**Meeting God through the Salvos**

If you squint, tilt your head a bit, and let loose your imagination, you can easily spot the long-haired, lithe lead guitarist in Captain Jason Davies-Kildea.

It was the late ’80s, and a 17-year-old Jason was in a band called State of Mind, a string playing ring-in to a movement that rarely ventured beyond brass. His mates, young musos from established Salvo families, were active members of their corps and, Jason recalls, ‘playing with the band meant that I played Salvation Army youth crushes, youth groups, congresses, interchurch events like “Youth Alive” and even a Christian night club.’

It was at one of these events, a Christian music festival at the Myer Music Bowl, that the young guitarist in his first year of tertiary study found God. He subsequently and enthusiastically devoured the Bible and all he could find out about Jesus and Christianity – a pursuit of God that literally changed the direction of his life.

‘I had been happily studying at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music,’ says Jason, ‘when I pulled out to go and study theology at Whitley College. I knew that my plans to be a music teacher weren’t going to work out anymore and I was keen to find my way into some kind of ministry.’

The first opportunity to follow that path was a job with the Salvos’ Crossroads, initially at the Crisis Centre in St Kilda, shortly followed by a stint at the Tranmere St Youth Refuge, and later some employment and training programs. It was here that a relationship bloomed with his Crossroads co-worker, now wife, Michelle*, who also soldiered with Jason at the Northcote Corps.

After six years or so at Crossroads, Jason gained some additional, also valuable life and work experience by working in the IT sector. Then, late in 2003, Jason and Michelle took another step into the Salvation Army’s mission by becoming lieutenants in The Salvation Army; their daughters Madelaine and Courtney were still in primary school when they signed up.

Along the way Jason’s picked up his Diploma of Missiology, his Bachelor and Masters degrees in Theology (all from Whitley), and a Master of Arts degree in Social Science from RMIT. As of last month he has now completed and submitted his PhD study; his thesis is available here [his thesis is available here (1MB)](https://example.com/thesis).

‘The intersection of theology and social work has always been vital to me,’ Jason explains, ‘and they have kept each other honest in a sense – our theology in The Salvation Army always needs to be relevant and accountable to the people we meet and help with homelessness or addictions or family violence…

‘In my appointments and my study I’ve always had a foot inside the tent and a foot outside. My experience of The Salvation Army has led me to see that, at its best, it’s an incredible movement.

‘No-one is at their best all the time, but those experiences shape my understanding of The Salvation Army, and my commitment to serving God through The Salvation Army is as a compassionate group of people who are pursuing a better world together.

‘My criticisms of the movement, when they come, do not emanate from an outside
perspective; it comes from a person who is a committed part of the organisation, trying to help it always give its best and follow its mission compassionately.’

Jason shares that through the course of his doctoral thesis, which included a survey of officers, ‘I had a lightbulb moment, that our organisational identity is a contested social construct; and that is a healthy thing. It’s that very disagreement, and thoughtfulness, and contending, in a sense, that makes us who we are and what we are becoming.’

* Captain Michelle Davies-Kildea is currently the chaplain at State Social Command – Victoria’s Crisis Care Services network.

Timeline of service
2003 The Davies-Kildeas were chaplains at St Kilda’s Bridge Network and the Crisis Services Network, as well as running the St Kilda Chapel.
2004 -08 The Davies-Kildeas were corps officers of Brunswick Corps (Vic.)
mid-2008 Lieut Jason Davies-Kildea was also appointed as the Melbourne Central DSPS
2012 As well as serving as the MCD DSPS, Captain Jason Davies-Kildea is also appointed to head up the Victorian Social Policy and Programme Unit.
2015 Jason is appointed full-time to the work at the VSPPU.

In addition to these appointments, he has also served as a lecturer and tutor at the Training College for a decade, including developing several new courses in theology and community services.