

Ana Medonza has sent us the following e mail on December 02, 2014

ESTO PERPETUA - MOTTO MATTERS

A school motto embodies the spirit of a school. It unites the school under a common goal and vision. It provides the students with an ideal to follow and strive for. It gives them hope and strength. Daily News spoke to some leading schools in Colombo to find out how their school motto has molded them and inspired them.

Daily News first spoke to the Sub Warden of S. Thomas' College Mount Lavinia, the Rev. Marc Billimoria who provided some insights into the Thomian motto - ESTO PERPETUA

Good values

“The origins give us the meaning. It is a Latin term from Eton College in England which was introduced to S. Thomas' College by our Founder, Bishop James Chapman. Before coming to Sri Lanka as the first Anglican Bishop, he was a Fellow of Eton College, having also studied there. He wanted to start a school in Sri Lanka that was modeled on Eton and so among the many features from Eton that he introduced here was this motto that was a traditional motto of Eton - ESTO PERPETUA, that basically means - May it last forever, Last thou forever or as every Thomian today understands it Be thou forever. Although the present motto of Eton College is FLOREAT ETONA, meaning ‘May Eton flourish,’ ESTO PERPETUA is said to have been the motto from about 1635. At S. Thomas' the motto became part of the present college crest in 1947 under Warden R S de Saram. What is interesting is, that it is also the State motto of Idaho in the United States of America where the translation is ‘Let it be eternal.’

We sing the motto every time we sing the College Song, which interestingly was written in 1916 by Edmund De Livera an old Royalist! In the College Song there is a chorus in which we repeat the term ESTO PERPETUA three times. Thus it almost becomes a part of a student's life for the period of time he spends at STC.

Well, the more he sings it, the more he has to realize that what he is being asked to do, is to be part of this institution which is going to last forever or flourish forever and prosper. So the student has to realize that he is part of the flourishing or the prospering of the institution. Beyond that while he receives the best education that is possible from the school, he also has a duty to give back to the school, in order that it may flourish. And the school may only flourish, if its products contribute positively towards that flourishing. For the students, it is therefore an important if not vital symbol of the school and the more they reflect on its meaning, they have to realize that they are part of an institution that is long lasting and that needs to flourish, and from which they also get something for their lives in order for their lives to blossom and flourish when they leave its portals. ‘Be thou forever’ what? Be thou forever- loyal, faithful, honest, true and compassionate. To me the motto encompasses all the good values the school promotes in a child that need to last forever, that need to flourish.

“There are two lines of one of the verses that go like this: ‘We rejoice in victory when our foes we beat and we know when fortune frowns how to take defeat.’ This has to be hit home over and over again at a time when competitive sports are in danger of becoming more of an obstacle than a support to education as a whole. Today it’s all about winning at any cost and at all costs. Our children must learn how win but also how to lose and to know how to handle and face defeat on the sports field. Life is not about winning all the time. There will be victories and there will be defeats. School prepares you to face both.

The school is not just as an institution with buildings and facilities but the school is a living entity which flourishes forever as long as the children are getting the best from it. The spirit that is fostered by the motto is something that will never be outside the Thomian psyche, because it is part of our song and crest. It is always in front of us and we cannot forget it. What we need to constantly remind ourselves is - what does it mean for us today? If you just come to school at 7.30am and leave at 1.30pm and don’t really take a part in the life of the school, you are not contributing to the flourishing. You are just playing lip service to the motto. But if you are part of the system and you are learning from the system and giving back to the system by way of doing well in your studies or doing well in your sports/ extra curricula activities then you are contributing to the motto becoming a reality,” said Rev. Billimoria. S. Thomas’ College is 163 year old. It was opened at Mutwal on February 3, 1851. It was transferred to and opened in Mount Lavinia on January 26, 1918 and will be celebrating 100 years at Mount in 2018.