

## **A Critical Investigation of the Benefits of Continued Professional Development to the Pastoral Practice of Salvation Army Officers.**

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### **Abstract**

Salvation Army Officers minister within complex pastoral settings. Continued Professional Development (CPD) may benefit their pastoral practice by providing an avenue to more effective ministry. There has been significant research regarding the CPD of leaders in many professions, but the same cannot be said about the CPD that points specifically to Salvation Army Officers or the benefits to a missional context, verses other professions or vocations. This article investigates the benefits of Continued Professional Development (CPD) to the pastoral practice of Salvation Army Officers.

### **Introduction**

Officers serve within a society that challenges the church's identity and credibility, and tests its traditions, values and beliefs. Hawkins et al (2012) suggests that 'learning must be equal to or be greater than environmental change, and if the organisation does not learn faster than the world around it is changing, the organisation will cease to exist'. CPD may address these issues and benefit pastoral practice but current research does not focus on benefits to clergy.

McKenna et al (2007) suggest that although there is substantial research relative to the on-going development of leaders in secular organizations, the same cannot be said about CPD for clergy, neither the benefit provided to pastoral practice. There is little reference specifically about the benefits to one's pastoral practice and though there are Christian authors who advocate for CPD their literature does not disseminate the result or the benefits to pastoral practice. In light of this gap in research, I interviewed Officers from varied areas of ministry and years of service to gather contextual data relative to the benefits of continued learning and development to their pastoral practice.

This article will provide insight into the benefits of CPD to the pastoral practice of officers and encourage others to consider continued development. As officers

assume learning opportunities and embed learning into pastoral practice, this will impact positively on the people to whom they minister and also on The Salvation Army's mission.

### **Praeparatio Continua**

CPD, also known as Continued Learning, or Ongoing Development, constitutes a method which helps in addressing current needs and emerging issues within varying vocations. Gurgel (2010) uses the term 'praeparatio continua' or 'ongoing preparation', to describe the spiritual and professional development for clergy beyond ordination. Rothe (2016) states,

'While historians place the formalization of CPD somewhat recently (1960s), the idea of working adults maintaining or acquiring knowledge and skills for increased competency within their profession dates back to the 19th Century. With the industrial revolution in Europe came a revolution of adult education.'

Gallager (2006) and Stein (1998) cited by the Institute of Medicine (2010) confirm the first iteration of continuing education for nurses was recorded in 1894, with CPD for doctors emerging after World War I. Brennan (2016) acknowledges continued professional education for other vocations may have developed during World War II. Minimal evidence exists regarding CPD for clergy, and none specifically for officers, although differing views exist about CPD for clergy, if ministry is understood solely as a calling. Some research links the term 'professional' to the secular world rather than to the church. Gurgel (2010) cited by Rothe (2016) indicates 'professional' terminology is misunderstood since a divine calling to ministry is viewed as more than a profession, suggesting CPD is an expectation of many vocations, and should be incorporated into ministry. Olson's research (2009) states, 'although seldom the focus of professional development research, clergy also benefit from continuing education and lifelong learning.'

Lifelong learning is more than formal education. Gurgel (2010) as cited by Rothe (2016) claims that CPD depends on the individual and their ministry and will emerge through formal means including accredited programs, certificates, diploma programs, and informal means like conferences, small study groups, or self-directed learning.

The question that needs to be explored with any ‘training, education or development opportunity’ is ‘what difference will it make?’ (Evans 2012) Teachers who pursue CPD, discovered ‘improvement in pupil’s learning and behaviour’, in their own ‘practices, attitudes and beliefs’, and continued learning helped teachers to ‘embed effective practices into their classrooms’ (Walter and Briggs 2012). Schostak et al. (2010) cited by Jackson et al (2015) indicate that CPD in the medical field ‘supports specific changes in practice which enables individual practitioners to maintain and improve standards of medical practice through the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviour’. These sources demonstrate that CPD makes a difference to the individual and enhances their practice. Olson (2009) proposes that ‘Continuing education allows professionals to supplement their pre-professional training and respond to a rapidly changing world’. This suggests that officers engaging with CPD should see a benefit to their pastoral practice in responding to the societal issues facing the church.

