

Territorial Commander welcomes Salvation Army's leaders to West

By Kenneth G. Hodder, Commissioner –

Territorial and command leaders from around the world are gathering this month in Pasadena, California, for the International Conference of Leaders. Under the leadership of General André Cox, the men and women who oversee The Salvation Army's work in every corner of the globe will discuss issues that affect its ministry, its people and its future. Of course, the USA Western Territory is greatly honored by the opportunity to host this gathering, and it is my hope that all Salvationists will pray for the Holy Spirit to guide everything that is said and done during these critical deliberations.



It is at moments such as this that we can rightly celebrate the way in which God has called into being a worldwide Army that crosses every racial, ethnic and linguistic barrier. Like the gospel itself, our movement does not depend upon any particular culture, tradition or mode of worship for its strength. To the contrary, we are at our best when we ignore such differences and claim for ourselves that spiritual phenomenon reserved only to believers —unity in Jesus Christ. Regardless of who you are, where you come from, or what your background may be, when you come to Christ, you become part of one family, one people, and one Army. No matter where a Salvationist may be around the world, when he or she goes to the local corps, they are home.

The reason for this unity, of course, is Jesus Christ himself. Scholars will forever study his origin, his person, his work and his mission, and Christ's importance to the world can therefore be readily understood from a number of different perspectives, including the historical, the philosophical and the spiritual. But for the disciple of Christ, the matter is ultimately far simpler, and the conclusion is always the same: Christ is one. The world may highlight one dimension or another, but we find in him and the salvation he offers a perfect unity that is available nowhere else. Because he is both fully human and fully divine, we recognize in Jesus a matchless beauty that marks him as the Son of God, the intersection of this world and the next, and the hope for all mankind.

This is why Christ is also the foundation of the Church itself. He is the reason for its existence as a spiritual, social and institutional reality. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3:11: *...no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.* And in Ephesians 2:20–21, the Apostle refers to Christ as the *chief cornerstone* of the Church, upon which *the whole building is*

joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. The Church is the incorporeal Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, and the divine instrument through which, thanks to the Holy Spirit, he continues his ministry in the modern world.

Our entire worldview as Christians is drawn directly from the teachings, example and personal sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Without him, we would literally have no basis for our belief and no foundation for unity. Indeed, Christianity itself would be a meaningless exercise. So when we express our “faith in Jesus Christ,” we do so not only to point to him as Savior, but also to identify him as the point of intersection for everything we are, everything we believe, and everything we hope to be.

As we often sing, “Our hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.” For Salvationists, who treasure the worldwide spiritual unity that his blood bought for us, there is ample reason to celebrate.