

JOURNAL OF AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY

JAC Online

Issue 129, October - November 2020

Copyright © 2020 Journal of Aggressive Christianity

In This Issue

JOURNAL OF AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY

Issue 129, October - November 2020

Editorial Introduction *page 3*
Major Stephen Court

War Zone Field Medics *page 5*
Captains Yasmin and Hector Acosta

A Brave New World: Post-Covid Mission *page 6*
Captain Xander Coleman

Converting Crisis Into An Opportunity *page 8*
Captain Manikya Mera

The Way I See It *page 9*
Captain Matt Kean

"Alexa - Find Rubicon" *page 12*
Lieutenant Scott Swires

How The Salvation War Looks Different Next Year *page 13*
Captain Anthony Barnes

Keep Expanding *page 15*
Captain André Mere Bara Togo

Covid: A Time For Cleaning House *page 16*
Captains Diane and Peter Hobbs

Homes, Coffee Shops, Laundrymats, and more! *page 17*
Captain Vinal Lee

Disturbing The Present *page 18*
Captain Brenna Lee

Hell On Earth To Kingdom Of God *page 19*
Major Osei Stewart

The Salvation Army In A Post Pandemic World: On The Frontlines
Against Nationalism *page 21*
Lieutenant Erik Johansson

Editorial Introduction

by Major Stephen Court, editor

Greetings in Jesus' name. Welcome to JAC129 – the 129th edition of Journal of Aggressive Christianity. This is a special issue: How The Salvation War Looks Different Next Year.

With all of the restrictions imposed in response to the pandemic, our conventional means of prosecuting the salvation war have changed. Concurrently, this is a kairos season for us to evaluate what was working and refine it and what wasn't working and retire it.

We've collected the hopes and intentions of Salvationists with varied perspectives weighing in with about 400 words or so (you'll notice the exceptions when you read them!) on 'How The Salvation War Looks Different Next Year'.

There are a handful of new JAC contributors complemented by some familiar names.

JAC129 leads off with 'War Zone Field Medics', by Captains Yasmin and Hector Acosta, in Seattle, USA, advocating a mix of first century and tech strategies.

Captain Xander Coleman, in Buckingham, England, describes 'A Brave New World: Post-Covid Mission', an optimistic imagining of customized spirituality coaching apps and more.

In 'Converting Crisis into an Opportunity', Captain Manikya Mera, in Melbourne, Australia, exhorts us to focus on developing relationships with people in our neighbourhood.

Captain Matt Kean, in Chilliwack, Canada, gives us his take, 'The Way I See It', from a different perspective than the rest of the contributions.

"The Salvation Army has come to a Rubicon," starts Lieutenant Scott Swires's article, 'Alexa – Find Rubicon'. Swires, in Brooklyn, USA, urges a restoration of our redeemed imagination.

In Las Vegas, USA, Captain Anthony Barnes prophesies, 'How The Salvation War Looks Different Next Year,' and a stronger integration of 'meet human needs' with 'in His name'.

In Bamako, Mali, Captain André Mere Bara Togo urges us to 'Keep Expanding', to keep on burning and anguishing for more souls.

Captains Diane and Peter Hobbs, Bellarine Peninsula, Australia, describe, in, 'COVID: A Time For Cleaning House', that we are experiencing a thorough house cleaning,

“especially within The Salvation Army internationally, so that the unshakable essentials stand clear and uncluttered: Jesus and His Great Commission.”

'Homes, coffee shops, laundrymats, and more!' Captain Vinal Lee is proposing a system of small groups meeting all around the community, probably starting in Indianapolis, USA.

Captain Brenna Lee, also in Indianapolis, USA, advocates, 'Disturbing The Present', to achieve the future that God has dreamed up for us.

Viral, political, and racial challenges can be overcome because God is still on His throne. That's the optimistic perspective in 'Hell On Earth To Kingdom Of God' by Major Osei Stewart, in Los Angeles, USA.

On his way from Sweden to Bulgaria (as part of the invasion force), Lieutenant Erik Johansson remains with, 'The Salvation Army in a post-pandemic world: on the frontlines against nationalism.'

Thanks to all of the contributors. God is not flummoxed by the virus. He's got a plan for His people. He's on the move. May these perspectives stir up your praying and imaginings and strategizing for this next stage of the salvation war.

Godspeed.

War Zone Field Medics

Captains Yasmin and Hector Acosta

Speculation

Because of the spikes and the time that it has taken Covid to work through society, we are speculating that church and church programs in The Salvation Army will not resume to the pre Covid norm for at least 12 months. It's worth noting that we as an organization estimated 2-3 months of disruptions to programs. It has now been 6 months and there is no end in sight. If and when we are able to open our building for church and programs, we anticipate capacity to be cut by 75% on the average.

Anticipation

Because of social gathering limits, the amount of business' closing, people being laid off and the unprecedented impact to the economy as a whole, we anticipate new waves of families in financial and housing crisis. We also foresee an awakening of spiritual hunger, need for hope, purpose and community.

