

Army as church part five

It's about equipping

by Raymond L. Peacock, Lt. Colonel –

“Equip me for the war,” wrote Charles Wesley—words we sing often in our worship services. Wesley must have been thinking of Paul’s words, And he gave (gifts)...for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up the body of Christ...(Ephesians 4:11-12, NAS).

While the hub for equipping Salvationists in the Western Territory is Crestmont College, every corps should see itself as an “equipping station.”

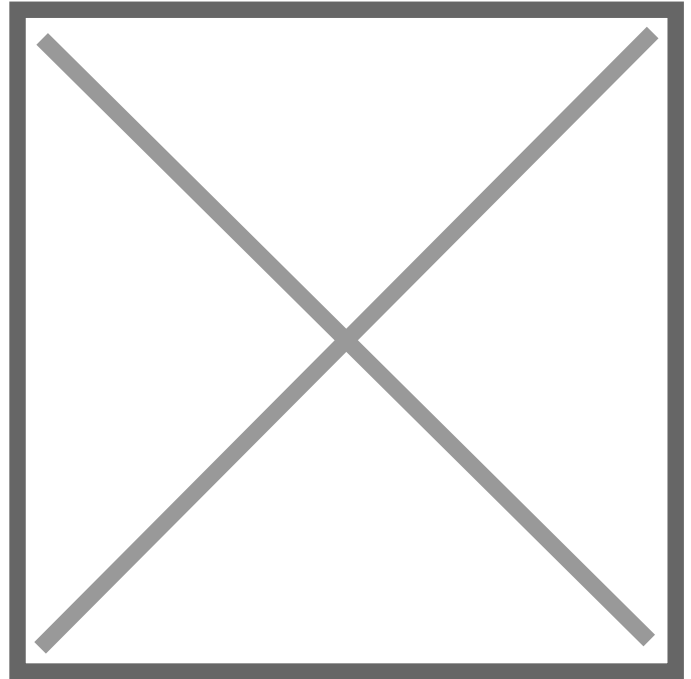
It has been nearly five years since our International Congress of 2000 in Atlanta. There, we celebrated the Army/Next. Leonard Sweet says the Next/Church, the church of the 21st century, has two challenges: “getting clear and clearing out.” By “clearing out,” he means clearing out spiritual deformities that disorder the church’s structural life and disable its mission.

Sweet suggests one thing we need to clear out are the obstacles standing in the way of implementing the one doctrine introduced—but not implemented—in the Reformation: “the priesthood of all believers.” There are not two levels of priesthood—clergy and laity—but only one. The church that will advance in the years ahead will be the church that mobilizes and equips the laity—which in our case is our soldiers.

Certainly, we don’t want a deformed or disabled structure or mission for the Army/Next. So, how do we make sure our corps are the equipping stations they need to be? Sue Mallory in *The Equipping Church: Serving Together to Transform Lives* suggests five points. While the points are hers, I have made them Army.

One person shares the vision

Someone has to see and share the vision of the corps as an equipping station to do service. Are there those who have caught the equipping and educational opportunity potential that exists here? We see our corps as worship centers for services of all kind, but mostly character building and social services.



Do we see our identity as an educational/equipping center? Often folks hesitate to serve, because they have not been trained. Think of what might happen if this changed. This is where it begins, seeing the vision and sharing the vision.

Officers relinquish control

Let's not bash the officer here; most are overworked and over-challenged. But for this vision to catch hold, the corps officers must think in terms of equipping others for service instead of doing it themselves. Some judgment is needed here. The officer needs to stay connected to the teams by hearing their reports, giving feedback, encouragement and ongoing training.

Teams replace committees

How do we get beyond the "saved to sit" to the "saved to serve" modality that is designated by the two "S" we wear on our collars? We ask soldiers to sit and worship and to sit on committees when we should be asking them to serve on ministry teams. The Army has this built into its history with prison visitation, League of Mercy, and social service client visitation. With a little bit of imagination, the work of the corps could be shared and lightened by developing and equipping several ministry teams. You might even ask soldiers for ideas on which teams they think should be formed.

Sue Mallory is quick to suggest that teams don't just materialize out of thin air. They need to define purpose, develop gift-based roles for team members, and determine accountability and more.

Speed kills

Just a reminder that equipping for and engaging in ministry is not a program. It is a way of doing the work, the ministry, the service of the Church and Army. Most ideas take a year or more to catch on.

Shortcuts are dead ends

Circumstances are different in every corps. Others have succeeded and you can too. There are lots of tools out there to get started. Two good resources are the aforementioned *The Equipping Church*, and also *Equipping the Saints: Mobilizing Laity for Ministry* by Michael J. Christensen.

I can say it no better that Commissioner Phil Needham, who said, "The Congregation is an equipping center. It is a place where members are helped to discover, develop and deploy their gifts for ministry."