

Right at the Heart Conference – Keynote by General André Cox

It is both a privilege and a pleasure for Commissioner Silvia and me to be able to share with you in this conference that touches a theme close to our hearts. The idea of this conference was born shortly after my election as General and hopefully it will have a lasting impact as the outcomes from these days will reverberate around the world.

Remember you are not just called in these days to sit around and talk and make recommendations. If there is to be any lasting impact it will be necessary for each one of you to be fully mobilised in order to bring about the changes you will dream of. Don't wait but discuss the outcomes with your own territorial leadership as this will reinforce any reports that will undoubtedly be sent from IHQ to your territories in follow-up.

You will hopefully be aware of my focus at this time in history on accountability. It was Molière, the French playwright, who said: **'It is not only what we do, but also what we do not do, for which we are accountable.'**

When I addressed territorial leaders at the 2014 International Conference of Leaders, I highlighted four key areas that we are addressing as part of the overall focus of the Accountability Movement. The aim of this work is to help everyone connected with The Salvation Army – soldiers, volunteers, employees, friends, donors, advisers, officers, partners – explore what God wants of us and for us to have the ability to explain where we are going, how we will get there and the difference we are making. Every one of us in this room is invested in this – it matters to us – we care passionately about being and doing all we can to be faithful to all that God longs for within the Army he raised up. The Accountability Movement is looking at four key areas: **Impact Measurement, Safeguarding/Child Protection, Finance and Governance.**

The current demand for improved governance in profit, governmental and non-governmental organisations, as well as in Christian churches arises out of multiple failures of individuals and organisations around the world to protect the integrity of organisations and the interest of stakeholders. We're not the only ones paying attention to these things – many other organisations are on this journey too!

For us, the motivation for much of this work is two-fold. Firstly, to ensure that we are building on strong theological foundations to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of this Army we love. Secondly, to develop the quality of our work in order to meet the required standards for continued registration of The Salvation Army as a religious and charitable organisation in the countries in which we are at work.

I hear constant criticisms about leadership in the Army and perhaps at times we do operate as though we are not accountable or would seem to think we have a divine right to do anything we wish. Officers at all levels have access to power, influence, money and assets and this undoubtedly does lay us open to the potential of nepotism, corruption and the abuse of power which is in total contrast and at odds with the message that we preach.

None of us is above the law, we all have to be accountable for the decisions that we make and for the way in which we use the assets of the Army.

One drawback when we use the word accountability is that we can be tempted to think only in terms of finances, accounts and assets. We would do well to remember that we are also accountable for the protection and safeguarding of people who are entrusted to our care through the multiplicity of Salvation Army programmes. While accountability of finances etc. is extremely important, nothing is more important than our accountability for people. It is this aspect that I want to focus on in this keynote.

1. Accountability and safeguarding of children, young people and vulnerable adults

We must start with questions about **people** when thinking about accountability – too often we focus on programmes, budgets, regulations, history, etc. God calls us to be accountable for people who are made in his image. We did not evolve from animals to be rational individuals as the humanists and atheists believe. People were

created for relationships, with body and soul – whole people. All of us who work for The Salvation Army need to share a common understanding of what it means to be a whole person.

As noted earlier, The Salvation Army as an organisation is accountable for people. This is a huge concept with significant implications. Not only are we as individuals accountable for our actions but The Salvation Army – as a God-raised movement – must be corporately accountable for how it cares for people as well as its assets.

I have regularly stated that children and young people are an important priority for The Salvation Army. These are more than words and we are working to ensure our young people are not only heard but that we are also intentional in the way that we nurture, disciple and develop the leadership potential in each young person.

We were truly blessed to see at the Boundless Congress the rich diversity and vibrancy of our young people. They were evident in each of the main sessions and what joy was expressed in the main session on the Saturday evening! What a blessing, but what a responsibility! If we fail in our responsibility to our young people then I think we will have a lot to answer for when we stand before the Lord.

I am sometimes reminded that we have as many as 2 million children at any time in our corps programmes, children's homes, schools and camps. Each one of those children represent our constituency and they should be on our hearts and on our prayer lists.

Some of you may be aware of the fact that I have been emphasising the importance of accountability. This encompasses far more than money, property and assets of course and must include those who are entrusted to the Army through our corps, institutions and various programmes. We are accountable before God how we deal with people in our care and there are no excuses that can mitigate any failures in this respect.

One of the things that angers me most and continues to be a constant preoccupation for me is the occasions when we have failed in our God-given mission to reach the lost, the hurting and the suffering with the Gospel message by failing to live up to the standards and values we proclaim. Make no mistake; we are accountable to God for the way that we deal with people.