Innovation

All of these elements create new opportunities for The Salvation Army to explore how best to serve suffering humanity. We would be tempted to stand by and wait for things to return to pre Covid. But as Tony Robbins has said, "change happens when the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain of change." Staying the same for this corps means we cease to exist. Changing means embracing the innovation opportunities we are faced with; one example is the ability to connect with those we serve and can potentially serve through social media platforms. As a result of Covid, this is one of the only ways of connecting with our communities, and I for one had been resistant to using social media against advice given to me years ago to incorporate it in ministry. The sad thing here is that this is not breakthrough stuff, I needed to start using this years ago.

The Church was always meant to be a movement not a place, which comes in handy when the building is closed down. For years we have compared ourselves to a hospital where the sick come to receive healing, but today it looks more like we are a field medic having to go into the war zone and provide support, and healing to those in need. This will force us to use technology along with some scoffed at methods like knocking on doors. We maybe need to use the first century model of home and neighborhood community groups with a digital twist to meet those needs today.

Personal application, I am teaching myself how to navigate social media platforms (and surrounding myself with those who use it), working on a church app for our local corps for streaming, on demand services, giving and communication, considering new expressions of old services like an after school program in our building pre Covid now looking like a mobile or side walk ministry.

A Brave New World: Post-Covid Mission

Captain Xander Coleman

If your lockdown has been anything like mine, you may have struggled to stay motivated, engaged and proactive in most areas of life. It may have been all you could manage to keep your heads proverbially above water, and respond to the challenges as they have arisen.

You may even, like me, have put on a few 'pandemic (covid19) pounds', and now be scrambling to try and reverse the damage.

I've signed up for an online coaching programme, which is designed to form long-term healthy habits with exercise and nutrition. There's a real life coach, who is accessible via email, a twice-weekly zoom meeting with the coach and other members of the programme, an app with daily tasks, habits, disciplines and teaching on nutrition and movement, and a monthly check-in with progress like weight, tape measures, etc. It's well organised, personal, and aimed at long-term habit formations that should stick and reap benefits long after the coaching programme has concluded.

Lockdowns in various places have accelerated local innovation in ministry – online worship meetings, Facebook Live, Youtube premieres, video-conferencing small groups and pastoral care. I had barely heard of these tools before March 2020, but now we have seen attendance at Sunday morning meetings, for example, increase tenfold through streaming on Facebook live.

Saints and sinners alike have also taken to consuming 'church' via social media. Though they miss singing together and in-person acts of worship and community, many believers have expressed a preference for online worship, which they can do in their pajamas while eating brunch, watch later in the day if they wish to, or have on in the background while they do something else. It's also created even more of a 'buyers market' for believers to find the worship style/preacher/music/teaching/aesthetic/etc that most engages them, rather than committing to a local congregation, with all of its local strengths and weaknesses.

At the same time, many who don't have an active faith have found their feeds flooded with churches experimenting with online content delivery. In the UK, an astonishing 24% of adults have watched or listened to an online worship service during lockdown, rising to 34% among the elusive 18-34 age bracket.

And 5% of UK adults who say they have watched or listened to a religious service since lockdown have never gone to church before. That's about 640,500 adults in the UK who experienced Christian worship for the first time.

Both the challenges and the opportunities of this chaotic moment are huge. Here are some conclusions we might draw as we move forward into the future regarding making disciples:

1. Online has its limitations when trying to reproduce Christendom-era church, but the digital reformation is upon us. It seems doubtful we can ever go back to how things were.
2. Consumer-based, market-driven online offerings are here, whether we like it or not. The challenge is to build authentic community amongst believers that goes deeper than tribes/ preferences/ theologies/ styles.
3. The lost are still seeking Christ, and may feel much more comfortable attending an online meeting than crossing the threshold of a church building.

I wonder if there is some missional mileage in a kind of spiritual online coaching; well-organised, personal, habit-forming and making use of the whole gamut of online tools available. Perhaps now is the time to experiment with a joined up approach to our church online strategy – using social media, email lists, paid adverts, apps, video conferencing and live streaming to create and deliver a comprehensive spiritual discipleship and coaching system that's scalable, accessible and that works for both new and established Christians.

It's a brave new world. Let's get involved!

Converting Crisis Into An Opportunity

Captain Manikya Mera

Covid-19 has affected the Church worldwide. Many churches around the world have been forced to virtualise themselves to stay linked to their congregation. For several years, the Church has worked linearly in buildings where the community is supposed to come and attend formal worship. This linear thinking never inspired churches to explore other ways in which they could be more effective in spreading the Gospel. The tragedy of the pandemic provided an incentive for the Church to step out of the box. Platforms like Zoom, where people can come together and Pushpay where tithe can be made online, are becoming more prevalent among churches. In Australia, more than 300 church buildings have been sold in the last 18 months because of the decline in traditional churchgoers.

