

Mr. I.R. (Iyngayam Rathnaswamy) Thomas

Mr. I.R. (Iyngayam Rathnaswamy) Thomas came from a family who were faithful Christians in Tamil Nadu. From a young age he was known to put his whole heart and energy in doing whatever he set his mind to do. So it was that when he was introduced to and convinced of the Seventh-day Adventist message, he was the first in his family to join the SDA Church in 1936 at the age of nineteen.

As with many of the early SDA believers in Southern Asia, he went to Spicer College where he graduated from Junior College in Theology in 1939. He then answered the call to serve as a teacher and principal in many parts of the Indian sub-continent which included Ceylon as a literature evangelist, SDA schools in Kolegal, the Senior Cambridge school on Spencer Road in Bangalore, James Memorial School in Pragasapuram, Lowry Memorial High School in Karnataka, Assam Training School, Kellogg Mukherjee High School in Bangladesh, E.D. Thomas Memorial High School in Kudikadu, and Spicer Memorial College where he began the college food industry. Wherever he served, he worked hard to improve the facilities and educational standards. In all these efforts, he enlisted students, faculty and community members to accomplish their goals. Wherever Mr. Thomas went, his wife Ellen also served in various capacities including teaching and administrative assistance roles.

After nearly twenty years in the Southern Asia Division, Mr. Thomas came to the U.S. in 1961 to pursue higher education at Columbia Union College. In Maryland, he joined a small group of Indian SDA families who were already working or studying there.

Soon after, in 1961, this group of Southern Asians organized the Southern Asia Adventist Association as they felt the need for fellowship and support of one another and for others who were coming to the US from Southern Asia. Mr. Thomas was selected to be the first President of SAAA. Ever since, he and the other members encouraged as many as desired, to come to the U.S. to follow their dreams. The migration of many SDA Southern Asians that began with a trickle in the 1950s and early 60s picked up and accelerated at such a pace that the “community” has grown beyond their expectations. Mr. Thomas was very happy to see this.

This migration naturally included his own family. His wife Ellen joined him in 1962, his son Rajan in 1963 and his daughter Finnie in 1964. The marriage of Finnie to Harrison John in 1965 at the Sanitarium Church in Takoma Park was the first wedding of the SAAA community. The marriage of his son Rajan to Rajee took place in Chennai in 1975. Mrs. Thomas was called to rest from the labors of

this world in 2015 and Mr. Thomas in 2016. They were blessed by a close-knit family: daughter and son-in-law Finnie and Harrison John, whose son Iyanrick and wife Shilpa have three children – Kamran, Dhiren and Asha; son and daughter-in-law Rajan and Rajee Thomas, whose son Reuben and wife Sabitha have two children – Rowan and Samina, and daughter Rohini and husband Will Maris have one son – George, and another child on the way.

Mr. Thomas would have been pleased to see the next generation of SAAA members take on the leadership of the association in its mission of service to community and those in need.