

## A Glimpse from the Past – Celebration

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For Salvationists “celebrate” is not a passive word. It expresses many occasions when Salvationists share their joy in living. And celebration has its roots in biblical history. Miriam sang before the Lord, David danced, the prodigal son’s father threw a party, all in praise to the Lord who had set them free.

William Booth’s Salvation Army was an eclectic gathering of individuals. He gathered a cadre of believers so varied in their background that one has to wonder how it was that they came together at all. Preaching to those who were so poor and so low on the social scale, the Spirit took hold of many hearts. These converts went away from Booth’s meetings rejoicing that they had found the Saviour. Like the shepherds who went from the stable after viewing ‘the Hope of the World’, they had something to tell, a song in their hearts and a message they felt compelled to share.

The Salvation Army of the late 1800s knew they had to spread their good news on the sad streets of London and didn’t hesitate to draw attention to themselves. Some of their efforts flopped, but others worked, and perhaps none better than music. Booth unabashedly used the tunes of the music halls and pubs, replacing their crude words with messages of salvation and redemption. Salvationists hit the streets with this effective avenue of witness and declaration.

This early mark of celebration developed into an iconic Salvation Army image when brass bands were formed and street meetings held to declare the faith. Eventually those brass bands perfected their message and their skills until they were a source of attraction. People came to hear, and went away blessed, saved and on fire for the gospel. And there are still occasions around the world where Army brass bands march in the public square or witness on a street corner.

Booth also recognized the importance of bringing Salvationists together and in 1886 announced an international “war congress”. The call went far and wide to Salvation Army personnel around the world to gather in London, to see and hear what had been achieved by the Army as “a new organization, a new system and a new people.” This began a great tradition of international gatherings that continues still today. In fact, thousands of people will return to the Salvation Army’s birthplace in London in June 2015 to ‘commemorate the past, celebrate the present and innovate for the future’ at the *Boundless* International Congress.

Speaking during an International Congress the Archbishop of Canterbury said that “I have never seen a gloomy Salvationist”. Joy and celebration. It’s part of our DNA. Praise be to God!

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