



WHAT DOES A GLOBAL COMMUNITY LOOK LIKE? Content to inform teaching or a talk

Read Philippians 2:1-11

‘Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.’

Biblical Context

In the reading from Philippians, Paul is encouraging his readers in Philippi to love one another and not to look to their own interests but to those of others. What did that mean when he wrote it? Philippi, like many of today’s cities, was cosmopolitan, with people from a variety of backgrounds and walks of life. ‘Others’ (v4) may have referred to people not like the readers - strangers as well as neighbours.

This reflects Jesus’ instruction conveyed in Luke 10:25-37, for us to ‘love our neighbour’ with the implication that our neighbours may well be from different places and cultures. Considering and valuing others’ interests, regardless of who they are, links us with Christ, who was the true example of humility.

Here are three examples from The Salvation Army around the world that highlights community at work:

1) Kenya

In partnership with The Salvation Army in Kenya East, and with funding raised through the United Kingdom and Ireland Territory, community members in Kilome have constructed a sand dam across their local riverbed.

Sand dams are very effective ways to turn a seasonally dry riverbed into a year-round source of drinkable water.



The Kenya East Territory has helped to build several of these; the community do most of the labour with The Salvation Army supporting with specialist materials and technical oversight.

The construction of the sand dams is part of wider project which also includes the formation of 'self-help groups' in which people contribute small amounts of money to a shared pot. Group members can then take loans from the pot in order to start small businesses or to pay for necessary costs such as medical bills or school fees for their children.

The self-help group in this particular village approached The Salvation Army for support in building a sand dam in Kilome to help them to access water and therefore be better equipped to farm on the surrounding land. The Salvation Army responded positively.

The work of building a sand dam is gruelling. The group that contributed their time and effort - carrying huge amounts of stone and sand long distances for days on end - was mostly made up of elderly men and women. They worked for the good of their whole community. They are not the ones who will benefit from later decades of clean water provision or from improved harvests, as their own time in the fields is nearly over. Yet they servant-heartedly acted, as encouraged in Philippians 2:4, 'in the interests of others'.

2) Pakistan

During 2022 Pakistan was hit by extreme flooding. The Salvation Army has been working to support communities that have been impacted. In Mehar, 75 per cent of the houses were damaged in the floods and much of the livestock which the community depended on for income and food were killed. Before the floods this community could access healthcare within 30 minutes by bicycle, but it now takes them three hours due to the damage to infrastructure. The boys' school in the area was damaged by the floods and children were unable to attend school for months.

Immediately after the floods The Salvation Army distributed wheat flour, rice, dhal, cooking oil, milk, salt, sugar and tea in what is known as 'rapid response'. This covers immediate life-saving actions that take place in the days and weeks following a disaster. Over time, the response moves on to a longer-term approach. In Pakistan a project was established to distribute vouchers for shelter repair and agricultural items.

The Pakistan Territory is also being supported by International Headquarters to implement disaster risk reduction in the hope of making communities more resilient to such extreme weather events.

In a country such as Pakistan where it is not always possible to use the name of Christ in our external facing work, The Salvation Army is meeting people at their point of need and embodying the likeness of Christ in the way that they respond.

3) Tanzania



In Tanzania, an overwhelmingly rural country, livestock keeping is invaluable in ensuring people get a varied diet. A 2019 study by The Salvation Army in Llembo, in the Mbeya district, found there were multiple challenges hindering livestock production, such as inadequate markets, low-quality animal feeds, and diseases.

In response The Salvation Army worked with local communities to set up a Livestock Banking project, aiming to support small-scale farmers to overcome the barriers to effective livestock production.

As part of the project, farmers formed village livestock groups through which they each received an improved breed of animal, such as a goat, pig or poultry. Breeding such animals can significantly improve food security and income as they provide families with meat, milk, eggs, and other products that they can eat or sell. All members of the group benefit through a 'pass on, pass back' model in which recipients return one or more of their animals' litter to the group to be passed on to another member.

The groups soon evolved to include savings and loans. As in the story from Kenya, it is community cohesion and an attitude of sharing that ensures the project's success. Everyone contributes, even a small amount, so that all in the group can thrive.

Conclusion

These examples of The Salvation Army's work with communities around the world are shared not only to inform but also to inspire. Thanks to the wonders of communication, the internet and air travel, the Christian community that Paul is urging the Christians in Philippi to have with one another can, in today's world, be a global Christian community across hundreds of cultures, languages and histories. Paul's words then take on a new and beautiful image of Christian togetherness - loving one another though we may never meet.

Discussion Questions

- What does it mean to be part of a community?
- Who do you consider your community to be?
- Why is community important?
- How can we actively include people in our community?
- How can we foster community across the globe?
- What can you bring to your community to help it thrive?