Introduction

Greetings from London and specifically International Headquarters. I am happy to be a part of this virtual space and excited to welcome all of you participating in this video symposium. The wonder of modern technology permits us to gather even while our world grapples with the consequences and aftermath of a pandemic. For a year and a half I have been confined to London and, with each engagement that is virtual, I find myself grateful but still longing for in-person encounters. As we anticipate our future, I echo words recently spoken by a colleague: ‘It is not about going back but rather, moving forward’. Thank you for the positive part you play in forging a path to the future.

In this keynote, I will address three significant areas:

1. The role of IMASIC (International Moral and Social Issues Council) and TMASICs (Territorial Moral and Social Issues Councils) in our global Army and world today.
2. ‘On Earth as it is in Heaven’ – the theme of this symposium.
3. Current moral and social issues in our world that are on my heart.

Our Christian faith is not an academic theory wrapped around a distant deity. Quite the opposite, in fact. The faith we profess and hold dear is tried, tested and proved in the crucible of life as we apply and contextualise our beliefs. Our theology must sit well in the practical, day-to-day context of what we believe, which then determines how we live. Perhaps more than ever before, with increased global connectivity, a multiplicity of available belief systems and innumerable ethical conundrums, it is essential that Christians (and especially Salvationists, given our context) possess the ability to engage in respectful, truthful and effective apologetics.

In order to do this our people will need:

- A robust biblical theology with associated vocabulary
- A boldness that comes from a holistic and transformative gospel
- A compassion that inspires and informs engagement in the messiness of life, and
- A resilience that enables them to stand firm in the debate, remain confident when the world drowns out our voice, and then give the glory to God when victories come.

This is where IMASIC and TMASICs come in.

The role of IMASIC and TMASICs in our global Army and world today

In the complex and multifaceted world we live in today, which can often be fraught with tension, misunderstanding, ignorance and intolerance, The Salvation Army needs to gather its best thinking minds to guide our denomination through the issues of the day. The issues addressed by IMASIC and TMASICs exist at the intersection of belief and behaviour. Your work takes place in the mêlée of life, where the application and contextualisation of faith is anything but straightforward, where there are often more questions than answers, where competing and divergent voices speak more than they listen and where new scenarios arise that cannot always be foreseen or fully understood.

The Salvation Army is well served through the existence of IMASIC and TMASICs. IMASIC has the privileged yet unenviable task of considering our international moral stance on global issues. For this reason, it is essential that membership of IMASIC is representative of gender, ethnicity and age. Each global issue contains nuances and cultural realities that will not always be evident to all. In researching topics, due diligence cannot be overestimated. Gathering a diverse and representative group that
possess a high level of expertise and experience, yet is sufficiently self-aware to know when to seek external counsel while at the same time sharing a scriptural foundation and clear Salvationist calling, is vital to enable IMASIC to discharge its duties and responsibilities. IMASIC speaks directly to the senior leaders in The Salvation Army, with a direct link and responsibility to the office of the General, so its voice is important and heard.

For those joining this symposium from our various TMASICs around the world, let me clearly state that TMASICs are not 'less than' IMASIC. You are different from IMASIC. TMASICs can have dual and interesting responsibilities. On the one hand, TMASICs take the global position provided by IMASIC and enhance it with a more cultural lens. On the other hand, TMASICs address specific country-wide or Territory-wide issues that may not be present on an international level. We are at our best when IMASIC and TMASICs exist in continual, respectful and mutually beneficial dialogue with each other, where IMASIC seeks the input of TMASICs, and where IMASIC can provide an independent and wider scrutiny of TMASIC positions.

In addition to the effective collaboration between IMASIC and TMASICs is the indispensable partnership between IMASIC and ITC (International Theological Council). IMASIC and ITC are two distinct groups, with different membership and particular foci. They follow separate agendas, yet there are times when, at the request of the General, they collaborate on significant issues being faced by our Army. While they retain their distinctiveness, IMASIC and ITC are part of the same Army, serving the same God and seek to fulfil the same mission. It will be interesting to some that both are councils of the General making direct engagement possible.