Buildings have become an icon mostly used for business rather than its original intent. The conventional model of the Church is struggling to advance the Gospel and becoming more like an inward-looking community. The pandemic has reinforced the Church to lead the salvation war alternatively instead of a traditional way. The crisis is an opportunity, so this could be an opportunity for the Church to reflect and find alternative ways to spread the good news of Jesus.

One of the ways that have worked for us in Melbourne, Australia, is by focusing on relationships. We began developing relationships with the people in our local community as we became friends with people. We shared the Gospel through our words and character, which led many to believe in Jesus. Since 2014, our faith group has expanded to more than 100 people from different ethnic backgrounds. The pandemic did not have a significant impact on our version of the Church due to our focus was on building real relationships. In our faith community, there is no structured partnership between a pastor and a congregation; instead, we are all equal as friends, exploring Jesus and deeply reflecting on the Word of God. We don't have any worship service or songs, but we only read the Bible continuously week by week, and through that, people have come to faith.

The pandemic teaches the established Church a lesson to go back to the organic way of spreading the faith, not formalising it inside the buildings or one-hour worship, but instead keeping it informal, expressing in every moment of our lives through our character. The greatest challenge for the Church is not to learn new practices of sharing Gospel, but rather to unlearn old ways that have become outdated. Let us go out not to convert people, but to represent the true love of Jesus, with no agendas attached. Jesus healed people, showed the compassion that led many to believe in Him. Loving our God and our neighbour has done wonders and still does. So let us focus on these two greatest commandments and nothing else.

The Way I See It

Captain Matt Kean

The way I see it, the future of The Salvation Army has only two possibilities: ease or hardship. Call me a pessimist, or even a fatalist, but regardless of how the messenger is labeled, I don't think the outcome can be anything else. The reason I don't think there's much possibility of a third option is mainly because of the chief purpose of The Salvation Army officer; we are representatives of a holy God, by calling and by duty. This is woven into every part of our vocation and it gives us clear definition and sets out our reason for existing. Perhaps as much as (or even more than) any other job in the field of Christian ministry, The Salvation Army officer has been established to contrast the world and work tirelessly for the increase of Christ's fame and kingdom. I know that's a very bold statement, but I believe it can be fairly argued.

As it stands currently, there is a tension that exists within The Salvation Army and it has to do solely with the officer's God-given mandate to represent the holiness of Christ and proclaim His salvation. I don't believe I'm saying anything that isn't fairly well known. I've personally had the privilege of doing ministry in four territories over the last 15 years and this tension of which I speak seems only to be growing as years go on. Because of our hands-on, down-to-earth approach to the Gospel initially, our clothes have necessarily become tinged by the mud of the world. With that there's no immediate problem. After all, in many cases God has put some of the most softened and humbled people in that mud.

However, over many decades I think we've splashed and kicked the spiritual slop of the world into our eyes and our vision of the Gospel's supreme value has been blurred. The Gospel's unmatched power to save sinful human beings, such as we were, has been too much forgotten. I say that without apology because I believe it is evidenced by the vast majority of The Salvation Army's programmes marked with our trade-marked brand, the Red Shield. Granted, there are exceptions – thank Heaven for that! – but where The Salvation Army is recognized by the world it is because of the promotion of our own symbol rather than our promotion of Christ. Over time, as we have published more and more of our own praise rather than Christ's, we have allowed ourselves to be groomed both theologically and spiritually by a world that frankly hates our Saviour.

Let me explain further.

Our organization is the second largest provider of social services in Canada, the government being first. Our Red Shield is recognized around the globe and our good works have reached beyond physical borders, language barriers, cultural differences, religious disagreements, and so on since our beginning. We are often lauded by communities, businesses, philanthropists, politicians, and paupers for being ones that do the most good. All of this is BECAUSE of God's rich grace towards us, yet we bank the credit ourselves and share little of it with God, maybe not personally, but as an organization. For too long, The Salvation Army has been growing more and more accustomed to the world's praise, holding up the Red Shield with a sense of pride

because of the work we have done, and specifically for the work that the world likes to praise. But the cross we seldom carry in public and the Gospel we seldom proclaim!

Now, though, the world has changed, and it will continue to change. Yet, so has the shape of Christianity, or rather, the mold that it has been seen to fit. Most people would assume that church on Sunday is what it means to be Christian, hence, it has been the perceived model of our faith. In these times, however, it is already harder to depend on our Sunday meetings to guard our spirituality. Many aren't even permitted to attend churches. Like Samson who was given terms for his divine strength to remain, The Salvation Army, too, has been given certain conditions. Soldier after soldier, officer after officer, has vowed to stand in this world as worshippers of God, proclaimers of THE Truth, and living sacrifices for the Saviour. These are our holy criteria, yet, the world will never praise us for these. Ever! The Salvation Army is no longer able to claim that these holy criteria set by God at our birth can be met on a weekly basis in our buildings; we must find different ways to let them loose. It's unlikely that letting them loose in the public domain, having them exposed for all to see, will come with ease.

