

HEART TO GOD, HAND TO OTHERS

The Enduring Impact of Community Care Ministries

Community care ministries (CCM) has been a foundational expression of The Salvation Army's mission of love and service for more than 130 years. Its roots trace back to Canada in 1892, when the idea for the league of mercy was born—a simple yet powerful vision of lay volunteers reaching out with compassion to those most in need.

Origins and Early Development

The league of mercy began as a ministry of visitation in Toronto, spearheaded by Mrs. Cornelie Booth, wife of then-Canadian Territorial Commander Herbert Booth. Her vision was to mobilize caring Salvationists—mostly women at the time—to visit those isolated in hospitals, jails and institutions. With nothing to read, no one to talk to and often no family nearby, many individuals were virtually forgotten. The league stepped into that void with kindness, prayer and hope.

An 1893 announcement invited people to request a visit for loved ones in hospitals or prisons. From these humble beginnings, volunteers soon expanded into leading spiritual services, offering uplifting literature, and supporting people post-release or discharge. In 1894, a woman bedridden in the Toronto Home for Incurables became the first league convert and was enrolled as a Salvation Army soldier under the league's ministry, testifying to the deep spiritual impact of this practical outreach.

Growth and Global Expansion

The compassionate mission quickly spread beyond Canada. The league of mercy was introduced in Australia in 1896 and formally launched in the United States in the 1920s. Soon, league of mercy brigades were active across Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America. Volunteers uniformed, humble and determined—brought encouragement through hospital visits, prayers with the dying and simple acts of care to the lonely and marginalized.

Through two World Wars, economic downturns and countless crises, league members provided a human touch when it was needed most. By the early 2000s, the league had grown to over 88,000 members worldwide, all offering "heart to God and hand to man."



Evolution of Name and Mission

While the mission remained constant—caring for people in Christ’s name—social and cultural shifts prompted change. By the late 20th century, The Salvation Army recognized the need to modernize. Visitation to long-term care institutions had declined and there was a desire to involve a wider range of volunteers, including men and youth.

Beginning in the 1990s and early 2000s, many territories transitioned from the league of mercy to community care ministries—a name that better reflected the broader scope of modern outreach. This transition marked a move away from a single structured “league” to a flexible, locally-led ministry integrated into the corps’ overall mission and community services.

Carrying Forward the Vision

From a single act of mercy in Toronto to a worldwide movement of care, community care ministries continues to embody The Salvation Army’s call to “go about doing good.” Volunteers serve without seeking recognition, simply committed to the mission of loving others in Christ’s name.

The heart of the ministry remains the same: whether through a conversation, a prayer, a warm meal or a helping hand, CCM volunteers show the world that everyone matters and no one is forgotten.

As our world changes, CCM stands ready: anchored in the past, active in the present and hopeful for the future.

