

LETTERS TO THE ARMY

November 2010

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

This is the twenty-second 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 peoples 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 TWENTY-TWO

HOPE

Dear Fellow Salvationists,

I write in the Name of Jesus to greet and encourage you.

Here in London we are in the late weeks of the Autumn season, but the weather is unusually mild just now and we can venture out of doors, without the need for heavy clothing, to enjoy the falling leaves as the trees turn golden brown. The children walk and skip to school with a carpet of fallen leaves beneath their feet. As they kick happily at the gathered gold, a sudden gust of wind will propel the fallen foliage once again into the air. It is an enchanting season. In the southern hemisphere you are in Spring-time, with promise and hope bursting outward and upward from the earth to remind you of new life.

Like all Christian believers, Salvationists are a people of hope. In mentioning hope I do not mean that shallow, facile optimism that says, 'Things will probably turn out alright in the end.' Christian hope proclaims the certainty that in Christ Jesus all is well now, regardless of our outward circumstances, and that we have the gift of hope from God not only for this life but for all eternity too. In 1 Corinthians 15:19 we are reminded that we have hope in Christ not only for this earthly life. Were this untrue then we are to be pitied above all others.

Titus 3:7 describes true believers as 'heirs having the hope of eternal life'. In this promise, and in many more found in Scripture, we sense the certainty of God's provision and the sureness of His promises. He does not toy with us. He offers us the gift of hope. We are free to accept or to reject His offer. My heart is filled with praise to God for each one of you reading this who has gladly and wholeheartedly accepted the Heavenly Father's infinitely gracious offer of hope – hope for today and for all our tomorrows.

I am very aware that as I write to you there remain only a few months of my term as the General of The Salvation Army. I will hand over to another, technically at midnight at the close of Friday April 1, 2011. The theme of hope is therefore very close to my heart in these days. I am full of hope for the future of the Army. I am full of certainty that God will bless and use to His glory the person, as yet unknown, who will become the General after me.

I urge every one of you to be filled with that same hope at this time. The 109 members of the High Council will gather at Sunbury-on-Thames near London in January 2011. They will come together from every corner of the earth on January 16th for a few days under my leadership as the General's Consultative Council. Then on January 21st the formal High Council proceedings begin, with the Chief of the Staff presiding over the opening session before a President is elected. The President then guides the Council in the election of the next General.

The High Council members will travel to London filled with holy hope. They will believe that God will guide them in their task. They will be open to the promptings of

the Holy Spirit. The Army world will cover them with prayer. These will be sacred days, days brimming with holy hope.

I close this Pastoral Letter by thanking you again for your fidelity to Christ and for your sanctified obedience to the divine leadings of God in your life and in your Army service.

Thank you too for your prayers for Commissioner Helen and for me. I am fully fit and well again. Commissioner Helen awaits the results of further scans to find out the full effect of recent radiotherapy. With me, she commits you all to the matchless love of Christ.

Together we say to you, with the Psalmist: 'Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord' (Psalm 31:24).

God be with you and make you a blessing to others.

Yours in Christ,

Shaw Clifton
General