Jividen (2009) suggests that professional and spiritual leadership overlap, and since the needs of society change so rapidly, leaders must continue to develop to remain relevant and effective. Woodward and Pattison (2000:13) describe ministry as ‘practical theology’ that ‘aims to make a difference to people, understandings, and situations in the contemporary world.’ Pattison (1986) as cited by Woodward and Pattison (2000:15) goes on to say that our practical theology is ‘interdisciplinary’, and ‘theology in itself cannot reveal all one needs to know adequately to respond to contemporary situations and issues’, and ‘other disciplinary findings and perspectives must be utilised.’ Therefore, theological teaching will be strengthened by integrating other areas of CPD in order to address issues and challenges faced by officers. Olson (2009) says, ‘Ongoing training and development is a critical component of sustained ministry effectiveness’, so engaging in ongoing training and development will produce benefits to an officer’s pastoral practice and more effective ministry.

CPD should not only benefit pastoral practice, but also improve one’s self-confidence, self-esteem, sense of purpose, and sense of accomplishment. Field (2012) considers well-being to be one of the most important outcomes of lifelong learning, and Boakes et al (2010) states:

‘Ongoing ministerial development should be ‘Benedictine’ in ethos, embracing the development of the whole person in his or her ministerial context rather than focusing on ‘training’ in any narrow sense. Ongoing ministerial development is about far more than equipping ourselves for a ministerial role. St Benedict believed and taught that a life balanced in such a way would produce the kind of spiritual groundedness upon which human flourishing and ministerial effectiveness both depend.’

It stands to reason that CPD increases one’s sense of wellbeing and positively impacts the ability to pastor more effectively.

Opportunities for development are many, but there needs to be an awareness of the potential barriers that jeopardise ongoing development. Although research is currently limited relative to CPD for clergy, study in the medical field conducted by Mathers, Mitchell, and Hunn (2012) indicate that time pressures, workload and funding were the top barriers to pursuing CPD. Schostak et al (2010) say that the major barriers were: study leave availability, cost, external demands, and work life balance, and these barriers may be experienced by officers. Balancing the ‘varied and unpredictable demands of pastoral ministry’ (Litchfield 2006:123) with family needs, and pressure from congregants can sometimes be overwhelming. Officers engaging with CPD can be seen as self-indulgent and some congregations may not acknowledge the sense of investing time and money into officer development if that investment is going to ‘walk out the door’ during the annual transfer of personnel. This research only considers external barriers but internal barriers also play a major role and can jeopardise ongoing development both personally and professionally.

Our internal frame of reference impacts greatly on our potential to achieve. People’s perceptions can become our personal sense of self (Watts, Nye and Savage 2002: 213). If those reflections are insensitive, negative, or hurtful, over time this can become part of our identity, causing low self-confidence, low self-esteem, a fear of failure or being judged. The desire to learn and develop could be impacted by one’s self-concept. Carl Rogers’ theory of self suggests that there are two components: the perceived self and the ideal self, and a healthy balance of both produces good psychological health. When there is an imbalance we may feel like we don’t measure up to the ideal (Ahmad and Tekke 2015). As we learn we ‘look for

ways to organise our thoughts' and make a 'mental map of a particular area or set of issues' (Watts, Nye, and Savage 2002:124). These mental maps help to comprehend a range of ideas or schemas. The schema of self refers to how we see ourselves, and if we think 'we're not good enough', this becomes an internal barrier to pursuing CPD. Despite internal and external barriers that jeopardise ongoing development, studies show that lifelong learning contributes positively to 'mental capital and wellbeing throughout our lifetime' (Cooper et al 2009). Acquiring practical skills, knowledge, and gaining emotional wellbeing are important reasons for officers continued learning and development while in ministry, since knowledge and wellbeing positively impact pastoral practice.

