

The Salvation Army
International Positional Statement

PEACEMAKING

STATEMENT OF POSITION

The Salvation Army believes it is God's intention for all people in all their relationships to experience peace that is just, sustainable and leads to fullness of life. The causes of violent conflict are always complex and multifaceted. The Salvation Army disagrees with those who argue that violence is inherent to religious belief. Jesus proclaimed a gospel of peace. Despite knowing that there would perpetually be troubles in this world, Jesus declared that human peacemaking in a troubled world is blessed by God.

The Salvation Army recognises the moral complexity inherent in issues of war and peace and the policing of civil order, and the difficult choices faced by governments and individuals. The Salvation Army itself is committed to peacemaking. It calls on everyone it can influence, especially Salvationists, to pray for peace, conscientiously pursue peace and equip themselves to become effective peacemakers. It recognises that even those who bear military or policing responsibilities can make peace and justice their goal.

The Salvation Army affirms that pursuing and sustaining peace requires communal effort. The Salvation Army will be a persistent advocate for social justice. It will encourage the building of cultures that intertwine peace and justice in the family, the Church and society. The Salvation Army supports global peacemaking efforts and will collaborate with others who share our objectives.

Background and Context

Violence remains prevalent in the world at interpersonal, organisational, communal, national and international levels. Violence is frequently associated with religion, but The Salvation Army disagrees with those who argue that violence is inherent to religious belief, and recognises instead that the causes of violent conflict are always complex and multifaceted. Peace is often threatened when those who do not hold power are unheard and disrespected; when they are ignored in the determination of the common good; when they are denied justice, and do not receive apologies for wrongs suffered.

Historically, Christian thought has offered a number of responses to the issues of violence and war, including just war and pacifist theories. Many of these theories are important and warrant ongoing study. Despite their differences, however, one matter on which all Christian theories are agreed is the primacy of peace with justice. 'Just peacemaking' can be embraced by pacifists and by those who believe there is sometimes sufficient justification for war, and just peacemaking practices can be nurtured by churches and other bodies that do not have governmental decision-making powers.

An underlying premise of just peacemaking is that being treated *justly* and seeing oneself, one's family and one's community being treated justly are major preventatives to violent conflict. Where there has been animosity, reconciliation based on truth and justice (including the extending and receiving of forgiveness) is a major contribution to sustainable peace.

Just peacemaking is not utopian. Its practices are empirically grounded and its proponents commit to refining these practices as necessary, based on good evidence. The measure is effectiveness, not theoretical purity. The effectiveness of just peacemaking is enhanced by communities that sustain courage and hope and embody grace.

Ten experience-tested practices of just peacemaking are:¹

1. Support non-violent direct action.
2. Take independent initiatives to reduce threats.
3. Use cooperative conflict resolution.
4. Acknowledge responsibility for conflict and injustice and seek repentance and forgiveness.
5. Advance democracy, human rights and religious liberty.
6. Foster just and sustainable economic development.
7. Work with emerging cooperative forces in the international system.
8. Strengthen the United Nations and international efforts for cooperation and human rights.
9. Reduce offensive weapons and weapons trade.
10. Encourage grassroots peacemaking groups and voluntary associations.

The Salvation Army has historically engaged in peacemaking by leading with its strengths, putting to work its international organisational credibility, its extensive knowledge of the causes and consequences of war and other forms of violence, and its appreciation of the spiritual dimensions of human existence. In action and in advocacy, it has focused on seeking healthy alternatives for those involved with or affected by conflict.

Grounds for the position

1. The Bible teaches that peace prevailed at the beginning of God's creation and that God will establish a peaceable kingdom as the ultimate consummation of history. In the biblical story of creation, violence is one mark of sin's entry into human history.
2. God's will is that the neighbour be loved, even the enemy.
3. All human beings, including Christians, are prone to disagreements, disputes and grievances. When one is in the wrong, it is to be acknowledged, repented of, apologies made and forgiveness sought. Even if one is not in the wrong, the Bible teaches taking initiatives to reconcile, seeking out those who believe themselves offended.
4. The narratives in the Bible that portray God as ordering war, sanctioning war or even waging war cannot be dismissed, but they need to be interpreted with great care and especially in light of the person and teaching of Jesus.
5. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, says the peacemaker is blessed, and encourages his followers to turn the other cheek. In saying this, Jesus is not ignorant of what it may cost to be a peacemaker.
6. The apostle Paul says that the work of Christ is to break down walls of hostility and to effect reconciliation between peoples as well as between human beings and God. Paul accordingly instructs Christians to live at peace with all as far as possible.
7. In many places, the Bible instructs people to oppose and condemn unjust and evil structures.
8. God gives authority to government to secure justice. An important part of doing this is to restrain evil and to keep the community over which a government has jurisdiction safe and secure. This requires preparation to use force, but the greater purpose for government is to make it possible for communities to be free of violence so that its people may flourish.

¹ (Thistlethwaite & Stassen, 2008) <http://www.usip.org/files/resources/sr214.pdf>

Practical responses

- The Salvation Army commits itself to peacemaking activities. Integral to this is learning how to engage in such activities with wisdom and skill. The Salvation Army commends the 'just peacemaking' practices referenced in the background and context section above.
- The Salvation Army will prepare its members to seek peace and to be active in the pursuit of peace with justice at individual, communal, national and global levels.
- The Salvation Army will encourage peacemaking groups in its ranks.
- The Salvation Army promotes the use of reflective processes, such as Faith-Based Facilitation, to encourage deeper conversations and reflection on difficult issues.
- The Salvation Army will persistently advocate for social justice.
- The Salvation Army sees international development as an effective method of global peacemaking. It will advocate for the funding of development programmes on the basis of them being conflict-preventing and peace-promoting.
- In all community work, The Salvation Army seeks to practice conflict sensitivity, encouraging thorough conflict analysis prior to implementation of new programmes in conflict-prone areas.
- The Salvation Army supports international efforts to eliminate torture and weapons of indiscriminate and mass destruction, to reduce the global arms trade, to strengthen human rights and instruments for the non-violent resolution of conflict.
- The Salvation Army calls on governments to make the establishment of peace a goal of their defence and policing activities, and their international relations.
- The Salvation Army supports those Salvationists who are on mandatory military service or who decide to enlist voluntarily.
- The Salvation Army supports a right of conscientious objection to military service.
- The Salvation Army supports chaplaincy to the armed forces.
- The Salvation Army undertakes humanitarian and spiritual ministries to war-affected persons.
- The Salvation Army opposes all forms of religious persecution.
- To encourage peacemaking, The Salvation Army will support ecumenical and interfaith dialogue.

Additional Resources

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The views expressed in this international positional statement constitute the official position of The Salvation Army on the issue addressed, and they may not be modified or adapted in any way without the express written permission of International Headquarters.