

The College Motto award 2021

Dr.Sujith Varghese Thomas & Dr. Sunitha Varghese

It is our pleasant privilege to introduce the recipients of the College Motto award for the year 2021 - Dr.Sujith Varghese Thomas & Dr. Sunitha Varghese from the MBBS batches of 1995 & 1996 respectively.

Dr. Sunitha Varghese née Henry Kannan joined Christian Medical College on July 12th, 1996. A soft-spoken girl with a sweet smile, golden voice and a heart for service; her guiding principle and vision has been: "If we are unfaithful, He (God) remains faithful; for He cannot deny who He is", as found in 2 Timothy 2:13(NLT). Her passion for missions was further fuelled by listening to Dr. Ramani Atkuri speak about the community needs in Orissa during the Community Orientation Program. In 1999, the secondary hospital visit to Asha Kiran Hospital, Lamptaput, Orissa cemented the plans for mission service in North India. Following her MBBS, she worked for two years at CSI North Kerala Mission Hospital and her subsequent interactions with Dr. John C. Oommen and Dr. Anil Cherian further inspired her fervour for mission service.

Dr. Sujith Varghese Thomas joined CMC Vellore as a member of the Batch of 1995, having committed his life as a medical missionary in a children's camp as a 11-year old boy . A visit to Asha Kiran Hospital, Lamptaput with a few of his classmates at the end of his first year convicted him and also drew his attention towards North Indian mission fields. During his years in CMC, he was actively involved in the Evangelical Union and in encouraging others in the Lord. After completing his MBBS, he worked for nearly two years as the Medical Superintendent and only doctor in BMP Mission Hospital in Kalahandi district in Odisha; where for a period, he also took up the roles of nurse and laboratory technician. Other than his clinical role, he was actively engaged in sharing the gospel in surrounding village communities and churches.

Sujith and Sunitha were married in 2003 and were also united in their zeal for mission service in impoverished parts of North India. Following their sponsorship obligations, they returned to their Alma Mater for postgraduate studies. Sujith completed MS in General Surgery (2004-2007) and worked for a year as Consultant in the Colorectal Surgery Department. Sunitha completed MD in Community Medicine (2005-2008) and passed out with the department gold medal. In 2008, they were 'called' to serve the Broadwell Christian Mission Hospital in Fatehpur, Uttar Pradesh where they moved as a young family with their 3-year-old daughter Soumya. They were the only doctors during the initial years and hence, were on continuous call. They faced many challenges and quickly learnt to depend on the providence of their heavenly Father. Lack of electricity was a big one, being available for only five hours every day. At extreme temperatures of 48 degrees in summer and nearly zero degrees in winter, they drew their power from Above to make things work. Dilapidated infrastructure, meagre income, small patient numbers and difficult clientele were some of the negatives they fought to make positive. They had to donate blood multiple times to patients prior to performing surgeries on them as there was no easy access to blood banks or willing blood donors. In the midst of such challenging circumstances of their first year, their son Saral was born. The delivery was conducted by the couple themselves amidst limited infrastructure. Much challenges lay ahead of them. Sujith had to travel to Kanpur several times a week for USG training while Sunitha would be the only doctor at the hospital and also covering home. This

was physically and emotionally demanding. In an area notorious for dacoits, murders and kidnapping; this young family depended on the security of the Lord's angels. There were a lot of sacrifices they had to make as a family including children's education, inability to go on vacations or visit family. Once when their son fractured his femur, they had to drive 8 hours to get him to the nearest orthopaedic surgeon.

Sujith took on the administration of the hospital as Senior Administrative Officer and Medical Superintendent while actively running the Obstetric and Surgical services. He pushed himself to get additional training in Ultrasonography and Neonatology to be able to provide for the needs of the predominantly obstetric set-up and also to get skills and knowledge in endoscopy, colonoscopy, law and leadership. He also had to function as the Anaesthetist during a major part of the time there. The OPD, in-patient wards and staff apartments were either newly built or revamped and new clinical areas like NICU, ICU, modular operation theatre complex, dental, orthopaedic and physiotherapy departments were set up. As a leader, he strived to develop an environment of love, unity and harmony among the staff and patients. He also mentored several junior doctors in the art of surgery and inspired their clinical practice. He was instrumental in bringing together pastors and Christian leaders in the district for regular times of prayer and united envisioning for a spiritual revival. Along with pastors, he regularly visited and preached in village churches as well as organised spiritual meetings at the hospital grounds. They saw many people coming to the saving knowledge of Christ with the lives of many being transformed. He was conferred the Global Leadership Award from LOBA in 2019.

Sunitha actively involved herself in the strategic planning for the hospital. Her obstetric experience and skill made the hospital known for safe vaginal births after Caesarean sections and treatment of infertility. As Project Director of Community Health, she cast a large vision for Community Health in the region and encouraged and developed her team to pursue it. She started an urban health programme among the Dalits of the urban area in 2010 which greatly improved the immunisation status of children, decreased neonatal mortality rates, improved maternal health and empowered adolescent girls with adequate tools to fight gender discrimination. She was instrumental in starting livelihood workshops to teach skills, agricultural techniques and craft making to enable communities to rise above poverty. She initiated a community based mental health programme and oral cancer screening towards preventive health care for the people of Fatehpur. Sunitha spearheaded the disability program to help individuals get required assistance from the government. Ashraya, a similar initiative for disabled children was her brain child too. In 2012, Sunitha's father fell ill with terminal cancer and as she could not leave the hospital to care for him, she brought her parents to Fatehpur where he eventually passed away. This painful experience inspired her to complete a fellowship in Palliative Care and establish the first Palliative Care program in the district and one of the very few in the whole state of Uttar Pradesh. She joined hands with SGPGI, Lucknow to train doctors of the UP government in Basic Palliative Care. Sunitha advocated anti-tuberculosis treatment through the WHO and was invited to speak in Mexico and Canada. She also presented in New York on urban community health. She went on to be appointed as Deputy Director of the Community Health Wing of the Emmanuel Hospital Association.

In 2019, after working for 11 years in Fatehpur, Sujith and Sunitha moved to Kotagiri Medical Fellowship Hospital. Over the next two years, Sujith helped in building the surgical, sonography and endoscopy services at KMF. In 2020, he sensed a clear leading to step down from institutional medical work and engage in ministry of working amongst North

Indian migrant workers in Coimbatore and Nilgiris. It was at this juncture that he felt led to pursue a Masters in Divinity. He was selected for the same on full scholarship at the Fuller's Theological Seminary, California and is presently half way through the course.

At KMF, Sunitha functioned clinically as the obstetrician and strived to build up the maternity services. She did a need assessment for Kotagiri which serves as a baseline document for community engagement at KMF. She worked in the tea estates for children with malnutrition through the Government Anganwadi program, explored non-communicable diseases and set up home-based palliative care services. Sunitha's passion for community obstetrics was answered with an opportunity to work with Prof. Gagandeep Kang in a project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation on Pregnancy Risk Stratification in India. Currently, they follow up pregnant women in communities through antenatal, delivery and post-natal periods, collecting high-dimensional clinical and social data to help find solutions to improve maternal and neonatal mortality rates.

The family is now based in Coonoor awaiting their next divine appointment after their present engagements. Dr. Sujith Varghese Thomas and Dr. Sunitha Varghese have performed selfless service in needy parts of our country and have lived a life that exemplifies the college motto - "Not to be ministered unto but to minister." The Alumni Association of Christian Medical College Vellore is proud to present the College Motto Award for the year 2021 to them as a couple.