The truth is that IMASIC, TMASIC, ITC and the wider Salvation Army need each other. We are not called to live as isolated individuals. The Christian faith is deeply personal, but it is not private. As the Trinity is an eternal community, so we, the Body of Christ, are created and called to live in community and communion with each other, and with God. None of us know everything. None of us speak with ultimate authority. We need the collective experience, wisdom, and spirituality that comes from this unique fellowship called The Salvation Army that is itself just one part of the wider, universal Body of Christ.

When The Salvation Army speaks into a moral or social issue prevalent in our world today, we need to do so from a solid theological position founded upon the Word of God. Remember, our first doctrine states: ‘We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God, and that they only constitute the Divine rule of Christian faith and practice.’ From that foundation, our voice needs to be truthful and wise, demonstrating an understanding of the issue at hand, the complexity and challenges that exist, an awareness that at the heart of the issue are people and their lives, a respect for those who will disagree with us, yet a firm conviction on the truth of our position and the value our faith perspective brings to the world. We are not bereft of resources or models for theological enquiry or engagement with the world. As a denomination rooted in the Wesleyan holiness tradition we should make reference to the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, where Scripture, tradition, reason and experience are considered, with Scripture being the ultimate authority. In terms of engagement, we have intentionally invested in the Faith-based Facilitation approach.

With fifty territories, eight commands and three regions spanning 132 countries, with more on the horizon, it should quickly be apparent that we need to work collaboratively to address the moral and social issues present in our world. Such collaboration requires patience, perseverance, and understanding. Some issues may present as urgent and some countries or cultures may want to move forward quicker than is wise or necessary while other issues, that are endemic or complex, require a slower approach, and some cultures and countries work at a slower, more deliberate pace. We need each other. The Salvation Army is not just about me and my context – it is about ‘us’ and ‘we’ – it is about a global reality lived in a multiplicity of contexts: it is about God, his Kingdom and the values of that Kingdom. A key element of this reality is the preservation of One Army as a worthy pursuit.

‘On Earth as it is in Heaven’ – exploring moral and social issues through a Kingdom lens
What an exciting and rich theme you have for this symposium! ‘On Earth as it is in Heaven.’ We are Kingdom people. Our actions should reflect that reality and glorify the King whom we serve and live in relationship with. Our spirituality and morality should reveal there is something more to life – not just something else, as in another option, but something better – in fact, the best! This theme, taken from the Lord’s Prayer as found in Matthew 6:10, communicates essential and life-changing truths. The Kingdom is God’s, he reigns supreme and he sets the moral compass. This Kingdom is not being held awaiting the Lord’s return but can be experienced as a present-day reality. Our foretaste of the Kingdom of God in this life is wonderful, and engenders awe and worship but, even then, it is just a shadow of what is yet to come. We live in the ever-present tension of the now, but not yet.

We strive and labour each day to make the Kingdom of God a reality in this world, to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with people and to facilitate a life-changing encounter with the powerful Holy Spirit, ascended Lord and Almighty God. The spiritual battle for the soul of each person and control of this world is real. As Kingdom people we need to view the whole of life through a Kingdom lens – viewing everything through the discernment of the Holy Spirit, viewing people and situations as Jesus would and viewing the world as the beloved creation of God.

There are certain paradigms and truths that need to be a given for us if we claim to be Christians and people of the Word. I want to share some of those with you, but before I do so, let me share with you a concern I have that creates a deep uncertainty and unease within me. Too often when Salvationists engage in debate on moral and ethical issues there is a swift referral to pop psychology and the voice of the world, and too little knowledge about and interpretation of the Word of God. If we follow the pattern of the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus is teaching us to acknowledge God as Sovereign and the One from whom all things proceed on Heaven and on the earth. Our second doctrine states: ‘We believe that there is only one God, who is infinitely perfect, the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all things, and who is the only proper object of [true] religious worship.’ Thus, our scriptural foundation, as mentioned earlier, and our belief in who God is, should frame and inform our worldview, belief system and life choices.

