

Territorial Leaders' Conference

November 2017

The territorial and divisional leaders met at Jackson's Point Conference Centre on November 19-21, 2017, for their annual fall Territorial Leaders' Conference. In keeping with the focus on the territorial strategic priorities as in other gatherings, the theme was strategic priority #3—social justice. The goal of this priority is “to promote the dignity of all people with a focus on the marginalized and vulnerable.” The champions for this priority are Major Glenda Davis, social services secretary, and Jessica McKeachie, public affairs director. It was an opportunity to worship, learn and network together as the leaders considered what it means to live justly. This report summarizes the events of and discussion during the conference.

Majors Beverly and David Ivany commenced each day with inspiring worship which complemented the agenda. They challenged the leaders to recognize the holistic ministry of The Salvation Army in following the example of Jesus who ministers in the darkest areas of our society. These times of reflection enabled the leaders to prepare their hearts and minds for the day and the discussions which followed.

The conference included a number of guest speakers who shared their knowledge and spoke about their social justice ministry and personal experience. In honour and appreciation for each guest, a Gift of Hope was purchased through The Salvation Army's Gifts of Hope program which supports farming, education, health and community development, all of which address social justice issues in developing countries.

One of the speakers, Major Campbell Roberts, chief consultant for the New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga Territory's social policy and parliamentary unit, presented to the group via video conferencing from New Zealand. Major Roberts has dedicated his officership to improving the lives of the people of New Zealand through practice, policy research and advocating for social change. He is guided by the reality that all people are children of God, and many of those who are marginalized in society have been sinned against. He told the group that being involved in social justice creates vulnerability. He reminded the listeners that social justice is at the heart of the gospel and ought to be the core of what we believe and practise.

Further, he challenged them to be people who live justly with a clear vision of a God-like world in the 21st century, with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other.

Guests also included individuals who could provide first-hand information about social justice issues in Canada. Larissa Maxwell, director of anti-human trafficking programs for The Salvation Army in British Columbia, gave a compelling talk regarding sexual and labour exploitation in Canada. She shared information about the programs offered at The Salvation Army's Deborah's Gate, including residential

services, life skills training, addictions and mental health services, barista employment training and outreach services. Her presentation gave details of program modalities as well as stories of transformation in the lives of the women and men who have come under the influence of their ministry. She gave shocking statistics of exploitation in Canada. Since 2005, there have been 360 identified cases of human trafficking before the courts in Canada. Of these, 341 were domestic and 19 were international. Of the 314 victims, 111 are under the age of 16. Although the topic was heavy and it was difficult to hear about the reality of human trafficking in Canada, Larissa presented through a lens of hope as she reminded the group that, “Everything can be redeemed, everything renewed, everything can be restored.”

Dion Oxford, mission strategist for The Salvation Army Housing and Homeless Supports in Toronto, presented on accessibility, speaking from first-hand experience as someone who lives with multiple sclerosis. Dion shared his personal journey in living with a disability and impressed upon the leaders the importance of making our ministries accessible in a physical, social, relational and spiritual way. He spoke of the importance of language that avoids labelling people with their disability. He also gave helpful insights as to how to ensure that our buildings and programs do not create barriers to ministry for people with disabilities. It was obvious from the reactions of the listeners that both Larissa and Dion had a profound impact on them and the way they thought about the social justice issues of anti-human trafficking and accessibility.

Following Larissa and Dion’s presentations, the group had a World Café discussion. The World Café is a way to have a structured conversation in an exponential way as people circulate amongst the tables in a random fashion, building on the thoughts and ideas of each other (<http://www.theworldcafe.com>). Each table had questions based on the presentations as well as from the pre-reading primer material which was made up of articles written by several Salvation Army authors. Questions included:

- In some communities where we do not have the capacity or willingness to also actively engage in social justice initiatives, how can we work in partnership with other community stakeholders who are fighting for social change and support them in this work? What are the benefits of these partnerships? What are the risks?
- One of the action items for the social justice strategic priority states: “Deliver services in ways that respect and value people.” What does respecting and valuing people look like?
- How can we engage youth more in the social justice work of The Salvation Army? How can we engage our corps members, as a whole, more in social justice?
- How does living justly impact how we undertake our business responsibilities?
- What does accessibility look like in practice (i.e. in our communications, policies, documents, training, spaces, websites, etc.)?