God doesn't care about our glory, but only His own. He wants the name of Jesus to be lifted up at any cost and every eye to behold Him. The message of Calvary is the only message with the ability to reconcile sinners to their loving Creator, and, according to the words of Christ, nothing other than their reconciliation brings any rejoicing to Heaven (see Luke 15). It's also true that The Salvation Army has an obligation to the grace of God to give ourselves entirely to the conditions He set for us – to be worshippers, proclaimers, and sacrifices.

The early days of The Salvation Army's existence has shown us what will likely come from our living these conditions without compromise; the early Church has revealed the same thing. The result is not ease, but hardship. They say 'history often repeats itself', but I'm more confident in the fact that God often does not. What He has said is carved in stone and is immovable. Consider honestly the words of Christ in His mountain sermon (see Luke 6:26), when He said, "Woe to you when people speak only well of you, for so did their fathers speak of the false prophets." Are these not warning enough for us who are called to be a movement of a different kind, the holy kind?

The way of ease is the way of the world. It will come to The Salvation Army when its officers are quiet, compromised, and timid in their portrayal and profession of Christ. This world wants our good works to look like the stuff it can produce on its own. It wants to be able to fix its own brokenness, solve its own problems, and wear its own crown without being told of its desperate need for God. Its praise, its support, as well as its money, will dry up when anyone refuses to lay down the banner declaring otherwise. So, it's to be expected that if an officer of The Salvation Army remains true to the convictions written into our birth, then it will mean that same officer will be shunned by the world that will not share those convictions.

When an officer refuses to raise the world's banner of spirituality without truth, religion without doctrine, sexuality without boundaries, love without cost, harmony without

humility, and politics without question, rest assured hardship will result. Sadly, The Salvation Army's current silence with regards to our promotion of the Gospel seems to suggest that such an officer will reap much of the hardship from the Red Shield organization that loves the world's praise. You see, the organization called The Salvation Army is only holy and pleasing to God as long as it upholds and endorses the covenant made by its officers, and that depends on those sitting in the highest seats of authority. If they want to remain in favour with the world that hates the cross of Jesus, then inevitably the officer who remains true to his/her covenant will be a thorn in their side, and a hindrance to the Red Shield.

The good news is that the two do not need to be opposed to one another, but only one can yield. It cannot be the officer, for if the officer were the one to yield, it would mean forfeiting the glory of Christ. If the organization called The Salvation Army will forfeit the praise of the world, exalt the word of God as the Truth, proclaim Christ as King above all, and remain uncompromised on the Lord's standard for its officers and soldiers, then both the Red Shield and the officer will shine with light of Jesus. It will equally mean that they will be sneered at by those who do not call Him Lord. But if the praise and approval of this world is the organization's preferred trophy, then inevitably the organization of the Red Shield will cut loose the covenanted ones and set them adrift. It has to. It simply couldn't afford such a Public Relations liability.

So, the way I see it, because of all this, the future of The Salvation Army has only two possibilities: ease or hardship. The latter is my hope. For we are not only blessed to believe in Jesus, but also to suffer for His sake.

Come soon, Lord!

"Alexa - Find Rubicon"

Lieutenant Scott Swires

Like Julius Caesar, The Salvation Army has come to a Rubicon. I believe that the Lord has, in His wisdom and kindness, brought us to a place where we need to make the decision to run where we have a habit of holding back. The Army has increasingly given up ground as leaders of innovation. We still rave about how Booth bought one of the earliest cars in England, they were less than a decade old, and held his famous motorcade in 1904. Booth was an early adopter, willing to make mistakes. Though I believe that there are many habits we need to develop, I will highlight three with this story.

First, Booth adapted to modern technology and methods that worked. Barna noticed a drop in church tech growth after 2005. Our YouTube channels show how ineffective we have become in using social media. YouTube is the second largest search engine online and Americans older than 75 go on it at least once a month. Studies show that most millennials believe they can learn anything on YouTube. This is not a fad or age specific trend. This is a large community asking questions about the One we love. Who is there to answer them? Online is just one method I'm highlighting. When the Booths saw the effectiveness of Charles Finney's methods they made his writings mandatory reading for officers while other Christian leaders scoffed. What is the language of leadership around revival culture in your area? Fruit-bearing ministries need prayerfully examined, not scoffed at.

Second, Booth was willing to make mistakes. To create a creative culture it is imperative to cultivate one where people know they will not be executed for making mistakes. Mistakes are necessary for progress. An officer once joked that in the Army we tend to shoot our wounded. It is interesting that out of the three people that received talents to invest it was the one that didn't try that was punished. Fear of punishment is directly related to not understanding God's love and counter to His mandate to create (1 John 4:18, Hebrew 11).

Finally, we need to restore our redeemed imagination. My mentor, Bob Jones, taught the redeemed imagination is the language of heaven. Holy Spirit has messages and assignments that are for the Army today, but we're still stuck on what He said 100 years ago. We can't live on yesterday's bread anymore. It's possible the Brengle of Today cannot be heard over the Brengle of Yesterday.

