

CY Conference Sending Talk - Going Viral

Raising Influencers, Not Audiences.

Who gets to shape and influence what happens next?

Not just who attends conferences or volunteers, but who gets to speak, lead, influence direction, and help discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to The Salvation Army today.

We began the day reflecting on Palm Sunday and Holy Week, moments where Jesus openly confronted the powers, systems, and dominions of the world. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus makes it possible for us, and the young people we journey with, to live under a different influence: the Kingdom of God rather than the systems of this world.

God of participation

This matters because the story of the Bible is not one of exclusion or hierarchy, but participation. God invites human beings, young and old, into his mission of restoring all creation. That invitation is not delayed until someone reaches the “right” age, qualification, or role.

“The Spirit of God is not rationed out on birthdays. There is no junior or trainee Holy Spirit.”

Scripture consistently affirms the voices and influence of children and young people.

Jesus welcomed children when others saw them as interruptions. In Mark 10:13-16, he made space for them and declared that the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. In Matthew 18:1-6, Jesus placed a child at the centre of a conversation about greatness, teaching that welcoming children is, in fact, welcoming him. Psalm 8 reminds us that God establishes strongholds through the praise of children and infants.

Anyone who has been in a space where children and young people are worshipping together can recognise this truth. These moments often push back against weariness, cynicism, and despair, reminding us that God is very much at work.

A Picture of the Forest

During the European Youth Event in the Netherlands, with over 600 young people gathered in worship, an image emerged that has continued to resonate: a forest.

In the picture, mature trees form a thick canopy. Beneath them, young saplings are alive but struggling—starved of light. Then something intentional happens:

branches are carefully pruned. Not because the older trees are bad or unwanted, but because the canopy has become too dense.

As light begins to reach the forest floor, young trees start to grow and flourish. They are still protected by the surrounding forest, nourished by deep roots and fallen leaves. Old and young thrive together, and the forest is renewed.

This image points to a needed cultural shift. It is not about removing older voices, but about courageously pruning the space, power, and influence those voices occupy, so others can grow.

Power Sharing in Everyday Life



A second, much smaller image brings this big idea into everyday practice: a simple keyring phone charger cable.

It's not impressive or expensive, but when your phone is dying, that small, ordinary object becomes vital—because it is available when it's needed. In the same way, power sharing with children and young people cannot live only in strategy documents or vision statements. It has to be something we *carry with us*, woven into our daily rhythms and responses.

Creating space is rarely about grand gestures. It is built through small, intentional practices:

- truly listening,
- involving young people in decisions that affect them,
- inviting them to co-create mission and ministry rather than simply helping with adult ideas,
- and centring everything in relationship and mutual respect.

Many of us are good at asking young people to *turn up*. The harder and more important work is learning to ask them to *speak up*, and being willing to change in response.

Why this really matters

This is not about building better youth programmes, or even a bigger Salvation Army. It is about participating in God's vibrant, diverse, life-giving Kingdom on earth.

Imagine what might change if children and young people were not just included, but fully participating:

- shaping worship and mission in local churches,
- influencing the priorities and blind spots of the wider Salvation Army,
- being taken seriously within families as disciples and leaders,
- and living out faith in schools and communities through service, advocacy, creativity, and peace-making.

The challenge for us all - One thing

Instead of ten commitments or a new strategy, the invitation is to choose one concrete action—a single act of pruning that creates space for light. One listening conversation. One shared decision. One mentoring or reverse-mentoring relationship. One intentional shift in how power is shared.

There is nothing stopping us. There is nothing stopping you.

The question is not whether children and young people have something to offer. The question is whether we will make room so that what God is already doing in them can influence us all.

Jonny Whitmore (March 2026) - Sending Talk delivered at CY Conference summarised with the help of AI.