- What do you think perfect social justice [God's kingdom come] would look like?

His Eminence Thomas Cardinal Collins, Archbishop of Toronto and a representative of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB), was invited to speak at the conference. The Salvation Army has partnered with the CCCC in advocating for the rights of the dying to receive excellent palliative care and for the conscience rights of individuals and facilities who choose to abstain from providing or participating in Medical Assistance in Dying. Because of the many issues which The Salvation Army has in common with the Catholic Church, it was felt that the Cardinal's contribution to the conference would be beneficial. He shared information about the structure of the Catholic Church, and about its community services arm.

The leaders were given an opportunity to view a documentary about a mentoring program for individuals who lived on the streets. The aim of the mentoring was to assist the individuals in obtaining stable housing. Dr. Michael Boyce, associate professor of English and film studies at Booth University College, facilitated a discussion regarding the observations about and learnings from the film. The documentary was a reminder of the barriers involved in assisting people with housing, the length of time and patience required when journeying with those seeking change, and the impact that compassion and caring can have on a person's life.

Another World Café was held regarding how The Salvation Army can contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. These are goals that were agreed upon by members of the United Nations in an attempt to make the world a better place by 2030. The group looked at three of the SDGs—end poverty, end hunger and reduce inequality—using as a guide “Go and Do Something,” a document produced by The Salvation Army International Social Justice Commission (<http://www.salvationarmy.org/isjc/SDGs>).

Discussions regarding ending poverty and ending hunger were related. Thoughts included providing more support for the current Salvation Army programs of Gifts of Hope, Partners in Mission and Others which assist developing countries. To address these issues locally, the groups considered the importance of education and goal development to support people towards independence. Working with businesses for the provision of food was also considered. They also discussed engaging congregations in service and fellowship opportunities which combat hunger and poverty.

Dialogue pertaining to reducing inequality looked at income, gender and new immigrants. It was determined that structure, culture and policy can create inequality as well as reduce it. People felt that The Salvation Army ought to find ways to be on the cutting edge of reducing these inequalities in our society by making it a priority and dedicating resources towards it.

The final afternoon was an opportunity for the leaders to bring the information together and progress from “What’s so?” (What are the realities and facts?) to “So what?” (What can The Salvation Army do about it?) A summary of the World Café discussions was presented. Several themes emerged from the discussions:

Internal and external partnerships

One of the key themes throughout the discussions was “internal and external partnerships.” It was recognized that some of these already exist, and there is an opportunity to develop more. The purpose of these partnerships would be to identify and increase the awareness of issues and how to address them.

Respecting and valuing people

Another theme was “respecting and valuing people” in every area of ministry, acknowledging that people are not disposable, and there is no one beyond redemption. Respecting and valuing people involves providing welcoming, tolerant, nonjudgmental environments for them, and having well-maintained buildings. It includes shifting from service delivery to program delivery which supports people in transforming their lives. There was an emphasis on seeking input from those with lived experience and including them in service delivery as a further means of valuing them.

Accessibility also came under the theme of respecting and valuing people. The discussions highlighted the importance of being accommodating in all areas where barriers exist for people to participate in worship, ministry and programs. These barriers consist of all disabilities, age, learning, language, culture, and building design. It was felt that The Salvation Army ought to look above the requirements of code and legislation as we provide dignity for all.

Living justly in our operations

The final theme was “living justly in our operations” and how this should impact all of our decisions and business transactions. Discussions included fair wages, meeting the General’s accountability targets, being fair in our transactions and aware of their impact on others, and practising fair process and due diligence.

The leaders were then reminded of the goal of the social justice priority “to promote the dignity of all people, with a focus on the marginalized and vulnerable” and challenged, after hearing all that they had heard, to consider what The Salvation Army can do. Much of the discussion looked at how to increase awareness across the territory about social justice issues, and what The Salvation Army is currently doing. Another follow-up action was the suggestion that we have building assessments to identify opportunities for increasing accessibility. There was also strong support for speaking out even more for those who have no voice.

Micah 6:8 says, “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (*NIV*). The purpose of the gathering was to gain a greater understanding as to what the Lord requires of us as an organization and as individuals as we fulfil his calling in our lives to live justly. In discussions with those who attended, it was evident that a change had taken place in their hearts and minds.