

## **Salvation Army music making in the UK today – a practical and theological investigation**

**By Leanne Wallis**

### **Abstract**

This article investigates Salvation Army music making in the UK today. It begins by considering the history of Salvation Army music making and the place of music within the movement, with theological reflection. Then, an assessment of contemporary Salvation Army music making is made. The research carried out confirms that major changes are taking place at this time. Three major issues have been identified, of inclusion, evangelism and change. These are used for further theological reflection, using insights from scripture, culture and other Christian writers. The conclusion gives some practical recommendations for Salvation Army leaders dealing with these issues today.

### **Introduction**

A former General of The Salvation Army has written, 'If music is one of God's gifts to the Army, we don't want less of it – we want more!' (Larsson, 2017). Music making has been part of The Salvation Army since its early days. However, times and culture have changed. Is Salvation Army music making still relevant, and what critical issues exist for it today? These are the questions which this article aims to answer.

I will firstly be considering how music began within the movement. Reflecting on this history, I will then move on to investigate the situation facing Salvation Army music in the UK today.

Having consulted modern literature, carried out a survey of corps (churches), and interviewed The Salvation Army's Director of Music and Creative Arts, I have found that changes in regulations for bands and songster groups are beginning to have an impact.

Several live and current issues are worthy of reflection. How inclusive should Salvation Army music making be? Is evangelism re-emerging as a priority for music making? How can musical groups face changes in the best way?

I will be arguing that addressing these issues well locally can offer potential for the future. So, I conclude by offering practical recommendations, for use by leaders today.

### **Salvation Army music making in a historical context**

Salvation Army music grew when brass accompaniment became a part of its outdoor evangelism in 1878. In 1884, over 400 Salvation Army UK corps bands had been founded (Holz 2016:164).

However, Booth saw music as dangerous, being suspicious of its 'seductive power' (Etheridge 2018). He revised his opinion, though, as Hattersley says (1999:244), when he learnt of the possibilities that music provided in evangelism. For Holz (1990), Booth's confidence in music lay with the spiritual power of the associated words. His priority was to save people's souls.

As Booth was 'suspicious of organised music groups' (Holz 2006:68), he chose to regulate music through orders and regulations, in 1880 and 1881 (Holz 2006:70). Strict controls were placed on membership, and the leadership of bands was very tightly defined.

There were also strict views about Salvation Army musicians' faith. Sandall (1950:117) believes that Booth 'was determined that the bandsmen should be converted men of high character, and that their playing should serve only the objects of the Army.' Herbert Booth stated in 1886 that

'No one had a right to sing lively tunes except they were saved; that the devil had no claim to even as much as a demi-semiquaver of music, and that he had been helped to usurp this power by Christians who put unsaved people up to sing the most sacred words' (Boon 1978:10).

In 1885, Booth ordered that bands could only play Salvation Army music (Holz 2016:164). Until 1902, all Salvation Army music was strictly regulated, based on spiritual tunes. Booth believed that bands should be concerned with outdoor evangelism, limiting their indoor repertoire.

The rigid boundaries drawn around band membership also seemed to apply to bandsmen's own leisure time. Booth himself advised bandsmen of the consequences of leaving the movement. He said of them,

'The poor fellow learned to play an instrument in the service of Jesus, but he turned his back on the precious Saviour, and now plays with the ungodly herd; notice his hard work as he toils far into the night at dances ... Will he blow his horn in hell? We think not. The unending lamentations of the lost will be the only music made by castaway souls in hell' (Booth, 1900 – 1901).

### **Reflection on historical Salvation Army music making**

Why did Booth choose brass bands to help his ministry in those days? Herbert (1992) argues that brass bands were an important element of Victorian working-class culture, offering good opportunities in mission and evangelism.

Theologically, Booth's passion for reaching the poor can be reflected in Luke 4:18, with words from Isaiah 61, verses 1 and 2, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.' Booth engaged with popular culture, proclaiming the 'good news', recognising the appeal and the accessibility of music. He encouraged music in evangelism, believing in its power to draw people into meetings. However, his different view of the role of music in worship indoors may have come from his own experience in Methodism, of the issues with church choirs (The Primitive Methodist Magazine 1903).

