

Exploring The Salvation Army's God-given identity

Secretary for Mission Lieut-Colonel Drew McCombe and Secretary for Communications Lieut-Colonel Dean Pallant present the findings of the Identity Task Force

“Salvation Army history shows what can happen when a powerful message is communicated effectively, empowered by a life-changing identity”



Love God
Love Others

IN late 2019 we were appointed to lead an Identity Task Force to review the vision, mission and values statements used by The Salvation Army in this territory. The work was necessary because our current identity is inconsistently understood and presented. Corps, centres and headquarters use a variety of mission, vision and values statements and logos. People involved with The Salvation Army have different understandings as to who we are and what differences we seek from our work.

A strong, consistent identity helps answer questions such as 'Who are we?' 'What are we doing?' and 'What do we want to be in the future?' These are important questions for everyone involved in the life of the Army – not just THQ. Any organisation's identity can become confused and even contradictory. This is a particular risk for The Salvation Army because we are involved in so many different activities.

We are not simply a local evangelical church. Neither are we only a homelessness charity or a social service agency or a chain of charity shops or groups of musicians or an insurance company or a leader in the fight against human trafficking and modern slavery. All this work makes a vital contribution to Salvation Army life and the good of society. Our diverse identity is a strength, but it can also be a weakness if we disagree about our vision, mission and values.

The Salvation Army's identity is God-given and God-sustained but it is vulnerable to being shaped by ungodly pressures that squeeze and distort it. The Army needs an identity that is dynamic and generates godly energy to ensure we faithfully serve the present age.

We are part of the universal Church, raised up by God with a unique identity and proud history. However, in every generation, The Salvation Army needs to explore its God-given identity. Our identity must have the capacity to make sense to today's Salvation Army members as well as employees, volunteers, the people we serve, our supporters and our ecumenical partners. The Salvation Army's identity needs to be large enough to encompass all aspects of our work in the one 'tent'.

In our deliberations with the task force, as well as with the Territorial Leaders Conference, Territorial Advisory Council and other groups, we identified serious risks in allowing different identities ('tents') to conflict and confuse. God's identity for The Salvation Army must animate every aspect of work with life and love.

The Salvation Army made sense to people in the 1880s and 1890s. In the 10 years after The Christian Mission became The Salvation Army almost 1,000 corps were opened in the UK and Salvation Army work started in 21 other countries, from the USA to Australia, Canada to the Netherlands, Jamaica to India, Norway to South Africa. The Salvation Army had a vision and mission for the world that inspired and motivated all kinds of people. Salvation Army history shows what can happen when a powerful message is communicated effectively, empowered by a life-changing identity.

However, the words and images used by the first Salvationists do not have the same impact today. For example, the motto 'Blood and Fire' does not make sense to contemporary UK society. We still believe in the vital power of the blood of Jesus and the fire of the Holy Spirit, but we need other words to communicate these eternal truths. Even the identity and methods used in the 1990s and 2000s won't necessarily connect today. In a rapidly changing world we must pay careful attention to our identity.

We have a distinctive and trusted reputation. A nationally representative sample of 1,000 adults recently reported that, when prompted, 90 per cent of people know of The Salvation Army and 64 per cent say they have seen the red shield logo in the past six months. Seventy per cent say they trust The Salvation Army a 'great deal or quite a lot'. We must build upon our existing identity to ensure our Army connects, inspires and transforms people and society in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Our Vision: Fullness of life for *all* with Jesus

LOVE GOD, LOVE OTHERS

The Identity Task Force was advised by a Christian who is also an expert in communications. He felt The Salvation Army required more than a vision statement, a mission statement and a set of values. He urged us to agree a few words that explain who we are and frame everything we do. After much prayer, reflection and discussion we agreed on four words. 'Love God, Love Others', based on Jesus' greatest commandment in Matthew 22:37–39 to 'love the Lord your God' and 'love your neighbour as yourself'. 'Love God, Love Others' underpins, inspires and motivates everything we do in every part of The Salvation Army. We must not simply love God and ignore others. Neither should we love others and behave as if God does not exist. The Salvation Army's wellspring, its driving force, is summarised in 'Love God, Love Others'.

OUR VISION

The territory also needs a measurable vision statement to help us capture the difference we want to make in the world. After much discussion, the Cabinet approved a new vision statement: 'Fullness of life for all with Jesus.'

This is 'Our Vision' for every part of The Salvation Army. It is inspired by the words of Jesus: 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full' (John 10:10).

No words can adequately capture the vision of boundless salvation that God intends for the world and everything in it. However, 'Fullness of life for all with Jesus' includes every aspect of Salvation Army life. We believe everyone can enjoy fullness of life with Jesus. It is aspirational – we are not there yet – but this is what we strive towards.