I get how scary this sounds. But I also get how many know it's time to cross the river. It is more important than ever to look to Him, because we have never passed this way before. Let's go get what the Army was promised. So get online, make mistakes, and be like those who dreamed.

How The Salvation War Looks Different Next Year

Captain Anthony Barnes

Over the past six months, the universal Christian church – not excluding our movement called The Salvation Army, has come face to face with navigating what has been labeled as a global pandemic. In the early days of the pandemic, congregations had to face the challenging reality of not meeting together physically. In the name of Social Distancing, we – the body of Christ, took precautions for personal and community wellness and safety, but we were unaware of, and didn't consider, the associated collateral. The novelty of operating in a new way was initially exciting for some. Without warning, the army was propelled into what is considered a current or relevant existence. No longer "behind the times" technologically, we began livestreaming our services. However, we quickly learned the realities of moving into something ill-prepared. We were ill-prepared technologically, emotionally, contextually, and in some cases, missionally. For the purposes of this discourse, we will focus on a portion of the missional aspect.

The Salvation War, as it's been coined, is what had driven The Salvation Army for generations; the battle to win souls for Jesus reflected our commitment to The Great Commission. Historically, testimonies in salvation and holiness meetings proved the legacy of the Salvation War. However, as of late, it appears – *in some places and cases* – the Salvation War has diminished, and in its place is a desire to create a refuge for the saints/soldiers who glory in the stories of old. As a result, when the place of refuge was removed, and we were relegated to online worship, we had no foundation to rely on; no "safe space" to simply tell our stories. Our saving grace is that this came by way of a lack of intention rather than by apathy.

Realizing the posture in which many of us have found ourselves, it is important that we take a step back, re-evaluate our origins and priorities, and adjust our focus from what has become primarily saint-centered efforts. We must reclaim our legacy and return to evangelistic campaigns for the Salvation of those who don't know, or need to be reminded of, Jesus.

This evangelistic campaign can happen in the one area that has been increased during this pandemic; social services. We have gained increased access to those in the margins of society. People who once found security in independent sustainability, now find themselves need assistance to make ends meet. We must begin thinking about how we integrate the part of our mission that says, "meet human needs" with "in His name". I think that we have been really good at meeting human needs, but in a statistic driven world, meeting needs has become the focus, while "in His name", or sharing His name, may have taken a back seat. Why not engage both? As my theology professor once shared, "we have a two-fold mandate to provide Spiritual Redemption AND Social Reformation". This doesn't mean that we need to explain the entire Roman's Road to Salvation while handing out a food box, but we have the opportunity to create a follow up plan and establish true community as opposed to what has become the normative practice of the Hit-And-Run method of administering social services. An intentional plan

for follow-up with our social service clients can be the first step to refining our efforts as we Wage Love in our communities this year, next year, and beyond.

Keep Expanding

Captain André Mere Bara Togo

Every work whose origin is divine communicates God's will to mortal humanity in a perspective of eternity. Death intervenes, and in so doing, constitutes a legion of witnesses marking the times and experiences of every human instrument used by God.

Today, William and Catherine Booth are counted as modern prophets gone. Although they are no longer of this world, their work still survives with force. The Salvation Army is a creation of one man and a woman. But when asked what will become of The Salvation Army after he and his children leave for the other world, William Booth wrote in 1908:

"The Army will remain, for God's will for it will always remain. Its discipline, which is the bond between its members, will always remain. The spirit burning with love for the salvation of souls will always remain. The hundreds of thousands of men and women of all classes, united by the strongest of bonds, will abide. Yes, I feel that this spirit is with me, it lives in my heart, it is in the work I do, it will inspire my words, it will make friends, it will provide me with the money I need. It will make me more than victorious in life, in death, and for eternity."

These words of William Booth are still relevant if we consider them in The Salvation Army's mission today. Since the genesis of The Salvation Army, its main purpose is known to all regarding its social and spiritual activities across the world. To maintain the momentum, it is necessary to wage a war without truce and mercy against vice and evil passions in all their forms.

We are confronted by a violent world which calls into question daily our Christian ethic. We are constantly facing the question of what it means to be a real Christian in today's world. We live in a very hostile century, presenting many challenges not only to our faith but also to our understanding of the world, family, and ministry. Our challenge would be to equip ourselves with all necessary armour in order to be able to resist all attempts in trivializing the sacred. We're called to stand on behalf of a society in perdition, while boldly overcoming all pitfalls, in an unambiguous way which proves to the world that the One in us is greater than the one in the world.

We are called to perpetrate Christ-like ways and practices in this dark time, to keep on burning and anguishing for more souls, to keep expanding the vision to all countries. Otherwise, we put off the light and our efforts of serving suffering humanity all are in vain. If we don't pursue this vision, we will compromise our mission on the way and drawn back into the mold the world is trying to impose upon us.

