

## **The Thinking Salvationist: Thinking Big**

A friend of mine, a teenager, recently fell off his skateboard and grazed his leg badly. There was gravel and dirt stuck inside the wound, yet being a typical, stubborn teenager, this friend decided that the best course of action was to put a bandage over the wound so that it would stop bleeding onto his clothes. Day after day he would remove the pus and new blood which was seeping from and around the wound, but didn't take the time to look at the wound itself and see how it was healing. After two weeks of this, my friend's mother decided that as the pain was still present, it was time to visit a Doctor, who promptly concluded that due to a lack of inspection and proper care, the wound had become grossly infected. The Doctor was astounded that the teenager had consistently treated the symptoms of the wound, but had done nothing to treat the wound itself.

Within The Salvation Army, and within the greater church, we so often behave like this teenager when it comes to issues of justice within our world. For every social ill we face in our day-to-day ministry, there is a larger-scale issue at the root. For instance, a homeless man asking for food at his local Corps is an immediate problem. There is no question that there are tangible, practical needs which must be recognised and met. However there are larger problems also in place. His homelessness and hunger could, for example, be evidence of a failing welfare system within the country in which that man lives. Like the teenager with the wounded leg, the Salvation Army Welfare Worker can satisfy the man's immediate needs by finding suitable accommodation and providing him with a meal (taking care of the smaller-scale, although not less-important problems). However, these acts alone do little to challenge the larger systemic issues which caused those needs in the first place (the large-scale issues) – that is, to treat the actual wound itself.

In 1895, Joseph Malins wrote a poem entitled 'A Fence or an Ambulance' (See Appendix A), in which he pointed out the importance of prevention. The poem tells of the people of a town which, having a dangerous cliff within its vicinity, discuss the best course of action in protecting people from being harmed by falling down the cliff. Some argue that placing a fence at the top of the cliff would prevent people from falling in the first place, while the majority argues that placing an ambulance at the foot of the cliff would allow fast response to those who have fallen. The poem continues:

*"Then an old sage remarked, "It's a marvel to me  
That people give far more attention  
To repairing results than to stopping the cause,  
When they'd much better aim at prevention.  
Let us stop at its source all this mischief," cried he;  
"Come, neighbors and friends, let us rally,  
If the cliff we will fence,  
We might almost dispense  
With the ambulance down in the valley".*

This metaphor for proactive prevention and reactive charity is as relevant today as it was in 1895. Across the world, The Salvation Army is brilliant at

responding in an effective and timely manner to social problems which appear. Our work as a charity, a result of our ‘heart to God, hand to man’ mandate, is reputable across the world in areas from rehabilitations centres to food assistance. However, it is time for us to move from a reactive modus operandi to a proactive one – attempting to eradicate new issues on a larger scale before they become day-to-day problems. As an international body, we need to look at the bigger picture, because it is these bigger picture concepts which dictate the way in which the world operates. To be ignorant of these concepts, yet complain about and attempt to fix the ways in which they’re manifesting themselves on a day-to-day level in our corps and social centres, is to miss the point entirely.

As part of The Salvation Army’s recently-released Vision Statement of “One Army, One Mission, One Message”, Salvationists are expected to “emphasise our integrated ministry” and “stand for and serve the marginalized”<sup>1</sup>. By ‘thinking big’, we can achieve both of these aims. However, this is not a new concept. In the early days of The Salvation Army, William Booth was recognised and valued for his ability to think on both a big-picture and small-picture scale simultaneously – that is, while challenging social evils on a big-picture scale he came up with practical answers to the manifestations of these problems on the day-to-day level. For example, upon noticing the many unemployed in Australia, Salvationists (under Booth’s advice in In Darkest England and the way out) established the first Labour Bureau in Melbourne. This bureau used a model which could be employed on a large scale, and therefore was subsequently adopted by both the Australian and British governments, completely altering the ways in which these countries dealt with unemployment.