Of course there has been a significant amount of media coverage in Australia with regards to the Royal Commission which has shown a very clear spotlight on the failings seen in the Army and other institutions when it comes to cases of historic child abuse.

I often speak about the sense of shame and anger that I have experienced by what has been revealed through the Royal Commission in Australia. There is simply no excuse for harming a child. I really want to see a zero tolerance stance on issues regarding the abuse of children and vulnerable adults but recognise that there is still some way to go before we get there.

The issues raised by the Royal Commission impact us all – this is not just an Australian problem. It is a concern for everyone in this room. Similar investigations are now commencing in the UK and will undoubtedly surface elsewhere uncovering more uncomfortable truths. The reality is every nation and culture has within it people who would harm children – we have to be alert to that reality and be and do all we can to protect the children and young people for whom we have responsibility.

It greatly saddens me to see the irreparable damage that results from abuse and it is absolutely vital that we do learn from the mistakes of the past to ensure that such things can never happen again.

My main concern is that such instances whether of sexual or physical abuse could still be happening somewhere in the world today.

A recent UN report states that about 120 million girls around the world – slightly more than 1 in 10 – have been raped or sexually assaulted by the time they reach the age of 20. The children’s agency UNICEF says that 95000 children and teenagers – mostly in Latin America and the Caribbean – were murdered in 2012 alone.

In a document drawing data from 190 countries it notes that children around the globe are routinely subjected to violence, including bullying. Much of this is happening in places where children should be safe: their homes, schools and communities.

More worryingly, the study revealed that about 6 out of 10 children aged between 2 and 14 were subjected to physical punishment from their carers on a regular basis. This should be a concern to us. With more than 2 million children in Salvation Army programmes or institutions around the globe at any time, one case of abuse is too many!

Research shows that not only is violence detrimental to the growth and development of children but it also carries with it life-long consequences. The readings of the report are grim and disturbingly it appears that violence against children in some countries remains socially acceptable or tacitly condoned with victims generally afraid to report the abuse.

I know there are cultures in the world today where corporal punishment is acceptable. I want to be absolutely clear that any form of corporal punishment is unacceptable in any Army programme, in any country, in any culture. I recognise we have challenges to face as we navigate our way through cultural realities but we must never seek to diminish the harm done to a child just because their own culture considers it to be okay – it is not okay – it is never okay!

You are hopefully all aware of the fact that significant changes have been made to Orders and Regulations and to the Territorial Commanders’ Memorandum of Appointment to ensure that this should not happen and that where it does, appropriate action will be taken against the perpetrator as well as against those with responsibility to monitor and control our safety mechanisms.

Many territories have in recent years put in place clear policies dealing with abuse, but my greatest fear is that these are but documents filed away simply in compliance with IHQ, territorial or government requirements. Unless we ensure a right culture documents are not worth the paper they are written on - as the saying goes: actions speak louder than words.

How many territories represented here have comprehensive child protection and general safeguarding policies developed? How many of you are satisfied that these documents are available, read, understood and (more crucially) implemented by all those involved in safeguarding children and vulnerable people in our care?

People are and must always be our absolute priority. We are part of the great rescue mission as co-workers with God fulfilling his plan of salvation for the world. Our motives in helping others and our relationships with people are the most important priority. We must provide, at all times, a safe place where people feel secure, loved and able to develop their God-given potential.

I’m pleased that you’re going to be looking at child protection in a little more detail tomorrow. It is an issue that concerns us all – it is an issue for which we all bear responsibility.

2. Discipling, nurturing and developing leadership abilities

One thing I have often expressed is my belief that we need to be far more serious about discipleship and the way in which we nurture our children, young people and young adults. It is a messy and complex world out there and we need to do as much as possible to enable our young people to reflect theologically about some of the challenges

they face. I see instances where some of our young adults leave the Army for other churches as the depth of our teaching does not satisfy their soul searching!

For years Salvation Army leaders have stated that youth and children are a priority, but this recognition has not always translated into action particularly in respect of allocation of both personnel and resources. Our children and young people should be the focus of a sustained and intentional leadership development programme in every territory. That is not going to happen without a clear intention and very practical prioritisation of resources and sustained emphasis.

Some of you will have heard me say at Boundless that there should be youth representatives on every Corps Council and that where this is not the case it must be rectified within the next 12 months! I am going to need your commitment and help to ensure that this happens in your territories. You must be advocates for our children and young people!