### **Questions asked and answered**

Although there is limited research pertaining to the benefits of CPD to the pastoral practice of clergy and none at all relative to Salvation Army Officers, literature does provide valuable insights. Conducting a critical investigation of the benefits of CPD to an officer's pastoral practice was influenced by my own ministry experience, engagement with CPD and my direction to others to pursue it. To demonstrate whether these findings supported the theories emerging from current research, the questions posed to interviewees were based on current literature.

Prior to interviewing the officers I was aware that all of them had engaged in informal CPD, and one had pursued formal CPD, but I had no knowledge of the formal CPD of the three remaining. Due to the potential that personal and private information would be divulged during the interview, I assured them that confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained throughout. Conducting interviews with officers allowed me to glean objective information from the participant's personal experience. Admittedly, interviewing a limited number of officers would not provide the broad-spectrum of results that a survey would, but they would yield an in depth understanding of the viewpoint of each participant based on lived experience. (Vanderstoep and Johnston 2009:166). To clearly understand how CPD benefits the officer's pastoral practice, the viewpoints and experiences of the pastor are paramount. The quantitative approach offered through surveys could produce useful and valid results, but the opportunity to interact with participants and witness them in their own context would be lost (Bryman 2016:400). Numerical data and precise

measurements are important to research, but contextual data is more relevant to the substance of this article.

With a focus on the benefits of CPD to pastoral practice, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method was chosen to analyse the data. Hefferon and Rodriguez (2011) suggest that the IPA method focuses on 'subjective lived experience'. Using this method allowed individual experiences to emerge and provided opportunity to focus on participants and how they made sense of their personal and social world, and to subsequently analyse and compare any emerging themes (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2008). During the interviews participants reflected on their own experience and framework of understanding versus the broader context. Common themes and connected thoughts were noted and compared to current literature to establish validation or contradiction of existing research.

To gather data relative to the critical investigation of the benefits of CPD to the pastoral practice of Salvation Army Officers, a purposive sample of four participants was chosen. In order to gain a broad scope of contextual data from their experience in pastoral practice, the Officers were selected with varied years of service and from varied roles and demographics i.e. a contemporary corps setting in rural Nottinghamshire, an urban administration in the Bristol area, a social setting in London, and a small traditional corps setting in rural Nottinghamshire. Data was gathered by conducting a 20 minute semi-structured interview with each participant. The participants were asked the following questions formulated from current literature:

- 1) What kind of professional development have you completed since training college?
- 2) Tell me how you would rate the importance of officers continuing to learn and develop throughout their ministry?
- 3) What might the congregation or those you minister to, see as the benefits of an officer who is intentional about CPD?

4) What are the internal and external barriers that jeopardise on-going development both personally and professionally?

The first two questions establish participant's engagement with CPD, its importance to them, and how it was applied to ministry. Literature considered the benefits of CPD from a secular viewpoint, so question three was crucial to the research topic, and vital in establishing the benefits of CPD from a pastoral perspective. Literature focused on reasons people did not engage with CPD, therefore question four helped determine organisational barriers that prevented officers from engaging and the impact on pastoral practice.

Officers acknowledged participating in formal or informal development beyond training college, based on general needs of appointments and demands of pastoral practice. Responding to question two, participants confirmed that learning should be purposeful, relevant, and applicable to the current ministry and not just a tick-box exercise, or engagement 'just for the sake of doing training', because this could be viewed as counter-productive. Three interviewees valued development and learning to remain informed of dynamic social issues, technology, laws, etc. All participants viewed CPD as highly significant to their role especially regarding pastoral practice.