Let me note a few of these truths:

- **God is good and everything he makes is good (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31)** As God is, by nature, and in action, perfect, it then follows that everything he made was also perfect. It resembled his own character, and everyone lived in perfect unity and harmony.

- **Sin is a negative factor in our world (Genesis 3:14-24; Romans 3:23, 6:23, 8:22)** Sin changed the relationship between Adam and Eve as well as their relationship with God, not to mention its impact upon every aspect of creation. The fall from grace was a big one, and no aspect of life remains untouched to this day.

- **We are not God, he rules over his creation (Job 38)** Humans often view themselves as their own deity, not wishing to bow down to the one true God, seeking to make their own rules and do things their own way, reluctant to admit wrongdoing and hesitant to express any notion of communal responsibility. Job’s rant at God is an exemplar of this.

- **Jesus must be central (John 3:16, 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Corinthians 1:23)** We firmly believe Jesus stands at the centre of Scripture, is the only source of salvation, is the way to God the Father, is the embodiment of truth, grace, love and mercy. His teachings stand the test of time.

- **If they crucified Jesus, they will have issues with us (Matthew 5:10-12)** To follow Jesus means to die to self, that is what taking up our cross is all about. If we truly resemble Jesus in all we say and do, we should expect opposition and persecution. Scripture teaches this. God keep us from seeking the applause and accolade of the world at the expense of identification and unity with Christ.

- **We are meant to be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16)** The Church, of which The Salvation Army is a part, should be different from the world. Yes, we need to be in the world, but what is the point of our existence if we don’t clearly display an alternative viewpoint, a vibrant spirituality, a transformative gospel and live counterculturally?
- **We live, work and serve with an eternal perspective (Ecclesiastes 3:11)** It is only in recent years humanity has begun to consider the environmental impact of global warming and the condition of the planet we will leave for those coming after us. We often live for the here and now, as well as live superficially. This is tragic when God has placed eternity within our hearts and deep calls to deep.

While I share those paradigms and truths with you because I believe them and would argue they frame our worldview, some would regard them as negative and restrictive; so, let me share with you four positive paradigms that could be more palatable to the world today and provide a 'way in' as we seek to engage and dialogue on moral and social issues:

- **Triumph of love** – 1 Corinthians 13 reminds us, love never fails and John 3:16 reminds us of the full extent of God’s love. John frequently reminded us that God loved us, even when we were still sinners, and that we should love one another. Love does not mean always agreeing with someone or keeping silent. Love means knowing when to correct and challenge. Love means speaking up when people cannot speak up for themselves. Remember, people will know we are disciples of Jesus by how we love each other.

- **Restorative grace** – None of us are perfect. All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's standard of perfection, yet in Christ we have been restored and renewed. In our engagement with people in the messiness of life today we must always seek to extend restorative grace to the fallen, even as we all live with the consequences of sin.

- **Essential mercy** – Jesus brought in a new system. It was no longer an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Jesus said turn the other cheek when someone asks for your jacket given them your shirt too. Remember Amos 5:24. Consider Hosea 6:6.

- **Kindness of truth** – Christians have to be people of truth because our Saviour is the embodiment of truth and Satan is the Prince of Lies. We must remember that the truth will set people free. Truth is not always easy to hear at the time, but it is the best thing to hear. Speaking truth to people is a kind thing to do and it is the right thing to do. In a world beset with corruption, when mistrust is easily justified, we need to be people, speakers and bringers of truth.

There is, absolutely, a place for Christians to engage in public dialogue on contemporary moral and ethical matters. We need to engage with academics, politicians, educators, influencers and activists, as well as our neighbours, friends and family. Having said that, when competing and divergent philosophies and faiths engage in robust dialogue, the argument can be endless and any resolution elusive. If we really are to view things through a Kingdom lens, seek for God’s Kingdom to come and for his will to be done on earth as it is in Heaven, then our primary concern needs to be the salvation of people.

**Specific moral and social themes on the heart of the General**

Before I share with you some specific issues that weigh heavy on my heart, I want to share with you an overarching principle that, if achieved, will begin to address every moral and social issue we need to combat today. I contend that if people were to be saved by Jesus and find their identity in him, then there needs to be a personal, God-enabled transformation so that the social evils of our world would begin to subside. Let me explain what I mean...