Unless they are given leadership opportunities how will they grow and develop their abilities, leadership and spiritual potential? Every local officer should be active in mentoring a young person, preparing someone who may eventually take their place.

Our young people and children are a most precious gift that God has entrusted to the Army and we need to value, cherish and nurture them.

It is pleasing as we have travelled now in all five of the geographic zones over these past two years to see the large numbers and the vibrancy of our young people all over the world.

Our young people are living in a very challenging world. In many western and developed situations they face huge pressure from secularisation and materialism.

There are huge peer pressures to adopt the branding; the latest gadgets and technology; the temptations of drugs and alcohol; the pressures of sexual promiscuity and they need to find in the Army a safe place where they are accepted and embraced.

In some parts of the world our young people are faced with extreme poverty; abuse; sexual exploitation. In some cultures young people are rarely to be seen and even more seldom to be heard. Those young people also need to have a sense of worth and belonging in the Army. We must lead the way on this.

At the High Council I said: 'It appears that despite our best efforts in producing relevant materials and programmes that we still struggle in many places to retain our young people. This should concern us for if we are not winning and transmitting the faith to the next generation we are failing in our sacred responsibility.

'What future will we have if we do not reach out to young people, effectively disciplining them in order to keep them and prepare the way for them to grow in leadership?

'We need to listen and answer the questions of our young people ensuring that their aspirations receive the priority attention that they deserve. We must provide them with a secure framework in which they can develop and flourish spiritually.

'The fact of the matter is however that one day they will take over from us. It is important that they build an Army that is relevant to the world in which they live remaining faithful to the specific call of God for The Salvation Army.'

The fact is we will not be able to effectively reach the young generation of today without engaging our young people!

What is clear is that if The Salvation Army is to have a future, we need to nurture and grow our young people and we need to start young – with our children. We need to see afresh the incredible gift that God has given to us in our children and young people. They should never be taken for granted. What are some of the things that we should ensure are in place as a matter of absolute priority? I share some ideas which are not exclusive:

Training those who work with children and young people

It is important to recognise that without adequately trained people, we will not make significant progress in improving the quality of discipling our young people. . You are key people in identifying and facilitating effective training for those who work with children and young people and those who lead them. We realise the importance of this priority for without trained people, we cannot effectively help them to become true disciples of Jesus.

For those of you who are TYs your highest priority must be the training and resourcing of DYSs. The DYS's highest priority must be the teaching, training and resourcing of local officers at the Corps level who work with children and young people.

My greatest fear is that we produce many materials and resources that fill cupboards but are not effectively used! How can we facilitate a greater sharing of resources with places around the Army world that currently have little or nothing?

Unless we are winning, retaining and effectively discipling our children and young people, there will be no Salvation Army in the future.

Relevancy of our programmes for children and young people

We also need to be asking ourselves about the relevance of our programmes. We are tremendously blessed with a great cultural diversity within the Army and I hope that this is something that will grow even further in the future.

Our diversity can also be a challenge, however, and we see huge differences across the globe with young people in materially rich countries, whilst in the developing world there are often very significant differences between the urban young people and those living in more rural or remote locations. Although some issues faced by youth may be similar they probably need to be dealt with in a different way if the message is to truly resonate to the specific need, context and situation. Put simply, there is no 'one size fits all' solution available to us.

What materials need to be developed in the different language groups? We have a wealth of material in the English language but other language groups maybe have more of a challenge in this respect.

There are a number of strategic and logistical issues that we need to understand and work out.

Loss of young people due to insufficient teaching and/or lack of younger officers

As I have already stated, there is significant concern in some parts of the world at least about the fact that we are struggling to retain many of our young people.

One of the possible causes for this is a lack of sound biblical teaching equipping them to respond to pressures from their peers as well as from prevailing cultural pressures in a manner consistent with foundational Christian values in which we believe.

We need to ask ourselves whether we provide a positive role model for our young people to value and aspire to. I believe that there are young people who have been abused in one way or another; young people who have been told to be quiet; young people relegated to the backs of our halls. How do they feel? Perhaps they don't verbalise it, but vote instead with their feet and leave the Army! That should greatly concern us and we need to be educating

Local Officers and Soldiers about their spiritual responsibility to pass on the Gospel message to the coming generation.

Many decisions affecting our young people are made by those who are old enough to be their grandparents! We need therefore to ensure that their voice; their concerns; their opinions are included in the decision making process. That does not necessarily mean that every board will have youth representation, but we must ensure there is proper consultation to ensure that decisions made really are 'informed decisions'.