When asked 'What might the congregation (or those to whom you minister) see as the benefits for an officer who is intentional about CPD'? All indicated that benefits are only realised if learning is seen to be embedded within ministry, and confirmed it could help develop congregational ministry tools, with one suggesting it 'breathes longevity into your ministry', and prevents the church from becoming 'stale, boring, or stuck.' Three participants saw it as a model for congregates and a way to develop others. All participants cited several psychological benefits of CPD in pastoral practice, especially introspection leading to self-awareness, self-confidence, self-worth, building trust, empowerment, valuing people and engendering mutual trust. Officers confirmed the need to look inward at themselves as well as outward at the needs of people.

Regarding the internal and external barriers jeopardising on-going development both personally and professionally, participants agreed that 'time' was the biggest, then ministry demands, lack of local leadership, and multitasking within that gap. All

agreed that allowing other priorities to take precedence is a barrier to CPD. Psychological factors such as self-confidence, fear, uncertainty, self-doubt, and being undervalued posed barriers to an individual's desire to pursue CPD. This, along with negative pressure from congregates not understanding CPD impacts the desire to pursue on-going development, especially for Corps Officers (CO's).

Data was analysed using the IPA method of data analysis since it has an interpretive element which considers personal beliefs and knowledge and affords a measure of flexibility (Pietkiewicz and Smith 2014). Exploring the lived experiences of participants and how meaning is ascribed to those experiences along with a participant's personal framework of understanding versus the broader context, was an important element in investigating the benefits of CPD for an officer's pastoral practice. It was essential to analyse the results accurately. Revisiting the responses helped to 'make sense of the participant's lived experiences' and point of view; important to the IPA method of analysis (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2009). Close examination helped identify and colour code relevant words, phrases, and sections of responses (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009). Repetitive answers, opinions of the participant, links to the literature review, and any surprising elements were well noted. To conceptualize the data, common threads were identified regarding the individual transcript and the four transcripts as a whole, and further grouped in emergent themes and subordinate themes. A final review was conducted by clustering emerging themes into three overall themes: significance of CPD, benefits of CPD, and the barriers to CPD which linked the benefit of CPD to the pastoral practice of Salvation Army Officers.

### **What does it all mean?**

Interview results, along with current literature were essential in doing a critical investigation of the benefits of CPD to the pastoral practice of officers. Research demonstrated participants had a good understanding of the significance of CPD, which constituted the first theme, since it equipped leaders to address needs within pastoral practice. One officer confirmed the need for awareness of the dynamic world in which we live and the challenges presented to those we attempt to serve; these contemporary times are complex, and officers are obligated to remain current with development to be effective in ministry. This is supported in literature. Both

Jividen (2009) and Olson (2009) suggest that professional and spiritual leadership should be developed in order to effectively address a rapidly changing society, and on-going development is a critical component of sustained ministry effectiveness. Responses from participants and current literature both suggest that engaging with CPD informs and equips clergy to address pastoral needs more effectively, validating the benefit of CPD.

While participants saw CPD as significant, they indicated that the benefit can be seen only when learning is embedded into ministry, pointing toward Evans (2012) who asks, 'what difference will it make?' CPD adds benefit for officer's pastoral practice, but this can happen only if learning is intentionally embedded within ministry. Engagement should not simply be about taking a course, or creating a tick-box exercise to fulfil a requirement of the Vocational Development Plan (VDP), but pursued with the purpose of benefiting and strengthening pastoral practice.

Participants engagement in the second theme provided only general reference to the benefits of CPD to pastoral practice, indicating that further development did provide ways to enhance ministry and had empowered them with tools for their 'ministry toolbox', positively impacted their wellbeing—providing benefit to the individual and the practical application to ministry. Research suggests that remaining current with practical ministry developments and remaining current with societal changes was dependant on the CPD pursued. Olson (2009) indicates that on-going development prepares leaders to address the growing changes in society and promotes sustained ministry effectiveness. Officers agree they cannot isolate themselves from societal issues but must remain informed and knowledgeable regarding social justice and cultural changes, therefore personal development should align with the needs of their people. The setting within which officers minister is not stagnant, and as the environment changes, CPD enables officers to adapt their ministry approaches to remain relevant and effective.