Booth recognised the importance of challenging the root causes of problems, and this recognition can be seen through his Seven Principles for Salvation Army Social Services ministries (see Appendix B). Principle Two states that Salvation Army programming must “include strategies that alter social circumstances and outside forces as they contribute to suffering”<sup>2</sup>, and the remaining Principles set out practical ways to do so. Paraphrased into modern language, Principle Three argues that “Any remedy worthy of consideration must be on a scale commensurate with the evil with which it proposes to deal. It is no use trying to bail out the ocean with a pint pot”<sup>3</sup>. Booth recognised that you cannot fight homelessness and hunger by feeding one person – a larger-scale response is required.

In many areas in which The Salvation Army works, the need for charity could be eradicated if the root problems were addressed. There are social issues in which The Salvation Army is very involved in the reactive response to, yet in some cases, we are doing little to challenge the large-scale problem, failing to be proactive in rectifying the problem in its early stages. For example, The

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<sup>1</sup> Bond, L., ‘Vision’, The Salvation Army International, accessed 4<sup>th</sup> March 2012, <http://www.salvationarmy.org/ihq/vision>

<sup>2</sup> Bollwahn, P., ‘Communion with the Poor’, The Salvation Army International Social Justice Commission, Speak Out conference, 2010, accessed 12<sup>th</sup> December 2011, <http://www.e-summit.org/conference/Communion-with-the-Poor.html>

<sup>3</sup> Campbell, W. & Court, S., Be a Hero, 2004, Destiny Image Publishers, Pennsylvania USA, p 143

Salvation Army, in many countries, is heavily involved in Chaplaincy and counseling services for those returning home from service of countries in various wars, yet in many cases, is doing little to challenge the actual sending of men and women to war in the first place. As will be discussed in a later article in this series, the case for refraining from sending citizens to war is much more compelling than the case for, yet as war is a socially accepted norm, little is done to challenge its very existence. While this could be considered to be an extreme example, perhaps it is time that The Salvation Army tackled some of these socially-accepted practices and challenged them on a big-picture scale.

The need for effective Advocacy within The Salvation Army is being recognised in many parts of the world. The International Social Justice Commission advocates at the United Nations for those whom we serve in our Corps and Centers. Additionally, various territories have integrated advocacy into their programs and staffing considerations. Luke Chapter 10 explores the concept of a neighbour, and Jesus tells us that “every person is our neighbour so what happens to each person, matters”<sup>4</sup>. Perhaps we have not even met these neighbours yet, but as the movement who is called to care for “the lost, the last and the least” we must be the voice for those who have no voice. My prayers is that God will open our hearts and minds to the changes He wants to make in our societies – both small and large scale. Let us pray also that He gives us the courage to use the voice He has given us to stand up for the voiceless... whether we know them or not.

Let us be an organization who, being aware of that which is occurring around them, recognizes problems when they appear rather than when they are too big to rectify. Let us continue to perfect our work as the ‘ambulance at the foot of the valley’ while working hard to build a ‘fence at the top of the cliff’. As individuals, let us listen to what God is trying to say through our thinking and our advocacy for others. Let us be Salvationists who hear God’s living, relevant word for today’s world and who act on it to bring about His Kingdom on earth. Let us be Thinking Salvationists.

#### **So what can I do?...**

- When recognizing a problem, attempt to look at the ‘big picture’. Think about the root causes of the problem and why the problem exists in the first place.
- Be confident in your knowledge of issues as a practitioner. The Salvation Army holds much respect in many countries because of our on-the-ground, working knowledge of societal problems. Use this well-earned respect to encourage bigger changes.
- Stay up to date with current world issues. Each day, read the Newspaper from front to back, or subscribe to an email update that will

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<sup>4</sup> Bailey, B. & Bailey, C., ‘The Salvation Army and the UN – Being Good Neighbours’, Speak Out Online Conference, 2011, accessed 12<sup>th</sup> January 2012, [http://www1.salvationarmy.org/IHQ/www\\_ihq\\_isjc.nsf/vw-dynamic-index/48CD772FAF2E742802578AF0053CE6D?openDocument](http://www1.salvationarmy.org/IHQ/www_ihq_isjc.nsf/vw-dynamic-index/48CD772FAF2E742802578AF0053CE6D?openDocument)

send you an email each morning with summaries of current issues. Foreign Policy, CNN and Stratfor are good examples of these.