However, his concern around band membership could be reflected in Hosea 6:6, where we read, 'For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.' Here, Smith (2001:112) believes that God is dissatisfied with his people's devotion, arguing that the people can only 'mechanically bring their

sacrificial gifts' to the temple. Was Booth concerned that music making could become like one of these 'sacrificial gifts'?

Why did Booth restrict membership of bands and Songster brigades to Salvation Army members, subject to orders and regulations? Perhaps he feared a repetition of the problems experienced by temperance bands, where many of them had become temperance in name only. Rhodes believes that this was the reason for band members being required to be active Salvationists (Rhodes 2007).

Catherine Booth was also determined that Salvation Army band membership should be a spiritual commitment (Booth-Tucker 1892:461). Mackey (2006:55) believes that The Salvation Army's mission was 'God's kingdom making war against Satan's kingdom.... [it was] an "us or them" world'.

I will now move on to considering contemporary music making in the movement. What has changed? What issues are being considered at this time?

### **Contemporary Salvation Army music**

Contemporary literature shows an interesting picture. Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century statistics show declining traditional UK Salvation Army music making. Holz (2006:180) reports that the number of bands fell from 611 in 1983 to 510 in 1999. During this time the average numbers of members in each band fell from 19 to 14. However, Salvation Army Research and Development Unit statistics (George Mitchell, personal communication) show that this decline reversed. The number of bands rose, from 462 in 2007, to 500 in 2017, and the number of Songster brigades rose from 495 to 508 in the same time. However, the average number of band members fell from 15 to 11, and Songsters fell from 21 to 15. Orders and regulations also changed, as did attitudes towards music making.

In 1991, Salvation Army music was permitted to be sold to other organisations (Blyth 2015:173). In 1992, all Salvationist musicians were permitted to participate in other groups (Holz 2006:177). Boundaries were being broken down between Salvationists and others in music making.

These changes were positively received. Larsson (1992) saw this development as The Salvation Army moving out of a 'ghetto mentality'. However, Salvation Army regulations still stated that 'all commissioned musicians must be soldiers of The Salvation Army' (The Salvation Army: 2000).

Then 'open musical sections' were formalised (The Salvation Army 2015), with unrestricted membership open to all who regularly attended worship. Many have written about the potential of this change. Larsson (2017) argues that music making, not just music listening, should be used for mission and outreach, to capture the non-believer. One bandmaster reflected on his own corps' journey towards open membership. He said, 'I guess we felt the Army followed a model of 'Behave, believe, belong', and we very much wanted to reverse that to say 'belong then believe', and then the behaviour will come as a result of that belief' (Paul French, personal correspondence 21/10/19). Anecdotal written testimony is also positive. For example, in 2014, 17 members of the Solent Fellowship Band, had found connection with a Salvation Army worshipping community. The writer argued that this was 'an evangelistic opportunity that we cannot ignore' (Peter Bale, *The Mouthpiece*, 2014).

However, this change has required considerable preparation from leaders. For example, Portsmouth Citadel devised guideline, (Guidelines for members of Portsmouth Citadel Band and Songsters 2019, unpublished). By being clear about the commitment expected of non-soldiers, and rooting these expectations in regulations, they respected others' commitments as musicians (Paul French, personal correspondence 21/10/19). Another purpose has been added to the guidelines, of providing 'a supportive environment in which the Christian faith – at whatever stage that may be – of all members of the band and Songsters is nurtured and can grow.' (Guidelines for members of Portsmouth Citadel Band and Songsters 2019, unpublished). In doing this, leaders have stated that membership is a means of evangelism and discipleship.

I also conducted some practical research, to investigate UK Salvation Army music today. To obtain a perspective on Salvation Army music making from Territorial Headquarters, I sought an interview with the Director of the Music and Creative Arts Unit, Dr. Stephen Cobb.

Dr. Cobb estimates that 400 corps hold organised music making activity today. No information is available of sections with open membership, but he believes that groups have been moving towards this format for some time.

He notes the decline in the UK Salvation Army, believing that recent changes in music making were introduced as a response to this. However, he believes that open membership is also happening as a response to changes in young people's lives today, as 'closed' musical sections decline in numbers.

Cobb believes that open membership gives the Army 'the chance to do mission through music'. He states that 'music is one of the most significant missional tools we have in The Salvation Army'.