The interviews provide evidence that officers are able to model their learning to the benefit of others; another practical benefit of CPD. Embedding learning into pastoral practice meant local leaders could integrate this knowledge into their leadership acumen, empowering them to lead more effectively in the ministry setting. One participant recalled how their own coaching and mentoring relationship prompted

personal development in these two important areas, and then provided that knowledge to local leaders who in turn engaged with coaching and mentoring. This is supported by Walter and Briggs (2012) who indicate that when teachers engaged with on-going learning and development and embedded their learning into the classroom, an improvement in student's learning and behaviour was realized. Congregations feel encouraged when officers demonstrate and model the knowledge they have gained from CPD. Participants demonstrate the benefits of CPD in developing leaders within the ministry context and one suggests that as people see it modelled from the officer, it gives motivation to do the same for themselves.

The wellbeing of leaders was another benefit of engaging with CPD. Participant's use of words like self-awareness, self-confidence, self-worth, empowerment and value, indicate the advantage for wellbeing as it provides opportunity for reflection. As one participant confirmed, CPD brought value to her life and ministry and says 'it's helped grow me and develop me and it's made me so much more of a better person', and 'I'm still an officer because of it.' Evidence is strong toward officers gaining a greater sense of wellbeing when engaging with CPD. When officers engage effectively with CPD and are affirmed by the educator and by those to whom they minister, this contributes to their wellbeing. Such affirmation improved self-confidence, self-esteem, and effectiveness and it helped in thinking positively about oneself. Boakes et al (2010) confirms that continued learning will develop the whole person in addition to equipping leaders for ministry and purport that human flourishing and ministerial effectiveness both depend on a healthy balance of the two. Field (2012) proposes that well-being is one of the most important outcomes of lifelong learning.

Along with the significance of CPD and its benefits to pastoral practice and the individual, the final theme in this study which emerged from the interviews was the existence of 'barriers'. Participants were able to speak of specific external and internal barriers – those created by others but also from within themselves. The most significant barrier for each was time. Using personal experience, each described the unpredictability of an officer's schedule despite attempts to develop consistent routines. Daily interruptions from a variety of sources within pastoral ministry

continue to be a challenge. This along with not having office support or local leadership resulted in heavy administrative duties. Balancing ministry workload with family demands and personal needs was difficult and often pushed CPD to the bottom of the priority list. Participant's 'lived experience' resembles research conducted by Mathers, Mitchell, and Hunn (2012) and Schostak et al (2010) who suggest that barriers such as time pressures, workload, external demands, and work life balance were some of the leading reasons why some people refrain from engaging with CPD. In addition to this, Litchfield (2006:123) writes about the 'varied and unpredictable demands of pastoral ministry' and suggests that the daily working patterns for clergy can be problematic when attempting to address the demands of ministry, family needs, and one's personal requirements.

Participants confirmed negative pressure from congregates can be overwhelming and prevent healthy engagement with CPD. One congregation feared an officer's CPD would distract from ministry and pastoral needs. Current literature suggests that misunderstanding of how CPD relates to clergy stems from the interpretation of 'professional', especially in light of a divine calling to ministry which is viewed as being more than a profession (Gurgel 2010). There is the thought that officers who are truly fulfilling their 'calling', would not need to engage with continued 'professional' development.

Negative pressure from congregations toward officers who engage with CPD can impact their wellbeing, creating a sense of worry for some. As officers receive insensitive, negative, or hurtful remarks from congregates, this can impact one's self-confidence or self-esteem, leaving officers with a sense of guilt or fear of being judged. Watts, Nye and Savage (2002:213) agree that what people reflect back to us can actually become our own personal sense of self. Ahmad and Tekke (2015) go on to suggest that when there is incongruence between the perceived self and the real self, one can end up feeling like they are not good enough. Evidence from the interviews suggests that self-confidence, fear, uncertainty, self-doubt, and being undervalued were psychological barriers that impacted officer's engagement with CPD. Conversely, Cooper et al (2009) suggest that on-going learning and development contributes positively to one's mental capital and wellbeing. So, if there was a way to overcome these barriers where officers felt they could freely engage

with CPD, this would promote wellbeing and in turn, contribute positively to pastoral practice.

