

Associated Gospel Assemblies
Citation in honour of Dr. Alfred Sangster
on the occasion of the 49th Annual Convention
Ash Wednesday, 2009 February 25

In the early 1960s, a lecturer in the Chemistry Department at the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies was at home at College Common when Stanley and Albert Karram drove in. The visitors arrived just when the young lecturer was about to take his wife Velma and daughter out for a drive. The visitors came with a proposal--that the lecturer, take on the chairmanship of **Merl Grove High School**. The proposal delayed and then cancelled the family drive-out, understandably much to the disappointment of the family. But Mrs. Vera Nugent, the only AGA principal in the now 85 year "Merl Grove Story" was able to laud at the 50th wedding anniversary last year, the "great investment that Dr. and Mrs. Sangster have made in family life--not only in their immediate family . . . but the lives of many families in Jamaica . . ." and "Merl Grove High School has been one such beneficiary of the Sangster family" The mission of the visitors was not in vain.

Mr. George Forbes had been Chairman of MGHS for the first few years of the Association's ownership. Albert Karram was in charge of AGA schools and was responsible for finding a successor when the vacancy arose. His brother Stanley who accompanied him on the visit that memory-filled day, not only asked to convey greetings from himself and family in Toronto, but notes that Dr. Sangster has been an invaluable leader as Chairman of the Board. The only remaining life member of the AGA Executive notes that Dr. Sangster maintained strict adherence to the Christian principles for which the AGA stands, and was unchallenged in his role of leadership at Merl Grove. That he has stuck to the task for almost fifty years, he says, speaks its own message of dedication and consistent faithfulness. He concludes that Dr. Sangster's work has shown wisdom in leadership, fidelity, strength, capability, all to the glorifying of the Lord, and to the beneficial development of the institution, staff and students.

Today, the Associated Gospel Assemblies raises thanks in tribute to your service to our school and denomination.

Dr. Sangster, we could just have easily invited you here to salute your role as a leader in education in the nation; for there are persons here who know you as Principal of CAST and President of the University of Technology. They are aware that in your twenty-six years on that side of Old Hope Road, student numbers moved from 1200 to over 6000; over 50 new programmes and 3 new departments were added. Some know of your Chairmanship of the Students Loan Council, the Jamaica Computer Society Education Foundation, and the Caribbean Graduate School of Theology. But we are not saluting you today for those roles.

We could also step outside of education and salute your contribution as Chairman of the Metrication Board, Chairman of Students Christian Fellowship and Scripture Union

(SCFSU), and Chairman of CAFFE (Citizens Action for Free and Fair Elections). But none of those are the reason for having you here today.

Dr. Sangster, your consultancies to CIDA, CXC, ILO, PAHO, UNESCO, the World Bank, and to the governments of Barbados, The Gambia, Turks and Caicos Islands, British Virgin Islands, and St. Lucia would be enough to salute your statesmanship, and any church would be proud to honour a son of our St. Elizabeth soil with those credentials. But Dr. Sangster, that is not why we asked you to come today.

And let me advise you Dr. Sangster, that we are not going to give you a Gold Musgrave medal, for you already have that from the Institute of Jamaica; and we shall not give you an honorary doctorate for you have received such from the University of the West Indies, and you will not receive the designations Order of Jamaica (OJ) or Commander of the Order of Distinction (OD) from us, for we are not empowered by the Government of Jamaica so to do--and they have already donned those honours on you. And we could go on about the Gleaner Honour Award, and the St. Elizabeth Homecoming Foundation Best of St. Bess Award 1994, and the Munro and Dickenson Trust Award for excellence, and the Joint Committee for Tertiary Education Outstanding Educator Award, and that you are installed in the Professional Societies of Jamaica Hall of Fame, and on and on--even that you represented Jamaica in hockey. But that is not the reason.

Quite to the contrary, Dr. Sangster, it was your humility to pay regard to, and accept from a relatively unknown and recently chartered small indigenous church grouping, an invitation to lead our school, Merl Grove, when you knew very well that your academic credentials and track record at the time would open all kinds of doors to elegant and exotic service--and you could just as easily have passed this one by.

But instead, you said YES! and served during the tenures of Executive Board Chairmen Pastors **Henry White**, **Albert Karram**, **Curtis Cole**, **Dennis Brown**, **Peter Garth**, and **Carlton Dennis**--every denominational leader since the inking of the 29th Act of Vestment by Parliament in 1959.