True freedom is only found in Jesus Christ, when the chains of sin, oppression and bondage have been broken. It is only in knowing Jesus we come to know the God who made us, his purpose for our lives and our true identity. True and lasting transformation is only found in Jesus. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone and the new has come. It is essential that we are securely rooted in Christ and grow to become mature disciples of Christ (Colossians 2:6-8). This union with Christ is a necessity of the Christian faith.
So yes, we must understand, fight against injustice and engage in every moral and social issue appropriately and with conviction, but our efforts are in vain if The Salvation Army is not also involved in the clear and unabashed proclamation of the transformative gospel of Jesus Christ.

That is the foundation point for our engagement as IMASIC and TMASICs.

I have taken enough of your time today, but in these concluding moments let me share some of my hopes and dreams which you can help with.

It is hard to describe the world we live in, though the words in Ecclesiastes still seem relevant – ‘There is nothing new under the sun.’

I note:
- The prominence of self-authentication
- Personal value systems without external influence
- Tolerance and intolerance shifting depending upon the debate
- Devaluation of truth.

There is little space left for:
- Biblically applied principles
- Theological reflection that has a hint of traditional adherence, or a conservative view
- Respect for culture, tradition and/or belief, but instead a normative process and view of an issue takes prominence.

The call upon any leader who represents people, creed or view is to declare your position. In that declaration there is only space for agreement. Our tolerance and respect for one another has eroded, leaving us with tension and a perceived inability to walk together.

'So, General, what is your position on...?'

I have concluded that for me, and I project the same on to my Salvationists... :
- Regardless of position and our right or hold it, our responsibility as followers of Jesus Christ remains unchanged.
- If we spend time, build walls, become intolerant to the extent we compromise our place in our responsibility to serve others, we have failed.
- **Our Voice:** There is space to both speak and be heard prophetically, through proclamation, from a faith-based ethos, through advocation and by using a biblical foundation.
- **Our Position:** We have a position on many things, presented to salvation as guidance, and these need to be better known, understood and available.
- **Issue Focused:** We don't need to speak to everything, but as we are engaged in many things we speak with authority, credibility and hold others to account.
- **Our Challenges:** Exist in the arena of what is ecclesiastical yet connects to our service to others. The world loves our service but often not our Saviour and this creates an impediment, and I suspect this will increasingly be the case.
- **Our Agendas:** They are broad, yet we become consumed by the agenda of others.
- **Our Dialogue:** Often dominated by a louder voice that is so confident that it mutes the majority.

You can see our agenda is diverse and far reaching. It constitutes my call for help and input. It puts people like you in a space where people like me give thanks to God for you.

**Upcoming retirement of Dr Jim Read – IMASIC Chair and Director of Ethics Centre**
I pause today and take a moment to acknowledge Dr Jim Read. Jim is a godly man of integrity who has given his life to engagement in ethical issues as a Christian in the service of God through The Salvation Army. To know Jim is to know a gracious man of God. In addition to his excellent academic ministry, Jim has been a committed husband to Laurie, father and grandfather. In addition to his work with Booth University College, ISJC and IMASIC, and his family commitments, Jim has been a faithful and committed soldier at Heritage Park Temple Corps and held lay leadership roles there.

When God made Jim Read, he made someone special and, although his retirement is honourable and much deserved, the reality is that Jim is irreplaceable. Jim, as your General and your friend, I wish to sincerely thank you for your service, commitment, dedication, wisdom, discernment and partnership in the gospel.

**Conclusion**

This keynote has sought to outline the essential nature of IMASIC and TMASICs, as well as share the need to have a secure scriptural foundation and framework to all our ethical engagement. You have also heard my heart on some key matters. Your work is Kingdom building and much needed by The Salvation Army. You are valued for who you are and all that you bring. It is unfortunate the symposium cannot happen in person, but modern technology offers us a viable alternative. My prayer is that you will all know the indwelling presence, power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit of God.