

Where's the Salvation?

Is the Army still an effective evangelistic movement?

Yes. Given the covenants of its officers and soldiers, The Salvation Army remains committed to saving souls and takes advantage of every opportunity to do so.

BY CAPTAIN MICHAEL RAMSAY

CHRISTIANITY IS STILL the quickest growing faith in the world, but not in the West. North American churches seem to be retreating from their God-given commission to share the good news of salvation. Some prominent church leaders have misinterpreted or disregarded Scripture, reason, tradition and even their own experiences around salvation in recent years, which is distressing. Many Western churches seem to be marching away from the authority of Scripture and, in so doing, they seem to reflect more the heresies of the culture around us. A prominent church leader has recently stated that there is no hell. I have read a number of so-called "Christian" teachers who write that all paths lead to God. I have spoken to ministers in local churches who have told me that they do not believe in the divinity of Jesus. People have explained to me that they are too embarrassed to tell others about salvation. I have heard it said that a loving God wouldn't let anyone go to hell. As the Enemy infiltrates the churches in our culture in this way, it is great to be a part of The Salvation Army. Surely, as an army for Salvation, we were raised up for a time such as this.

In the Army we should not easily fall prey to the mythology that eternal salvation isn't real or that all paths lead to salvation because we hold as our primary doctrine the belief that "the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God; and that they only constitute the divine rule of Christian faith and practice." Seeking out as many opportunities as possible to read, study and meditate on the Word of God can help us resist many of society's heresies.

I can't comment on the Army's evangelistic efforts from coast to coast, but I can comment on my experiences serving God and the Army in various contexts in Western Canada. I have seen Salvationists faithfully using the valuable tools that God has provided for us to fulfil our holy covenant with him.

First and most noticeably, we have our uniforms. As our soldiers walk down the streets, people often engage us in conversation and sometimes even conclude with a confession of faith. This is exciting. I have seen new soldiers eagerly don their uniforms expecting opportunities to witness to the community and I have seen God faithfully bless those efforts. I have even heard ministers from other evangelical denominations lament that they do not have a uniform to wear.



God has also equipped his Salvation Army with a great social services ministry. We do a lot. In the city where I am currently serving, our soldiers and employees sit with people in the courtrooms and ask them if they would like us to pray for them. We provide spiritual care for the RCMP and other agencies in town. We spearheaded the first ever chaplaincy program in our hospital. We have so many opportunities to share the gospel.

The Army also has a great public relations ministry. Especially at Christmastime, we are often on the radio, TV and in the local newspapers. I have seen many Salvationists use this to remind the public that we are a Christian ministry. I personally point people to our mission statement and frequently share the parable of the sheep and the goats whenever I am invited to speak in the community about the services that we offer.

In addition, at our food bank ministry our soldiers and volunteers offer to pray for people. As people explain the problems that have caused them to seek assistance, I have seen our workers share their faith, invite people to Sunday meetings and lead clients in prayers of confession. People have come to know the Lord in their time of need.

Where I have served God through the Army, it has been emphasized that we are an Army of Salvation. At my ministry unit, we meet weekly with our department heads and open each meeting with a devotional thought that often encour-

ages us to share the gospel. Our employees have monthly staff meetings that also begin with this same encouragement.

As do all Salvation Army officers, I entered into a covenant that states that I am "called by God to proclaim the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" and that I will "live to win souls and make their salvation the first purpose of my life."

The Soldier's Covenant, which every soldier (including officers) in The Salvation Army has signed before God, promises that we "will be faithful to the purposes for which God raised up The Salvation Army, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, endeavouring to win others to him." God promises that even if we are unfaithful, he is faithful and he will be true to his covenants (see Romans 3:3-4, Deuteronomy 31:6, Joshua 1:5, Hebrews 13:5). Covenants made with and before the Lord are holy and they will not fail. We made this covenant and God will hold us to it. He will continue to use us for his salvific purposes.

I have faith that Salvationists will live up to what we have already obtained through this covenant with God, but we should not be blinded to the Enemy's tricks to tempt us away from our sacred commitment to the salvation of souls.

I have served alongside some wonderful Salvationists who have a passion for souls that shines through in their lives. In a time when society seems to be retreating from God, I am so thankful that I am a part of his Salvation Army.

Captain Michael Ramsay is the corps officer at Swift Current Community Church, Sask.

No. The Salvation Army is no longer an effective evangelistic movement. In order to reach the lost, we need to change the way we connect with society.

BY LIEUTENANT PETER ROBINSON

EVANGELISM IS AN interesting term. I think it is much like rocket science. The majority of us have a general idea of what it is, but when push comes to shove, we are forced to admit that we really have no idea how to do it—or at least not effectively and efficiently. If any church should be able to excel at evangelism it should be The Salvation Army. After all, it's in our name. As The Salvation Army, we strive to be the vehicle or the catalyst that brings people to the feet of Jesus, where they are able to seek and receive the salvation that comes from Christ. We are an Army fighting for the salvation of those around us—the true definition of an evangelistic movement.

At least that is what we were at one time. I would venture to say that the majority of readers came to know Jesus through The Salvation Army. However, we have lost much of our evangelistic momentum. While those of us who serve in The Salvation Army continue to have a burning desire to see souls saved (and view this as our primary purpose), over the past 10-20 years we have become less effective at evangelism. If you are like me you will find it difficult to remember the

last time that you saw someone come to know the Lord for the first time. I don't mean making a re-commitment to God or returning to serving Jesus after walking without him, but having their soul saved for the first time. I am not saying that this is not happening in The Salvation Army, but to think of ourselves as an evangelistic movement and yet having people come to know the Lord be the exception instead of the rule is contradictory. Of course, there are glimmers of hope. There are surges of salvation at youth councils and other rally type of events, but these are not happening all the time and certainly are not the norm.

As The Salvation Army, we are fighting as hard as we can but our weapons are becoming antiquated and are no longer as effective for combating the enemy we are facing. The enemy has evolved and, in order to fight well and effectively, we must also adapt. What we are fighting for has not changed and will not change, but the methods we are using must. At our very core we desire to help people come to know the Lord, but simply desiring to do it is not enough. We must equip ourselves with the necessary skills and tools.

We can regain our evangelistic momentum, but not if we carry on in the same manner as we always have. Society around us is changing and the evangelism tools and strategies that we used in the past are simply no longer relevant or effective. We must become aware of how our world today communicates and interacts, as well as where people place their priorities. Our message is a one-of-a-kind lifesaving message, but unless people are listening, no one will hear it. I long to see The Salvation Army be an unstoppable evangelistic movement, but if we keep doing as we have always done, we will continue to see our numbers dwindle and the salvation of souls be an anomaly instead of the standard. ☺

Lieutenant Peter Robinson is the corps officer at Portage La Prairie, Man.

Are You an Aspiring Writer, Web Designer or Photographer? Join Our Editorial Workshop

Where: Kingston Citadel
816 Centennial Dr, Kingston, Ont.

When: November 10 from
10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Cost: \$10 (includes lunch)

Presenters: Major Jim Champ,
Editor-in-Chief; Geoff Moulton,
Assistant Editor-in-Chief; and
John McAlister, Web Producer
and Features Editor

RSVP by November 1 by contacting
the Editorial Department at
salvationist@can.salvationarmy.org
or 416-422-6119