## **Conclusion**

Societal changes and challenges impact the lives of people we serve, which force us to strengthen our pastoral response. While helpful, officers can no longer just rely on life or ministry experience. More and more, CPD has become a significant part of pastoral practice. As indicated, officers regarded CPD as significant to their role and beneficial to pastoral practice. It revealed that CPD equips officers to pastor more effectively and this is evidenced when officers embed development into ministry. As the investigation unfolded it became more evident that benefits of CPD were more far-reaching than anticipated. The research revealed that along with benefits to pastoral practice there was significant advantage to the individual especially in the area of wellbeing. When officers feel a sense of wellbeing this in turn positively impacts ministry.

Another important finding in this investigation pointed to internal and external barriers which kept officers from pursuing CPD. Time, work-life balance, and self-concepts, along with negative pressure from corps members were barriers to engaging with ongoing development. The discovery that corps members really didn't have a clear understanding of what CPD actually entailed, how it benefited an officer, and the process of how it informed pastoral practice, was a definite barrier for those interviewed, and is certainly a topic for further research. The other side of the equation is where officers may not fully understand the purpose of CPD. My experience confirms two extremes: officers who engage very little with CPD and those who become 'career students'. If, on one hand an officer is disinterested in personal development or on the other hand one is constantly studying, a sense of balance is lacking and this may negatively affect the ministry unit as well as the officer's pastoral practice. It may be beneficial to take this research further by conducting an investigation involving Corps officers, congregates and current personnel involved with leadership development to establish what they understand CPD to be. Gaining the perspective of these people relative to the benefits of CPD and/or the pitfalls of 'career' officer-students, or those who do not engage with CPD would prove interesting.

It is important to recognise that wellbeing was significant in the responses given by the officers interviewed, thus having a considerable implication for practice. Officers want to know that they are valued, that their development is recognised and useful for ministry, whether it is formal or informal and regardless of the impact. The research; especially as it points to wellbeing, helps me to see that The Salvation Army has an opportunity to inspire officers to find meaning in what they do and guide them towards purposeful learning, helping them find ways to apply that learning. Further, The Salvation Army personnel can help officers overcome external barriers by creating understanding around CPD by clearly communicating to both officers and congregates the purpose of CPD and the benefits derived as a result. Conversations with officers in an effort to help them choose development pertinent to current pastoral practice will be valuable. When officers can reflect on why they desire to pursue learning and development, it becomes more meaningful and thus they are more apt to apply it to practice.

The use of semi-structured interviews with officers was the best method for gathering information and it provided the participants the space where they could become vulnerable and this in turn produced rich data for my investigation. Likened to Guenther's Holy Listening, each interview became a safe place where 'anything may be said without fear of criticism or exposure' (Guenther 1992:19). These conversations merged with current literature confirm that CPD is indeed beneficial to officer's pastoral practice. It is my hope, therefore, that this article will draw attention to these benefits and positively influence and inspire officers toward engaging with CPD. It should be noted, however, that while embracing CDP is a goal to which one can aspire it is not an end in itself. The ideal is that officers who do engage will embed learning into ministry practice. CPD is a personal responsibility but also an integral part of God's plan for us. My desire is that this article will be affirming to officers and will engender a renewed sense of awareness of CPD so they can continue to engage with on-going learning and development. As a senior officer I have a responsibility to encourage other officers towards engaging with CPD which is relevant to current ministry, and, I have an equally important responsibility to ensure that I model it myself.

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