

Local Mission Delivery: Theological reflections on holistic ministry and the Salvation Army Australia's new mission delivery operating model



By Lieutenant-Colonel Lyn Edge, National Secretary for Mission

A friend of mine came into contact with The Salvation Army when he sought help with his addiction to alcohol. Whilst attending that program he started connecting with the local Corps, where he made friends and joined the community. That was many years ago and he is now flourishing in his physical and emotional health, he is relationally rich and spiritually nurtured through Christian faith. He is also intellectually stretched and often found serving others. He came to The Salvation Army with one specific need in mind, and what he encountered was a community who embraced and cared about the whole of his being.

From the founding of the Salvation Army, we have always been committed to holistic ministries that encompass the whole person, and their communities. However, there have been times when we have had an inconsistent approach to mission. At those times, some parts of the Army have focused on the spiritual while others cared for the physical needs. We've not always addressed the whole person. Sometimes, we've worked and served in silos and not known what other Salvo services were doing in the same area.

This is where our new **Local Mission Delivery** (LMD) model will make a difference. It is how our different mission expressions will collaborate to serve in a holistic and consistent way across the nation. It will bring together all expressions of The Salvation Army in geographical locations to intentionally work together to achieve our mission. As we become one National Salvation Army territory with a new unified vision, we now have the opportunity to strengthen that commitment through the implementation of this new way of working together.

Holistic Mission: theological reflections

Holistic mission is an integrated approach to mission in which all dimensions of life are valued. It includes the proclamation of word as well as the need for social action. It encompasses the present and the future, the individual and community, the personal and social, the spiritual and the physical and all creation.

Christianity grew from the Hebrew tradition, which embraces a broad understanding of life as integrated. There are no divisions between physical and spiritual realities,

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all of life is sacred and of interest to God. In the scriptures, the idea of salvation is broad and holistic.

The Hebrew Bible's vision of salvation is material, "that is, concerned with lived, concrete, socio-political issues [as opposed to] . . . frequent Christian claims that salvation is something spiritual and otherworldly. In reality, the Old Testament knows no such dualism as material-spiritual, and regards every aspect of life—personal and public, present and future—as open to YHWH's saving capacity. Thus 'salvation' is deliverance from any and every circumstance and any negative power that prevents full, joyous, communal existence."ⁱ

In Isaiah 65:17-25, the prophet paints a picture of the new heavens and the new earth. He, imagines what life lived as God intended it might look like. In this passage you will see worship and prayer. You will also see a place where there is secure and affordable housing, meaningful work, healthcare, safe and supportive neighbourhoods, equality and a healthy environment. It is a very concrete image of flourishing individuals and communities in every dimension of life.

Sometimes we think of mission as a mixture of different elements; elements of soul saving, some practical help and maybe renewing our world. This view can lead to a fractured approach to mission. Christian mission embraces all elements it is interested in wholes not fractions.

Themes of a broad and embracing salvation continue in the New Testament. Numerous times in Luke's gospel Jesus is heard saying "your faith has saved you" and on each occasion salvation is both present and holistic (Luke 7:50; 8:48; 17:19; 18:42). Not only was the salvation about physical healing, but also heralded access to social, religious and community life. Luke uses salvation to describe the renewal of the whole of human life, its economic, physical, political, and religious dimensions.ⁱⁱ

Dualistic thinking was imported by the early church from one strand of Greek thinking. Dualism is the idea that all of life can be separated into two main categories: the sacred and the secular. This "split-vision" dichotomy led to a limited

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view of salvation which held sway for much of Christendom. Today, there is a move to unite the various aspects of future and temporal salvation through a more complete understanding of salvation. Social engagement, advocacy and social justice are increasingly understood as integral to Christian faith and practice.

Some of us grew up in an era when The Salvation Army structurally modeled fractions not wholes. From very early days, there was a Field and a Social Department, later becoming Corps and Social. In these days, we are embracing a more holistic structure, which I believe reflects both our biblical and Wesleyan theological heritage.

The Salvation Army theology and practice of holistic mission evolved over time. Early writings and practices suggest that the Booths and their leaders focused on soul saving, with a pragmatic response to meeting human need. However, by 1889, the article "Salvation for both Worlds" by William Booth revealed the extent to which this had progressed. He noted, "I had two gospels of deliverance to preach—one for each world, or rather, one gospel which applied alike to both."ⁱⁱⁱ

Holistic mission cannot conceive of spiritual salvation without a concern for the needs of this world, nor indeed a stand for social justice and reform that ignores spiritual concerns. As William Booth said when faced with those who wanted the social work of the Army without the spiritual work "If you want my social work, you have got to have my religion; they are joined together like the Siamese twins, to divide them is to slay them."^{iv} Reflecting on this quote, Needham observes that "for the church in mission, evangelism and social action go hand in hand. Otherwise, the gospel is perverted."^v

Integral mission or holistic transformation is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. Further, our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ.^{vi}

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Thy kingdom come

Holistic mission is lived out when we see life lived the way God intended. One way of understanding this is through the prayer "Thy kingdom come". The phrase kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven recurs over 80 times in the Gospels.

