

Faith & Life – Compassion

John walked into family services – eyes darting back and forth ablaze with rage. Janice braced herself in anticipation of the oncoming onslaught. It was not uncommon for John to explode with curses, conspiracy theories of plots designed specifically to threaten his life, sharp demands for service or angry accusations against the staff. A new day, a new scenario – “Lord, Help!”

Leo entered the shelter. Travis greeted him warmly and asked if he wanted supper. As Leo lined up for the meal his eyes suddenly glazed over and he stood immobilized, lost once again in a seizure. Travis immediately recognized the situation and cleared the area. Suddenly, Leo left the line and began walking aimlessly down the staff hallway, trance-like, leaving a wet trail behind him. Once again, he had soiled his pants.

These may sound extreme but for many workers of The Salvation Army these are typical encounters they face on a daily basis with the people they serve.

As I reflect on these situations and the innumerable people I remember serving in over 30 years of Salvation Army service, one word comes to mind as an essential ingredient to our work – COMPASSION.

There are a couple of verses in the book of Matthew which have resonated in my spirit over the years as how we in The Salvation Army are to serve others. These verses are an anchor for us to be grounded in.

“Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Seeing the people, He felt **compassion** for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.” (Matthew 9:35 – 36)

As Jesus labored, He worked out of a core place in His being - compassion. He was not unmoved by what He saw in people - their circumstances, their inner turmoil, their messes, their hurts and confusion. He truly saw them. He saw beyond their exterior – and was moved to the core of His being with love, pity, mercy, tender affection, concern, grace.

This is our core value. This is what we seek to emulate as an organization: an Army that sees every individual that walks through our doors – really sees them – and is moved in our innermost being with love, pity, mercy, tender affection, concern and grace. Our compassion is not changed because of poor behaviour, ingratitude, lack of engagement, rudeness... Our core



value is that we intrinsically have compassion for them in whatever state they present. God help us!

This value of compassion doesn't merely rest in our feelings towards them. The concern and love motivates us to make a difference in their lives. For John, it meant working with his sister as an advocate to ensure that he receives the psychiatric intervention and treatment that is needed. For Leo, it means accommodating him in the shelter despite the mess, collaborating with health services and other community agencies to journey with him to a diagnosis. Our compassion leads us into action to meet human needs – to see lives transformed before our very eyes. This is no quick fix. It is a journey which takes time, commitment, hope and above all unfailing compassion.

Captain Ruth Gillingham has been on a constant adventure with Jesus, from the downtown Eastside of Vancouver to London, ON to Yellowknife, NT. Married to Ian for over 25 years with five children ranging in age from 22 down to 9, she's still loving the highways and byways.