

LETTERS TO THE ARMY

August 2009

PASTORAL LETTERS **FROM THE OFFICE OF THE GENERAL** **TO SALVATIONISTS ACROSS THE WORLD**

This is the 15th in a series of Pastoral Letters from the General to every Salvationist across the world.

The Pastoral Letters are intended to be distributed unchanged and entire to all Salvationists and may be shared also with others interested in the sacred purposes for which God raised up The Salvation Army.

INTRODUCTION

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ.

This comes to all Salvationists with my strong, ongoing affection in Christ for you, and with my prayers for your effectiveness in the sacred calling that God, in his supreme wisdom, has placed upon the people known as Salvationists.

It has been laid upon my heart that I am to take a step of obedience under God by reaching out to you all through Pastoral Letters written from time to time. I write therefore in order to obey the One who has created us all, and with a longing that what is written will affirm, encourage and inspire you.

The themes for these occasional Pastoral Letters continue to be the themes God reveals. His holy will is made known in many ways. I pledge myself to be mindful that his will is often revealed through interaction with members of the Body and not only or always in the seclusion of the place of prayer.

It is my deep hope that each Pastoral Letter will be read wherever Salvationists are to be found, whether in private or in public settings. The chosen themes may prompt discussion, prayer and – as appropriate – action.

All Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise stated.

Shaw Clifton
General

PASTORAL LETTER FIFTEEN

FAMILY

Dear Fellow Salvationists,

You are lifted to the Throne of Grace in prayer daily. Prayer is a recurring miracle that gives us direct access to our Maker and which bonds together those who trust in Jesus as their Saviour.

In my last Pastoral Letter (Letter Fourteen) I requested your prayers for the International Conference of Leaders. Now I record my deepest thanks to you for supporting this historic gathering in prayerful intercession. In the days leading up to the conference I received many written assurances of prayers and more have reached me since the gathering ended, making intercession for the ongoing impact of the deliberations. Those present certainly experienced a deep sense of being held and sustained by the prayers of many around the globe. We had a wonderful sense of unity right from the very beginning of our time together. Please note the ‘Spiritual Statement to the Army’ that has recently been issued on behalf of all who attended the conference. It is my hope that this Statement will be met with a tender and sensitive response by all who read and ponder it.

The Lord granted the International Conference of Leaders a true sense of being members together of the family of God.

The theme of this Pastoral Letter is Family.

Family is God’s idea. He has planned the created world in such a way that we thrive best when family life is strong, protected and promoted by those in government. Serious social research shows that children do best, for example in health and in education, when they are raised by two parents, one male and one female, who through marriage are publicly committed to one another for life.

Marriage and family are inevitably interlinked. Alternative models of family life can be found on every hand these days, some arising out of marital breakdown, others the result of a deliberate choice to bring a child into the world out of wedlock. Statistical evidence tells us that these children face an uphill struggle to do well compared with children born within the sacred bond of traditional marriage.

When family life is strong, a nation is strong. Stable families are a pre-requisite of a stable social order. Secure family life results in lower crime rates, in fewer people serving time in prison, and in improved mental and emotional health. Family lies at the very heart of a stable social order.

In turn, stable family life delivers for most of us reliable love and personal security. The reliable love of parents, experienced by the child, opens up that child to experiencing and knowing the ultimate reliable love – that of the Creator. Recently we celebrated the birth of our fifth grandchild, Amos Paul Clifton. We are thankful that he will be raised in a secure family setting, giving him the best possible start in life

and an opportunity to know and sense from his earliest days parental love modelled on the love of God.

Closely interwoven with strong family life are key areas of social policy that all governments should promote and protect. We need to pray for political leaders to be raised up who will have respect for life, who will work for decent housing for all, who will promote family-friendly practices in the workplace, and who will favour families and marriage in the shaping of taxation and other fiscal policies.

Families are the bedrock of our society, the setting within which we discover the essential human qualities of love, commitment, compassion and generosity.

Let us pray therefore that every family will be modelled on God's creation plan. Let us pray that Christian families will know daily the grace of God as the key ingredient in living and growing together. We can also pray that those seeking to undermine family life will be frustrated. We can pray that marriages will flourish and succeed even in the face of much modern pressure to the contrary.

We must pray too for much divine grace to attend those who presently find their marriages and their family life under strain. May they come through the storms stronger and more deeply committed to each precious relationship.

Finally, let us give thanks for the family of the Body of Christ, the family of believers within which we can also know reliable love and spiritual intimacy.

I commit you, yet again, to the perfect love of Christ.

Yours in Jesus,

Shaw Clifton
General