OUR MISSION

Having agreed 'Our Vision' we need to know how we are going to get there. 'Our Mission' focuses on five key priorities. They are not arranged hierarchically. They overlap and mutually support each other.

Our Mission:
To share the good news
To serve others without discrimination
To nurture disciples of Jesus
To care for creation
To seek justice and reconciliation

When these priorities are present, The Salvation Army is working towards 'Our Vision' of 'fullness of life for all with Jesus'. Each of the five priorities of 'Our Mission' are rich in meaning and help us explain to 21st-century society why the Christian message and the work of The Salvation Army is relevant and desperately needed in our communities and nations.

Of course, this is not all new. The Army's identity comes from God whose purposes are unchanging. 'Our Mission' builds upon 'saving souls, growing saints and serving suffering humanity'. The TIDE mission priorities (transformation, integration, discipleship and effectiveness) are being taken forward, for example, by the Structural Co-ordination and Design Group, who are focusing on transformation, integration and streamlining. As the writer of Ecclesiastes stated: 'History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new' (Ecclesiastes 1:9 *New Living Translation*). However, we need to find fresh ways to communicate the good news of God's love to every generation.

The Identity Task Force was also tasked with affirming the territory's values. Due to the pandemic we did not complete this work, which is being taken forward by a group chaired by Major Beverly Baker. They are making good progress so you can expect to hear more about 'Our Values' soon.

Our mission

SHARE THE GOOD NEWS

At the heart of The Salvation Army's mission is a passion to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ far and wide. This is not an optional extra. The Salvation Army only does what it does because our inspiration and vision come from peoples' ongoing relationship with Jesus. We know the difference our relationship with God makes in our lives and we don't want anyone to miss out.

SERVE OTHERS WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION

The Salvation Army responds to people without discrimination. God calls us to be with the people we serve. In 'being with' people – as against 'doing for' people – together we find solutions and make progress because we are all made in the image of God. We are called to share love in a too often loveless world. 'Love God, Love Others' inspires every aspect of our work.

NURTURE DISCIPLES OF JESUS

The future of The Salvation Army depends on nurturing current and future generations of Christian disciples who, filled by the Holy Spirit, share the good news of Jesus, resulting in more disciples. Like athletes, Christian disciples need to practise staying fit for God's demanding mission. Habits such as prayer, Bible reading, corporate worship, music, tithing and helping others are vital. The Salvation Army believes being a disciple of Jesus and experiencing the blessing of holiness is the way to experience fullness of life.

CARE FOR CREATION

The Salvation Army is committed to helping change attitudes, resulting in a more responsible use of our planet. We seek to provide practical care and advocacy for people affected by damage to the environment. People will not experience fullness of life unless God's creation is protected and cared for.

SEEK JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION

People can experience a fuller life while we are on Earth – we don't have to wait until we die. God longs for justice for all people. Therefore, The Salvation Army will speak out against injustice. We fight not simply the effects of injustice but also the systems and structures that enable injustice. Seeking reconciliation is also an essential part of Salvation Army life. Justice and reconciliation are vital activities to achieving 'Our Vision' of 'fullness of life for all with Jesus'.



Love God
Love Others

Our identity principles

In addition to the three new statements, the Cabinet have approved a set of principles to guide and strengthen the identity of The Salvation Army in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.

Our Identity Principles are:

- The identity of The Salvation Army originates in God and is rooted in God – Father, Son and Spirit.
- The Salvation Army must be Spirit-filled and life-giving for all people.
- The Salvation Army must consistently explore, embrace and strengthen our God-given, God-inspired identity, which is part of the mission of God in the world and the wider Church.
- The identity of The Salvation Army must be faithful to God's purposes and relevant and engaging to a range of audiences. For example, the general public, corps members, employees, supporters, volunteers, officers, media and parliament.
- The Salvation Army's identity must be big enough for every part of the territory to understand itself and be appreciated as part of one Salvation Army, contributing to 'Our Mission'. Fragmentation or narrowing the identity of the Army poses a risk to an inclusive and diverse Salvation Army.

Every part of the Army is welcome to use the three new statements, but we are not having a big rebranding launch. Rather, THQ will start using the new statements and develop and share resources that explain and promote our reimagined identity.

We thank the members of the Identity Task Force for their hard work and commitment. We pray this work will strengthen and embed our God-given identity into every aspect of Salvation Army life. We, the people who serve and work through The Salvation Army, need to understand who we are and why we do what we do.

We need to be clear, confident and consistent as we live out the gospel of Jesus and 'Love God, Love Others' in every aspect of our lives. May God help us do this faithfully and fruitfully.