- Surround yourself with people who are passionate about different issues and try to discover why they're so passionate.
- Speak to leadership in your Division or Territory when deciding how to act. The Salvation Army may already be working towards the same goal; in which case, come alongside those already working and see what you have to offer.

## Appendix A

### The Fence or the Ambulance by Joseph Malines

'Twas a dangerous cliff, as they freely confessed,  
Though to walk near its crest was so pleasant;  
But over its terrible edge there had slipped  
A duke and many a peasant;

So the people said something would have to be done,  
But their projects did not at all tally:  
Some said, "Put a fence around the edge of the cliff";  
Some, "An ambulance down in the valley."

But the cry for the ambulance carried the day,  
For it spread through the neighboring city:  
A fence may be useful or not, it is true,  
But each heart became brimful of pity,  
For those who slipped over that dangerous cliff,  
And the dwellers in highway and alley  
Gave pounds or gave pence, not to put up a fence,  
But an ambulance down in the valley.

"For the cliff is all right if you're careful," they said,  
"And if folks even slip and are dropping,  
It isn't the slipping that hurts them so much  
As the shock down below when they're stopping".

So day after day as those mishaps occurred,  
Quick forth would these rescuers sally,  
To pick up the victims who fell off the cliff,  
With the ambulance down in the valley.

Then an old sage remarked, "It's a marvel to me  
That people give far more attention  
To repairing results than to stopping the cause,  
When they'd much better aim at prevention.

Let us stop at its source all this mischief," cried he;  
"Come, neighbors and friends, let us rally'  
If the cliff we will fence,  
We might almost dispense  
With the ambulance down in the valley".

"Oh, he's a fanatic," the others rejoined:  
"Dispense with the ambulance? Never!

He'd dispense with all charities too, if he could.  
No, No! We'll support them forever.

Aren't we picking up folks just as fast as they fall?  
And shall this man dictate to us? Shall he?  
Why should people of sense stop to put up a fence  
While their ambulance works in the valley?"

But a sensible few, who are practical too,  
Will not bear with such nonsense much longer.  
They believe that prevention is better than cure;  
And their party will soon be the stronger.

Encourage them, then, with your purse, voice, and pen,  
And (while other philanthropists dally),  
They will scorn all pretense and put a stout fence  
On the cliff that hangs over the valley.

Better guide well the young than reclaim them when old,  
For the voice of true wisdom is calling,  
To rescue the fallen is good, but 'tis best  
To prevent other people from falling.

Better close up the source of temptation and crime  
Than deliver from dungeon or galley;  
Better put a strong fence 'round the top of the cliff,  
Than an ambulance down in the valley.

## William Booth's Seven Principles for Social Service Ministries

from

'In Darkest England and the Way Out', published 1890.

1. Programming must lift up and facilitate change at the personal level whenever matters of character or conduct are at the root of individual or familial dysfunction;
2. Effective intervention must include strategies that alter social circumstances and outside forces as they contribute to suffering;
3. The scale of the intervention must, by design, be commensurate with the human outcomes and life changes sought;
4. Effort must be sustained over time, sufficient to support long-term growth;
5. Efforts must be specific, measurable, realistic, feasible, and motivating yet practical in every sense;
6. Intervention must not unintentionally injure those it is intended to benefit;
7. While assisting one individual or population, our intervention must not negatively impact the well-being of others