

The Three-Legged Race.

By Captain Michael Ramsay

The three-legged race is always fun to watch. Some people seem to run it with ease while others fall down and trip all over each other. I've seen dads tied to their kids who've simply picked them up and run with them without breaking the tie that binds. It is a lot of fun. The secret is that the winning couple is the pair who moves in sync with each other so that with every stride each matches their partner. Two independently minded people determined to do their own thing have no chance!

It is like that with covenants. The origins of the most commonly translated word for covenant (Berit[h], used 286 times in the Hebrew Bible) refers to being bound, tied or even shackled together, not unlike the three-legged race.

We in the Salvation Army are a covenanted people. Our covenants are very important to us. They can certainly be one of our organisational strengths. General Clifton wrote in his third pastoral letter that our covenants are one of the main ways in which the Lord chooses to provide opportunities for us to join him in his work for the salvation of the world. A covenant is more than a promise; it is more than a legal contract. It is a sacred covenant through which the Lord binds himself to us. Covenants are important.

Salvation Army soldiers pledge to uphold our movement's doctrine and, among other things, to abstain from all that can enslave the mind and body. We officers covenant to make soul-winning a primary focus of our lives. The Lord binds himself to us in these covenants. As Christians we are all yoked together with Christ.

Commissioner William Francis wrote in the Canadian Salvationist in June 2008: 'The key to upholding our sacred covenant is staying close to God, keeping faith with him.' This is significant and this relates very closely to the three-legged race.

Any of us who have ever been in such a race with our children – or years ago with our brothers and sisters or parents – will remember the challenges it represents. When one partner tries to move at a different pace than the other, neither goes anywhere very quickly. I am sure I am not the only person who has fallen on the ground laughing as my partner has started heading in the wrong direction. It's difficult to move, let alone win the race, when the one you're yoked to is going in the opposite direction to you.

It's the same with our covenants. If we tie ourselves to God in a sacred vow and do not follow him closely, it's impossible to even finish, let alone win, the race and experience victory with Christ. Once we've committed to the race, we need to press on towards the goal and not give up. If we try to go our own way, our covenant is of little or no use to us or to our Heavenly Father.

If we move in step with each other, bound together, with our arm around our partner, relying on his strength, the race is easy and the child can often move even faster than if she were running on her own. If we remain faithful to our covenant and allow our Heavenly Father to put his arm around us we will find it easier to walk in step with our Lord. At times, often when things are most challenging, we will find he is actually carrying us towards the finish line where we will celebrate victory in Jesus.