Possibly one of the best known of those references comes when his followers ask him how they should pray . . .

And Jesus said

"This, then, is how you should pray:

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6: 5-10)

Your kingdom come. God's kingdom come. Not your church come. Not your Salvation Army come. But God's kingdom come.

The idea of the kingdom of God wasn't new to the people of faith in the first century. The Hebrew prophets were captured by the dream of the coming kingdom, a vision of the world where God's justice and peace would reign. Isaiah spoke of a place where swords would be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, and war would be no more (Isaiah 2:4). He saw equity for the poor, help for the weak and liberty to the captives. Amos spoke of the kingdom as a place where justice would roll down like waters and righteousness like an overflowing stream (Amos 5:24).

So Jesus picks up the refrain and tells his followers. Pray that God's kingdom will come. Jesus was a little hard to pin down on what he meant by God's kingdom, but we don't have to look far from our text in Matthew to get the idea. In Hebrew poetry a common rhetorical device is parallelism. In this form the second line explain or expands the first line. In this text, we see an explanation of the first line in the second; Your kingdom come ... Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

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The kingdom of God is come when earth is a foretaste of heaven. Jesus didn't say, When you die, you will enter the kingdom of God. He said, the kingdom of God is among you. The kingdom of God is here now. The kingdom of God had broken into our world.

John Ortberg says "Sometimes people pray a version of the Star Trek prayer to Scottie: 'Beam me up.' Many people think our job is to get our afterlife destination taken care of, then tread water till God comes back and torches this place. But Jesus never told anybody – neither his disciples nor us – to pray "Get me out of here so I can go up there." His prayer was, "Make up there come down here." Make things down here run the way they do up there".^{vii} As Christians we are not just waiting around to get to heaven but rather we are called to be agents in bringing heaven to earth. We can be part of making up there come down here.

The Message translation of Matthew 5:9 says "As above, so below."

Michael Frost offers us a way to think about this. He asks us to imagine the world to come, when the world is regenerated as it was intended to be. Then think of that as the biggest blockbuster movie of all time. Our lives, both collectively and individually, are to be like a preview of that upcoming feature. The church is to be like a trailer for the New Jerusalem, a taster, with all the best bits on full display.

"If we conclude that the world to come will be a place of complete and perfect justice it follows that the mission of the church is to create foretastes of the justice that is to come. Likewise, if we believe that the world to come is a place of love and mercy, we are to be a trailer of that love and mercy, a free sample for those looking to buy into the whole thing. Read the Scriptures and compile a picture of the world to come—justice love, peace, reconciliation—and then go forth to fashion foretastes of that world".^{viii}

So we pray, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as in heaven. Or we could pray it this way. "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in my community as in heaven." And then we act to bring up there down here. On the walls of 614 in Melbourne is the William Booth quote, "making heaven on earth is our business." This is still true today.

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Living holistic mission today

Our history demonstrates that The Salvation Army has a tradition of holistic, incarnational ministry style. The slum sisters; Soup, Soap and Salvation; the cab horse charter; the match factory; and so we could go on.

The belief in a boundless salvation continues in Australia today. There are so many stories to tell. I recently met a man named Mark. You can hear his story by searching on Salvo Studios Community Garden of Hope. He has experienced and is sharing holistic wellbeing in Perth today. In Queensland, Jacqui Stringer, is sharing the love of Jesus in ways that embrace the whole person in the Ipswich Indigenous Ministry.

Local Mission Delivery model

For too long we have had a fragmented approach to mission. Some parts of the Army look after the spiritual whilst others care for the physical needs. Dualism has led us to compartmentalize our faith and practice. The new way of working together in the Australian Salvation Army today embraces all dimensions of mission and ministry as part of a whole.

Local Mission Delivery in Australia is based on the belief in holistic integrated ministry. It will bring together all expressions of The Salvation Army in geographical locations to work together in achieving our mission.

Conclusion

God desires the redemption of the whole of his creation. The interest is not in fractions, or segments, or simply earthly injustice, or even only human souls. Fractional mission is a minimization for the people of God who are called to a mission of wholeness. Living out truly holistic mission allows us to act in tune with the intentions of God for the whole created order. It is our inheritance as Salvationists. It is our challenge today.

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- i. Brueggemann, *Reverberations of Faith*, 185
 - ii. Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission*, 90
 - iii. Booth, *Salvation for Both Worlds*, 2
 - iv. Needham, *Community in Mission*, 63
 - v. *Ibid.*, 63
 - vi. Micah Network, *Integral Mission*, lines 23-7
 - vii. Ortberg, *God is Closer than you think*, 176
 - viii. Frost, *Road to Missional*, 29