Covid: A Time For Cleaning House

Captains Diane and Peter Hobbs

Throughout Covid19 God has been giving us the best education and the main lesson being that God is in control, and we should never drop out of the Salvation War. God promises in His word that He treats us like His dear children and while for many Covid19 might have felt like a punishment, we have seen it as the best discipline, training that we have fully embraced. What is to be learnt from this experience? What needs to change? What is to remain the same? But always the most important underlying question of why?

For a decade my wife Di and I have almost been prepared for this lockdown as we were strongly led to make disciples, growing faith wherever life happened. For us that meant simply immersing people in the reality of the Trinity and teaching these new first generational disciples to immerse themselves in Scripture, to pray, listen to Jesus and do what He says. This prepares us for events like: pandemics, wars, persecution, lockdowns. Any circumstance where Salvationists will need to be ready and prepared to be led by the Spirit.

We have embraced the training of 2020 and discovered disciple making alone truly leads to being the best way to live. The fruit has been transformed lives and disciples raised, disciples who are now also making disciples.

But ultimately 2020 has been like a thorough housecleaning, and we believe this year God has been re-prioritising us especially within The Salvation Army internationally, so that the unshakable essentials stand clear and uncluttered: Jesus and His Great Commission.

Stripping back what Church is to the main thing: The presence of Jesus, amongst his spiritual family on mission together.

So in 2021 we see Disciple making continuing to be the main focus as it has been. When we make disciple making the main thing, we see God doing what is best for us, training us to live God's holy best. In the process we know we will continue to see transformed lives spread throughout community. Leading to organic missional networks which are forming all around the world!

“God is not an indifferent bystander. He’s actively cleaning house, torching all that needs to burn, and he won’t quit until it’s all cleansed. God himself is Fire!”

Hebrews 12:49 The Message

Homes, Coffee Shops, Laundrymats, and more!

Captain Vinal Lee

We are navigating the greatest communication shift since the invention of the printing press. The reality of this communication shift and the excitement of this change became evident to the entirety of the church in March 2020, when the Church had to learn the rhythms of this new neighborhood called social media. In a moment, the Church had to go entirely online and for the first time in 500 years unlocked the potential for the rapid advancement of the gospel in new and exciting ways. This leads me to ask the question, 'how will the salvation war look different next year?'

The first step will be the large and overwhelming acceptance of social media and websites as a strategic and intentional option to preach the gospel, rather than an acceptable substitute for when we can't meet in person. This season has shown us how wide we can spread the gospel with the same intentionality, but at a fraction of the cost of previously deployed methods. I believe in this new year that we will see exciting expressions of church online, which aim to plant new expressions of faith all around the world by leveraging the power of the internet and our local communities. This may look like a church whose primary worship service takes place entirely online but uses a system of small groups meeting around the community in homes, coffee shops, laundrymats, and more to foster a deeply connected community of worship. I believe the Church will lean into church online as a vibrant expression of faith connecting with people all over the world and around the neighborhood. We will see church online become a primary means of worship and church growth for many worshipping communities.

We can no longer ignore online or consider it a secondary option, but we must embrace the new play book that Covid-19 has given us and deploy church online strategies to reach the next and current generations with the gospel. Mark 2:22 in the Amplified Bible, Classic Edition says, "No one puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the bottles destroyed; but new wine is to be put in new (fresh) wineskins." I believe that the church in this new year will not return to old wine in new wine skins but will use the season God has given us to grow His kingdom like never before.

Disturbing The Present

Captain Brenna Lee

One of the bold statements given by The Salvation Army's Co-Founder, Catherine Booth is, *"If we are to better the future, we must disturb the present."*

Historically, we witness, through testimonies and text of the early days of The Salvation Army, the Booths and their soldiers disapproving of the living conditions both physically and spiritually throughout London. As a response, the Army's soldiers creatively met the needs of those who were hurting. They didn't develop programmatically but designed the ministry around two things:

- 1) Where the people were, and;
- 2) What the people needed, all for the glory of God!

Early Salvationists gathered their resources and, "preached the gospel of Jesus Christ and met human needs without discrimination." This ministry included preaching the Gospel in 'Open Air,' feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, befriending the friendless, cleaning impoverished homes, and so much more. As a result, hundreds of people who got saved through the blood of Jesus, transformed by the Holy Spirit, joined the fight to continue the Kingdom Advancement throughout the England and eventually the world.

As a programmer, I understand the joys that are experienced when our plans go well, and the woes when they are not executed appropriately. If the year of 2020 has taught us anything, it's that our plans are not concrete. I am beginning to appreciate more and more each day. How often are we given an actual moment in time where everything is off the table and were able to step back to reevaluate our ministry? This is our moment!

This is our moment to, "better the future [of The Salvation Army] by disturbing the present." It's our moment to reevaluate and ensure that we are still an Army firmly founded on the truth of the Old and New Testaments, with the primary focus to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, while meeting basic human needs without discrimination (not necessarily through a required program, but through ministry that is designed around where the people in need are and what the people we serve need).

