



# How the High Council elects a General

by General John Larsson (Retired)

**ON Monday 29 July 2013 the High Council of The Salvation Army will convene to elect the Army's 20th General. The Council will meet at the Renaissance Hotel, near Heathrow, the traditional venue of Sunbury Court being unavailable because it is being extensively refurbished.**

The High Council comprises all active commissioners, all territorial commanders irrespective of rank and all territorial presidents of women's ministries. With 117 members – 64 women and 53 men – the 2013 High Council will be the largest to date.

## **PRELIMINARIES**

After electing a President to guide its deliberations, the first task of the High Council will be to establish the way it will work. The Council will review the Orders of Procedure used by the previous High Council, which distils into some 70 numbered paragraphs the accrued wisdom and experience of all past councils. After reviewing the document and making any amendments it feels necessary, the 2013 High Council will formally adopt the revised version as its own Orders of Procedure.

A High Council is an exercise of spiritual discernment and time is therefore set aside for worship, reflection and prayer. Even before the High Council officially opens on the Monday morning, the members will spend the Sunday together in worship and intensive prayer. Their collective prayer will be that at the end of the process they might be able to echo the words of the Council of Jerusalem: 'It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...' (Acts 15:28).

## **NOMINATIONS**

The High Council then moves to the nomination stage. Every member has the privilege of nominating someone to be a candidate for General. The only criterion laid down is that the person nominated must be an officer. That means that about 17,000 persons are eligible to be nominated. But on past precedent the forthcoming High Council is likely to nominate persons from within its own membership.

Only those who are nominated by three or more members are deemed to have been nominated. Those who accept nomination become candidates – and it is from this panel of candidates that the High Council will be called to elect the next General.

At this stage, the High Council adjourns for a full day to enable the candidates and spouses to prepare written answers to the questions that the Council has prepared. Candidates also work on their speeches.

### **QUESTIONS AND SPEECHES**

When the Council begins its deliberations again, candidates and spouses read out their answers to the questions. Through the process of questions and answers, the High Council seeks to get to know the candidates at greater depth and to learn more about their leadership style, their personalities and their views on subjects related to the Army and its ministry.

Each candidate then gives a speech. No parameters regarding subject matter or length are laid down but speeches usually deal with the candidate's vision for the Army if elected General and last between 10 and 15 minutes.

### **ELECTION**

After the questions and speeches, the election itself begins. In the hush of the council chamber, each member in turn receives a voting paper from the President and in a secluded area places a tick/check against one of the names on the paper before putting it in a ballot box. The other members engage in prayer. The process is unhurried and can take up to an hour for each ballot. After the voting has been completed the tellers count the votes. The Salvation Army Act 1980 – by which the High Council is governed – stipulates

- a) that in the first three ballots a candidate must get the vote of more than two-thirds of the members present to be elected
- b) that from the fourth ballot onwards a candidate need only receive the votes of more than half the members present
- c) that the candidate who gets the fewest votes in each ballot must drop out until only two candidates remain. The balloting continues until one of the candidates reaches the required number of votes.

### **CLOSING MOMENTS**

What happens next is of the greatest significance. However protracted the election process and however close the result, it is in the tradition of High Councils that the moment the new General is elected all members immediately give their full support to that person. Any differences of opinion there might have been before that time are swept away and the corporate decision of the body is accepted by all as the expression of the will of God.

Then comes the moment when the doors of the council chamber are thrown open and, in a ceremony that will be webcast [at sar.my/tv], the President presents the new General to the Salvationist family around the world. From every heart rises the cry: 'May God bless our General!'

- For news about the 2013 High Council visit [www.salvationarmy.org/highcouncil2013](http://www.salvationarmy.org/highcouncil2013), follow @HighCouncil2013 on Twitter or like High Council 2013 on Facebook