

LETTERS TO THE ARMY

April 2008

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

This is the seventh 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 SEVEN

CHILDREN

Dear Fellow Salvationists,

In this seventh Pastoral Letter I feel led to think aloud with you about the children of the Army and the children of the world. In doing so I send you warm greetings from London where Spring has come early and is now in full bloom. God's handiwork is matchless. So is God's love, a love that extends in a very special way to embrace our children and children everywhere.

We know from the words and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ that there is a special place for children in the heart of God. That is why we too as individuals and as an Army must also hold the children in high esteem and look to their wellbeing at all times. Jesus had harsh words for any person harming a child. Also he made time and space for children, letting them come to him even when those around him tried to prevent it. He prioritised the children.

We must do so too. General William Booth visited India twice and published a clear-headed strategy for winning India for Christ. A key part of the strategy addressed our attitude to the children of India. Booth said that for India to be won for Christ we must pay, not just 1,000 times more attention to the children than to the adults, but 10,000 times more attention! This was a bold statement but it applies still today and not only to India. It would break the Founder's heart to visit corps that have no work for children and where throughout a whole Sunday you will not meet a single child. What a tragedy!

Our Junior Soldiers are infinitely precious. Every child is a gem for Christ. A child who loves the Lord with a simple childlike heart can be used by God in turn to win the parents for the Kingdom. Also, the children are our role-models in simplicity and trust, just as we are their role-models in loving and caring for one another. As I write I offer up an earnest prayer for all who teach the children of the Army, for theirs is a very great and privileged responsibility.

In today's world we must protect the children from all kinds of evil and harm: impure literature, the temptations of the internet, drugs and alcohol, those who would prey upon them seeking to damage and abuse them, materialism, low self-esteem, peer pressures of every kind, premature sexualisation – the list could go on and on. Every Army centre in the world is expected to have clear and effective child protection procedures in place. These procedures are not an optional extra.

Let us take a step back and ask ourselves if we are fulfilling our duties to the children within our influence. Do they sense that we respect them? Are we supportive of their family life? Do we teach them, at a suitable age, about the importance of marriage and fidelity? Do we have imaginative, effective programmes for them? Is our teaching for the children sound and true? Are we settling merely for entertaining them or are we intentional about leading them to Christ?

I know that the Lord speaks into the lives of children because he spoke to me when I was only 12 years old. He told me what he wanted from me for the rest of my life. No one else knew what he had said to me, until I was ready to share it. So today this still happens and we who are adults have no idea what God is whispering into the souls of our children. For this reason we must respect them as tender plants growing up for Christ to do his holy will in the world.

God bless the children! Thank you for looking after the children! They are beyond price in the eyes of their Creator.

This comes to you all with my strong love in Jesus Christ and my ceaseless encouragement in the great Salvation War.

I commit you to the perfect love of Christ.

Shaw Clifton
General