So, how do we allow this unusual year to influence our focus? I believe it's an ample opportunity for us, The Salvation Army, to step back, observe what is necessity and what is not absolutely required, what has worked and what needs to be disturbed, in order for a brighter future.

Hell On Earth To Kingdom Of God

Major Osei Stewart

2020 cannot end any quicker as I am sure there are many who are just counting down to the end of what most have called a dreadful year or the year from Hell. It was difficult as we faced so many unforeseen obstacles and challenges this past year. So many unwanted changes and occurrences - from Coronavirus, masks, social distancing, hand sanitizing, health orders, quarantine restrictions - to the loss of life of so many people, like celebrities we “knew” from afar to our family and friends, loved-ones, near and far dying unexpectedly. This thing is maddening and there rings true a certain level of uncertainty that we have all experienced. And no doubt, we are wondering what should we expect in the next few months? Will things get worse? Will it get much better? For many, the outlook is grim.

However, Isaiah 41:10 says, *“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”*

These last few months, we also experienced the divisive political and racial tensions in the USA; the sin of racism has been exposed and people are up in arms and angry. Coronavirus seemingly has made our senses more acute of the sin of racism and hate that permeates our culture, nation and world. Across the country police brutality and other societal injustices are being confronted head-on. I believe we are at the precipice of change.

It has been a rough year, indeed. And I believe that we have had much opportunity to take advantage of our unwelcome circumstances, because so many are truly searching for answers and are wanting to escape the fear and worry that has troubled their hearts.

While I do not have any answers for what the future holds, what I can say with boldness and certainty is that God is still on the Throne – despite the bickering. Despite the uncertainty. Despite the deaths. Despite the protests and push back on the systems. In spite of it all, God still reigns, and He reminds us in Philippians 4:6-7 *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

As believers, we have a real opportunity to be present for the many that are hurting and broken because so many are desperately trying to find a way out of the madness. As believers, we have a real opportunity to be light in the dark world to let our light shine before others, so that they may ...give glory to our Father who is in Heaven. (Matthew 5:16) and be salt to bring flavor and seasoning to the bitterness of life.

In spite of the difficulties, we have been handed opportunities to take a step back and embrace the uncertainty by leaning even more into the Savior Jesus, trusting Him through each one. More importantly, we have an opportunity to make a kingdom difference by being on a united front to save souls and to minister to people whom are hurting, fearful, and worried. To bring the kingdom of God – Here and Now, serving as

vessels of intentional love, to people with whom we come into contact. Philippians 2:2 says, *“Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.”*

These days, it may feel like Hell on Earth, but the Kingdom of God is greater and will last forever and as believers we can be vessels of His love and His hope that will draw people to the Savior.

The Salvation Army In A Post Pandemic World: On The Frontlines Against Nationalism

Lieutenant Erik Johansson

Do you remember the time before the Corona-pandemic hit the world? Over the last three decades there has been a general understanding among almost all countries and political leaders from right to left, that open borders with free trade was desirable. In Europe, almost the whole continent had agreed to remove all border controls; goods and people were crossing countries without even thinking about it. Live in one country and work in another? Of course, who cares about borders anyways! Countries from all corners of the earth were connected, and goods and people were constantly on the move. A person could use his mobile phone in a small country village to order something from the other side of the world - and it would arrive within a few days! And in 2019 more than 4 billion(!) passengers traveled by air - a large proportion internationally!

A lot of things were of course still uncertain, and many problems remained, but one thing was sure: the way forward was open borders!

Then the pandemic hit the world. And everything changed. Europe, which had abolished most of their internal borders, was suddenly setting them up again. Families got stuck on different sides of newly erected borders in previously integrated, borderfree cities. The travel rates dropped to only a few percent of previous amounts. It was all supposed to be temporary, they said. A drastic measure for a short time. A bracket in the history of globalization. But now, when many parts of the world are slowly trying to get back to normal, something has changed. The border controls that were supposed to be temporary are in many cases still there. When traveling in Europe, citizens are required to show their passports to get through borders - for the first time in many years. And the airlines are talking about years before the travel rate will be back to normal again. If ever. At the same time politicians from left to right are talking about the need to strengthen their own production of goods and relying less on world trade while questioning whether this open world really was such a good idea.

Globalization has been replaced with nationalism.

Is that a problem? It is. And it's not primarily a political problem, but an attack on the very essence of Christianity. Let me explain why.