Training and development of youth

When we talk about leadership development, we need to think not only about officers and local officers. Leadership development commences with the teaching, training and nurturing of our children and young people and we need to be far more intentional and ambitious about that. Our aim is to ensure that they can all be fully and effectively engaged in the mission. We recognise the need for our young people to be challenged, to have opportunities for service and to be fully mobilised for God.

When visiting the India Northern and Eastern Territories it was pleasing to see that there is significant investment in the teaching, training, nurturing and discipling of young people there. In the India Eastern Territory for example, young people from the age of 11 can undertake a six year course of study in the Corps Cadet programme. What a lively, gifted, motivated, and significant number of vibrant young people we saw wherever we went! That is replicated in many places around the world but there are still significant areas where we need to do much better!

Where we provide positive Salvation Army role models, we see our young people eager and wanting to be part of this great family and to contribute to the mission of the Army.

While I am not necessarily advocating that the Corps Cadet programme is the answer to every situation, I do believe that we need to be far more intentional about the way that we do prioritise the teaching and discipling of our young people.

In many countries of the world we have seen a relentless decline in moral and social values that has brought us to the point where many have lost their moral compass. The distinction between right and wrong has become so blurred that in society today we try to justify, explain away and excuse just about anything.

At a critical point in their development when many young people face so many difficult choices which undoubtedly have such a significant impact on the rest of their lives, it is little wonder that today many of them have a sense of abandonment and feel unsure about the future. It is a damning reflection of the world that we have prepared for them and which we will ultimately leave them!

There are far too many parents today who wilfully abdicate their parental responsibilities and as good as leave their children to fend for themselves. The breakdown of many traditional societal structures has left many young people without healthy traditions, boundaries, moral guidelines and support to see them through the treacherous passage from childhood to adulthood.

Values are constantly changing and/or being brought into question, and therefore many children and young people are left without clear signposts to help and guide them through a most critical, and possibly the most bewildering, phase of their lives.

Tragically many young people who struggle with the big issues and choices that they have to make are marginalised by society and sometime their own Salvation Army fellowship at the very moment when they need a clear frame work and guidance. In a direct response to try and fill such a glaring void, it is perhaps not surprising that we are seeing increasing initiatives to support and mentor young people.

Those of us who now form part of the older generation must realise and fulfil our responsibilities with regard to the coming generation. It is our responsibility to be building the bridges across the generations and to accompany our young people on their journey to adulthood. We need ever to see the tremendous potential but also to recognise the wonderful resilience that is there in young people to overcome staggeringly difficult circumstances and situations in their lives.

In many countries now in the business world there is a very conscious effort to support, train and guide young people. In some countries there is a strong culture of training young people through apprenticeships. What spiritual and leadership apprenticeship programmes do we offer our young people?

In reality we ourselves are nothing more than disciples, apprentices, but we have a moral and spiritual responsibility to set an example, to model and to show the way.

Conclusion

Franklin D. Roosevelt, the 32nd President of the United States of America, said: **'We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future.'**

As I said earlier, the purpose of our gathering is not just to talk, make recommendations and leave but for us to identify concrete steps that we need to take to ensure that our ministry to our children and young people is accorded the priority that it should have. Whilst I will be happy to receive recommendations from this conference at IHQ – I want to challenge you and encourage you to return to your own place of service determined to make changes that will benefit children and young people where you are.

We need to be challenged by the things that have not been done and perhaps for our lack of prioritising resources to ensure that reflects the importance of our children and youth.

To sum up in a nutshell some of the many aspects of accountability, I would like to see that The Salvation Army always actively promotes integrity, accountability and proper management in areas of finance, property management but even more importantly in the way that we care for our people.

We should confirm the utmost priority of caring for all people but more specifically in the context of this conference our children and young people by the way that we safeguard them, nurture, teach and train them so that they can grow into the people God knows they can become – the people he created them to be.

In all that we do we must want to have the ability to hold ourselves and each other to account as we work for God and seek to be like Jesus.

As we journey through life we face many experiences and challenges. We need to have the ability to account for our actions – to God, ourselves and also to our families, our Army leaders, our friends, our community.

I pray that we will never forget that our young people and children are a most precious gift that God has entrusted to the Army and we need to value, cherish and mentor them.

Paul in writing to Timothy reminds us: 'Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth' (2 Timothy 2:15). I pray that God will help me and all of us here today to do just that and that each of us will truly do our best to serve children and young people as we long to see them being equipped for life in the world today.