

The Paul Harrison Award was instituted in 1996 to honour medical graduates or post-graduates of CMC Vellore, who, through their outstanding and selfless contribution in the field of healthcare, have been able to uphold the motto of the Institution, 'Not to be ministered unto, but to minister'. Dr. Alexander Thomas and Dr. Rebecca Alexander now take their place among these alumni.

Dr. Alexander Thomas joined Christian Medical College Vellore as a part of the MBBS batch of 1961 after completing his BSc. In the capacity of a welfare officer at the Dayapuram Leprosorium, his work with Leprosy began, even before his medical training. It was no coincidence, then, that his training coincided with the period during which Dr. Paul Brand and many other CMC faculty were involved in pioneering work in the field. Influenced by these illustrious faculty, Dr. Alexander expressed a desire to take up work in Leprosy as a vocation. He was released by his original sponsoring body, The CSI Madhya Kerala Diocese, and joined the Mission to Lepers organization, which is now known as the Leprosy Mission International, Dr. Alexander thereafter dedicated his life to serving patients suffering from leprosy.

He completed his training in Internal Medicine in CMC, and it was during his Post graduate training, in 1972 where he married Dr. Rebecca Jacob (from the MBBS batch of 1964). Dr. Rebecca later completed her training in ophthalmology. Dr. Rebecca and Dr. Alexander were supportive partners in their missionary journey that they embarked on.

Immediately after his training in Internal Medicine, Dr. Alexander and Dr. Rebecca worked in Vadathorasalur for a period of two years. He then carried on his work in the Philadelphia Leprosy Hospital, Salur, where he served for a period of 12 years. Dr. Rebecca opened an ophthalmic unit here and went on to perform about 6000 cataract surgeries in the next few years.

This location then, was the most important leprosy training center for TLM International, and Dr. Alexander and Dr. Rebecca were able to train more than 2000 professionals in Leprosy and start the PG Diploma in Leprosy (for the first time in India) under the King George Medical College, Vizag.

Dr. Alexander was the Regional Secretary for South India for TLM. After working in the TLM hospital at Vadathorasalur he coordinated two large leprosy projects in the Malappuram district of Kerala. He also spent a few years in the SLRTC hospital in Karigiri. This provided them with the experience required for the next exciting phase in their lives.

Dr. Alexander and Dr. Rebecca then left India and invested three years of their life in Bangladesh. Dr. Alexander was the Project Director for the Chittagong Leprosy Control Program for the TLM there, which covered a population of 8.3 million people. Under their supervision, the vertical program was converted to an integrated Health Care program. Health Education Programs were started medical teams were trained and as a final result, Leprosy was significantly reduced from 6 per 10,000 to under 1 per 10,000 in that region.

Dr. Alexander served as the Vice President of the Indian Association of Leprologists for a two year period from 1985 to 1987, and was also a WHO district consultant for five districts.

The impact of Dr. Alexander and Dr. Rebecca's life was felt in areas far beyond the medical field. They were instrumental in an afforestation program where 4000 trees were planted with the help from the Menonite Mission in India. They took an active interest in starting four YMCA units in Salur, Parvathipuram, Vizianagaram and Koraput. They were involved in the purchase of land with the YMCA, with a view to develop model farming, diary farms and training tribal children. They started a Tribal Hostel for children of the Kuwi Tribe. At the invitation of Mrs. Gladys Stains, they also visited the Baripada Leprosy Hospital and were involved in the planning of the New Hospital Complex. Their heart of compassion was visible in the relief activities they were involved with in Bangladesh and Orissa, after the 2002 cyclone.

Relegating age to mere numbers, Dr. Alexander and Dr. Rebecca decided after their retirement, to join the Christian Fellowship Hospital, Oddanchatram. They served there for a period of 13 years, helping in leprosy training and General Medicine. They also volunteered to serve a year in the Parkal Mission in Warrangal.

This narrative documents only in part, the rich life experiences and contributions of Dr. Alexander and Dr. Rebecca. Despite their achievements, they remain rooted in humility and simplicity. Their warm welcoming smiles are doors to hearts of love and lives that have borne witness to Christ at every opportunity.

Our Lord Jesus Christ said The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me. Christian Medial College Vellore, is proud to be the Alma Mater of these, our alumni, and would like to confer Dr. Alexander Thomas and Dr. Rebecca Alexander the Paul Harrison Award for the year 2020.