. He was soon making waves; contributing to increased discipline and meticulousness as well as innovation as he worked in collaboration with Dr. Kanagasabapathy. His ability to befriend and encourage his junior colleagues, his dependability and thoroughness and his pleasant ways of enforcing discipline, soon earned him a place in the CMC's administration. He began as Deputy Medical Superintendent, with the difficult assignment of regularizing credit billing and reimbursement

certificates and of cadre fixation for the technical staff in Allied Health Sciences. His kindness and thoroughness made him ideally suited to working with patients and their anxious relatives. Having proved his mettle in these demanding areas, he was the natural choice, in 1995 for the position of Associate Director (Finance). Though this was virtually another career change, Poonnoose accepted this assignment willingly and fulfilled it with selfless dedication and utmost attention to the welfare of the institution.

But Dr. Poonnoose is remembered equally for his contributions outside these areas of work. In the college campus he was “Thambiachayan’ the much loved (and also feared if you were in the junior choir) music conductor. His deep bass voice, his varied musical repertoire, his skill with the St. John’s church organ and his commitment to the college and church choirs are the stuff of legend. All the campus children waited eagerly to be 10 when they could join the junior choir! The college choir found in him a director who was strict, but a lot of fun. He chose a variety of music and challenged the choir to give its best and they responded with enthusiasm. He was one of the choirmasters invited back to Vellore to lead the choir during the special Centenary Year Alumni Reunion

The other skill for which he is well known is his love of and flair for gardening. His zinnias, chrysanthemums and poinsettias were the talk of the campus. He supervised the gardens in the Scudder Auditorium and the college campus for many years, laying the foundations for what we now see.

Despite all these activities, Dr. Poonnoose was and still is a family man. With his wife Shanthi a much beloved teacher in the Scudder school, and their two sons Pradeep and Santosh, he provided an open home where students and colleagues alike found welcome, laughter, food and music.

Dr. Poonnoose continues to be active after retirement and has served on the boards of many institutions like the Union Christian College, Alwaye and the Kodaikanal International School. He is still on the board of the Christian Fellowship Hospital at Oddanchatram. His musical talent and church activities earned him a place in the Spiritual Life Committee of the planning group for the 13<sup>th</sup> World Mission and Evangelism Conference of the World Council of Churches held in Athens in May this year. He was responsible for organizing one of the morning worship services for the conference as well as for the music and the spiritual life of the conference. His deep bass voice as he led the congregation in well loved melodies from Vellore made a profound impression on many at those meetings. Dr Poonnoose’s deep commitment to Christ and the

values of his kingdom and his humility have been an inspiration to many people, young and old alike.

Though Dr. Poonnoose's area of professional accomplishment was not in the main stream of a medical college, he had fallen in love with CMC and dedicated his life to its objectives. He served the institution loyally in the diverse areas to which he was assigned without reservations. And beyond the call of duty, he and his family fully identified themselves with the community life of CMC, enriching it with their special talents.

In recognition of his dedicated service and seminal contribution to the life and work of the institution the Alumni Association of the Christian Medical College, Vellore is proud to honour Dr. Cheral Poonnoose Mathew with the Alumni Award for the year 2005.

13<sup>th</sup> August, 2005  
Vellore

President  
CMC Alumni Association