

Sri Lankan Orphans Benefit from Tsunami Foundation

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka – Former American diplomat Dr. Patrick Mendis, a Sri Lankan-born and the University of Minnesota-educated professor, has set up more scholarships through his Tsunami Leaders Caring 'TLC' Foundation. Several Buddhist and Catholic students received scholarships to attend schools in his native birthplace of Polonnaruwa.

The orphans and poor students were selected by Reverend Father Eric Fernando at the Holy Rosary Church and Venerable Dewananda Thero at the Dharma Vijarama Temple. "We are very grateful to Professor Mendis" said the Catholic priest and the Buddhist monk at a joint meeting in the ancient capital of Sri Lanka.



Professor Patrick Mendis met with Venerable Dewananda Thero (left) and Reverend Eric Fernando in Polonnaruwa, Sri Lanka.

Professor Patrick Mendis grew up with Catholic priests and Buddhist monks during his formative years. He came to Minnesota on a high school scholarship and attended the St. Peter Claver Church in St. Paul when he was teaching at the University of Minnesota. Professor Mendis is a close friend of Reverend Dr. Kevin McDonough, the residence priest at the St. Peter Claver and the vicar general and curia of the Catholic Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis.

"I had the best of both worlds," said Professor Mendis, who was visiting his birthplace this summer. The ancient city has a long history of Buddhist kings since the 1st Century A.D. Polonnaruwa is known among Catholics because the Reverend Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk from the Abbey of Gethsemane in Kentucky, found his "enlightenment" and God when he visited three famous Buddhist statues in the ancient kingdom.

In his book, Professor Mendis writes of his birthplace, "the city still projects a salubrious aura of a rich heritage of benevolent kings, advanced Buddhist culture with palaces, temples, monasteries, libraries, and a massive reservoir system." The professor has raised funds by selling his internationally acclaimed book, *Glocalization: The Human Side of Globalization as If the*

Washington Consensus Mattered. He has already set up a number of tsunami scholarships and a Peace Prize in Sri Lanka.

In the midst of civil war, Professor Mendis has been a catalyst and a peacemaker. "Because of Dr. Mendis, I became a good friend of Father Eric," said the Venerable Dewananda. "When we meet and talk the villagers are at peace," Father Eric Fernando elaborated.

Reverend Richard Peries and Gilbert Perera, who taught English and Bible studies for young Mendis, introduced him to the Most Reverend Dr. Oswald Gomis, the Archbishop of Sri Lanka. At the Bishop House in Colombo, Father Perera told, "Patrick still remembers his roots and continues his journey of faith in America."

Archbishop Gomis, who exemplifies his own work in advocating the Buddhist-Catholic dialogue and better relations, thanked Professor Mendis for his tangible contribution. Professor Mendis has worked with the Pontifical Council on Inter-religious Dialogue between Buddhist and Catholic at the Vatican during the previous Pope John Paul II. He was recommended to serve on the Pontifical Council by the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis.



Professor Patrick Mendis's special audience with the Most Reverend Archbishop Dr. Oswald Gomis of Sri Lanka (center) and Father Gilbert Perera at the Bishop House in Colombo.

The Archbishop Gomis, who is also the chancellor of the University of Colombo, encouraged Professor Mendis to continue his academic pursuits. Professor Mendis is the vice president of academic affairs at the Osgood Center for International Studies in Washington, D.C. and serves on the board of the Sri Lankan American Catholic Association.

"I knew this kid would do great things" said Father Richard Peries, who had served in California more than 30 years and recently retired in Sri Lanka. "Good Lord has blessed this man; he is truly a peacemaker," said the priest and a childhood friend of Professor Mendis.