In the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, we can read about the events of the first Pentecost. The day when the Holy Spirit came - as was promised by Jesus upon his ascension where he had given his mission of saving the world to his disciples to fulfill. There, in a world full of Roman imperialistic nationalism as well as Jewish nationalism - where the first demanded full allegiance and worship to the emperor and the second claimed that the long waited for Kingdom of God was only for the Jewish people - the Holy Spirit comes in, and in a way that must have been shocking to everyone present, breaks down all barriers. Suddenly pagans and Jews, Romans and

Greeks, Arabs and Africans could all hear the good news of the Kingdom in their own language. In that moment everything changed. The sin of separation and division between people that had been plaguing the world since the tower of Babel had now come to the beginning of its end. Not only were all the barriers between people broken from that moment, but ever since, the Holy Spirit has given followers of Jesus the ability to speak new languages - sometimes through the miracle of hard work and sometimes through a more instantaneous miracle - that has broken down borders and divisions all over the world. All this, to point to and give a foretaste of the ultimate future, when the Kingdom of God has come in all of its fullness and borders and nations no longer exist.

Hence, globalization is not a “political” idea, but the very essence of Christianity. Like Paul summarized it: *“Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.”*¹

Few movements have been able to live this out as well as The Salvation Army. We don’t stop at an invisible unity above nations and borders, we make it very practical: We don’t pledge allegiance to national flags, instead we salute our Army flag. We have people from almost every race and tongue serving under one General, signing one set of Articles of War and thereby entering one covenant. As General Evangeline Booth expressed it *“The Salvation Army is a great empire without frontiers, made up of a tangle of races, tongues, and colors, such as never before in all history gathered together under one flag.”*²

What can we do to keep it that way? How can we make sure the Army is not swept away by the nationalistic wind blowing over the world? To start with, let’s embrace what we already are. A universal embrace of our covenant will by itself make it hard to let any form of nationalism creep into our bloodline. The current Order & Regulation for Soldiers already makes it very clear: **“...the Salvationist will not be a narrow nationalist”**.³

But more can be done to make sure nationalism doesn’t take hold of The Salvation Army, and emphasise that our allegiance is not to any nation or government - be them “good” or “bad” - but to Jesus Christ, God’s Kingdom and his Army of Salvation. For example:

The world of sports are united together through the Olympic Game that takes place every fourth year, alternating between countries and continents. Why not embrace a

¹ Colossians 3:11

² The quote appears in a few different versions, but the point remains the same in all of them. One could also quote General William Booth who in 1885 stated *“I don’t like the word ‘foreign’...for with the Army no land is foreign, and no people are aliens”* or General Bramwell Booth who at the brink of the first World War in 1914 stated that *“As Salvationists, our nation, like our Master’s, include all nations.”* and a year later saw the need to tell his officers *“Keep in mind that you are international - as Jesus was... We must uphold the principle of love and universal brotherhood, and the unity of all people in the presence of calvary.”* Hat tip to Primitive Salvationst Facebook page!

³ *“As a member of an international Movement the Salvationist will not be a narrow nationalist. Because he belongs to God, he is primarily a citizen of the world.”* (Chosen to be a Soldier - Order and Regulations for Soldiers of The Salvation Army, chap.IX, sect. 5)

similar set up for International Congresses? Let's already now schedule an **International Congress every 5 years**, rotating between the continents! That way we counteract this year's lack of international contacts and the coming together will strengthen our supranational⁴ camaraderie.

The Salvation Army equivalent to countries are its territories and commands. Depending on where you are in the world, they can encompass part of a country⁵, one country⁶ or many countries⁷. I suggest we ensure that **our territories don't match the national borders** by splitting up and rearranging those that currently are. That will serve as a visible sign that God's kingdom trumps the nations of the world.

There is a custom that if the Territorial Commander of a territory is local, the Chief Secretary should not be. Or the opposite. Let's take that one step further and make it a territorial requirement that **at least 20% of its officers serving must be from a different territory**. For a small territory like Sweden & Latvia that would mean that around 20 of the officers must be officers from outside Sweden or Latvia. Currently there are only a handful such cases. This would, except increasing the experience for both those who are going abroad and those staying to fight alongside the foreign officers, reminds us of the international nature of our movement.

When the Army was young new soldiers were issued a "Soldier's Pass". A document that proved the soldiership status of the person, which was to be renewed regularly - sometimes as often as once a month. Did the person for any reason not live a soldier's life, his passport would not be renewed and he'd lose his status as a soldier. In time this practice faded away, and is today only in use in a few countries. But let's **bring back the practice of a Soldiers Pass on a global level** - preferably also available on your smartphone! Not only is it a great discipleship tool that will solve the problem of soldiers on the rolls not matching the reality, it will also be a great visual tool to help us to embrace the fact that a Salvation Soldier is not primarily a subject to Caesar⁸ but to God⁹.

If we embrace these ideas, we shall see an Army that is even more strongly positioned to fight the poison of nationalism getting into our system and better live out the coming ultimate, borderless, nation-free future, already today.

⁴ Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines supranational as *"transcending national boundaries, authority, or interests"*.

⁵ Like India, that is made up of six territories.

⁶ like Australia.

⁷ Like the Eastern Europe Territory, consisting of Moldova, Ukraine, Romania and Georgia.

⁸ As a symbol of worldly governments.

⁹ Through his Salvation Army.