You have seen the school through virtually all of the major expansion efforts that have made the school soar above its humble beginnings in the Speid family as the "Little Red House". Such expansion includes the erection of the science block now named the **Curtis Cole Building**, the addition of two and three storey classroom space including the **Alfred Sangster Building**, the acquisition of 79 Constant Spring Road and the erection of the **Karram-Speid Auditorium** in which we now congregate, the building of the **Enid Kerr Library**, the transformation of 3 Dunrobin Avenue into a guidance and counselling centre, the housing of the Home Economics department in the construction of the **Mabel Clachar Building**, the erection of the perimeter walls, the upgrading and expansion of the playing field, the sixth form trailers, and the P.E. changing trailer, the PTA and PSA trailers, the **Ellorine Walker Health Centre** with dental clinic.

But of noteworthy significance to you, and to us, was the care and detail with which you personally attended the aesthetic matters of the campus. The grounds were made into a

showpiece, not just by insisting on high standards by the grounds staff, but with their motivated help, your own hands delicately deposited in the eagerly awaiting soil, the trees and plants brought from your own home and nurseries to beautify the now 10-acre property.

But the task to which the visitors called you, was a task of leadership with and through people--board members, principals, teaching staff, administrative staff, ancillary staff, students, parents, past students, education officers, security officers, contractors, suppliers, donors, pastors, church members. You became one with us in this school project, promoting the AGA without compromising your Church of God allegiance.

In that regard, you have led Merl Grove proudly to regional leadership in the educational system, earning school management awards from the Ministry of Education in Region 3. Your insightful understanding of the positioning and responsibility of church-owned school, you dealt with government personnel wisely, confidently, and sometimes even stridently defending the role of the church. As a case in point, you let the Board know on each occasion of vacancy, that we would only send up one nominee for principal when the Ministry document required four from which they would choose the one they felt was most suitable. So, much to the chagrin of pertinent education officers, you made it known that we were a church school, and the church through the properly appointed Board will determine who the principal of the school will be; and that only after absolutely professional conduct of interviews for principals, which same professionalism was given to teaching candidates.

The Shakara Harris matter will be concluded under a new watch, but your standing up for the safety of all our girls in the wake of the death of this 12 year old as she attempted to cross the road in 2004 will not be forgotten. The high-tech traffic light system, and whether it be median, or bridge, or rerouting of traffic has so much of its impetus in your struggle for safety at #79.

Safety and care would not allow for pandering to indiscipline; so whether it was student or teacher, administrator or contractor, the word is that you were level-headed and fair in the administration of justice.

There are also those shall we say softer sides to your involvement--your taking of pictures at events, your chairing of school functions for many years, your accommodating response both day and night to calls for help and counsel and advise. The help you arranged for grieving staff; the care for the needy students that the school feeding programme under your watch facilitated. These are hallmarks of those touched by the love Christ. On behalf of the AGA you mediated our care for those whom we exist to reach.

That early visit from the Karrams was to have you embrace and be part of the larger framework of our engagement in the nation; for we preach through our words and our works, our sermons and our safety concerns, our closed-door warnings and our open-hearted welcomes, our tenacious hold to eternal principles and our teary-eyed humility in the face of our own failure or that of others. We bear witness of Christ in our nation as

we give hope to girls who have been robbed of hope, help to parents who have lost all other help, a bright future for those who as the Karram mission intended, come to know Christ in their sojourn through the halls of learning at Merl Grove, a church school, an AGA school. Yes we keep on preaching, through our evangelists and our managers, our churches and our schools, our Executive Board Chairmen and our school Board Chairmen. Dr. Alfred Sangster, you have been one of our best preachers! So today, on behalf of the Associated Gospel Assemblies, we commend, honour and pay tribute to your **wise and exemplary leadership of Merl Grove High School for the past forty-eight (48) years**, your in-depth understanding and execution of the task, your deep commitment, insightful visioning, vantage point management, faithful tenure, beautifying hands, and alternative preaching.

And by the way, the **Merl Grove Story** is not finished yet, though you wrote and published an important historical document--a magazine by that name some years ago; for someone will at sometime scribe in a monograph this phrase by which you have already been called, a phrase so befitting the role you have played at Merl Grove for the Associated Gospel Assemblies: a church phrase, a family phrase, and a phrase that only Albert Karram and Nathan Speid could rightly share with you. Yes, Dr. the Hon. ALFRED M. W. SANGSTER, O.J. Ph.D., J.P., C.D, we salute you as **Father of Merl Grove**.

The Lord bless you!