He is aware of anecdotal positive stories of people returning to the Army through music but has no awareness of any broader picture of membership growth, and wonders if it is too soon for the changes to have had impact. Conversely, he recalls examples where a move towards open membership has had negative impact. He thinks that the changes will continue to be challenging.

Cobb also discusses the challenges of changing to an open format, and the advantages of moving from a position of strength, rather than as a response to decline. He recommends finding a suitable person to be a role model; perhaps a person who already attends the corps, known to the band, prepared to become an adherent, who would blend in with existing members.

He believes in the importance of working out the non-negotiable elements of Salvationism so that inclusiveness does not lead to compromise. He believes in the need to try to 'understand what doing and being Salvation Army means'. He also speaks about the inclusivity within bands, describing the room available for everyone of all ages and abilities within them.

Cobb reflects that music brings people into a closer relationship with God. He argues that the words associated with Salvation Army music form The Salvation Army's 'book

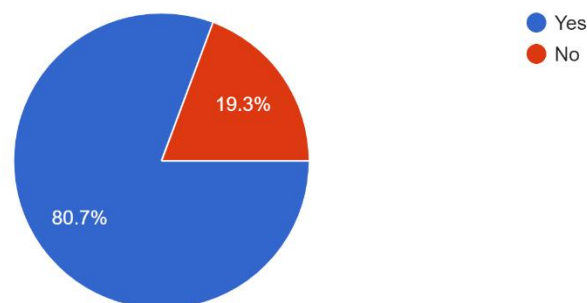
of common prayer', and believes that this is a sound rationale for music making within The Salvation Army.

I also obtained data from Salvation Army corps. Myers (1996) advises that 'a "good" research proposal has a sample of sufficient size and clarity to be replicable.' I decided to survey Corps Officers, through the Salvation Army Corps Officers UK Facebook group. I asked for a voluntary, anonymous response, to collect reliable, truthful, and nuanced data. The response received represented up to 57% of Salvation Army corps across the UK - a significant sample.

Of these responses, the diagram below shows that 96 corps (80.7% of those responding) had organised musical groups within their programme.

Do you have any organised musical groups at your corps?

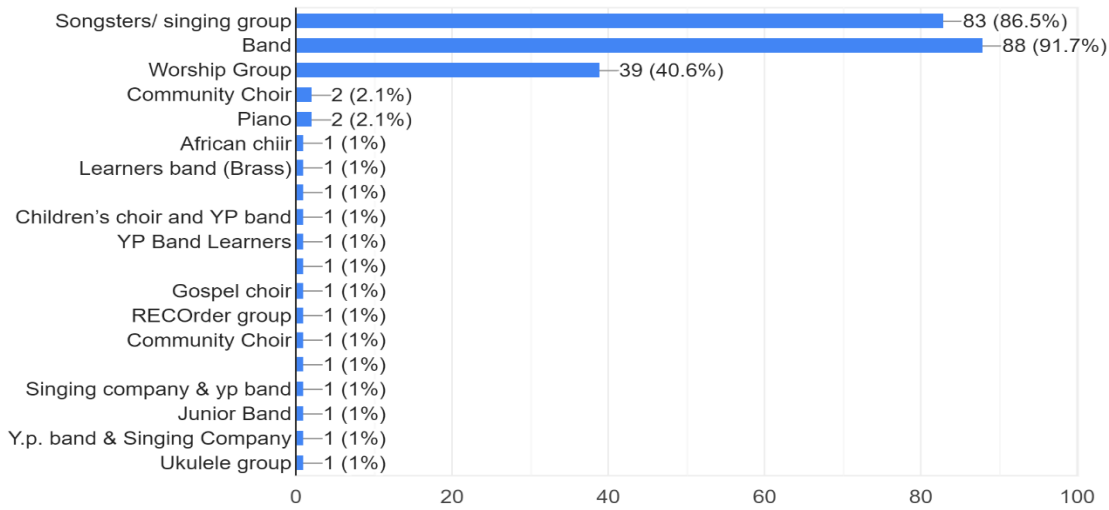
119 responses



Of these 96 corps, the diagram below shows that 83 corps (86.5%) had a Songster brigade or singing group, 88 (91.7%) had a band, and 39 (40.6%) had a worship group. Other groups were present in very small numbers.

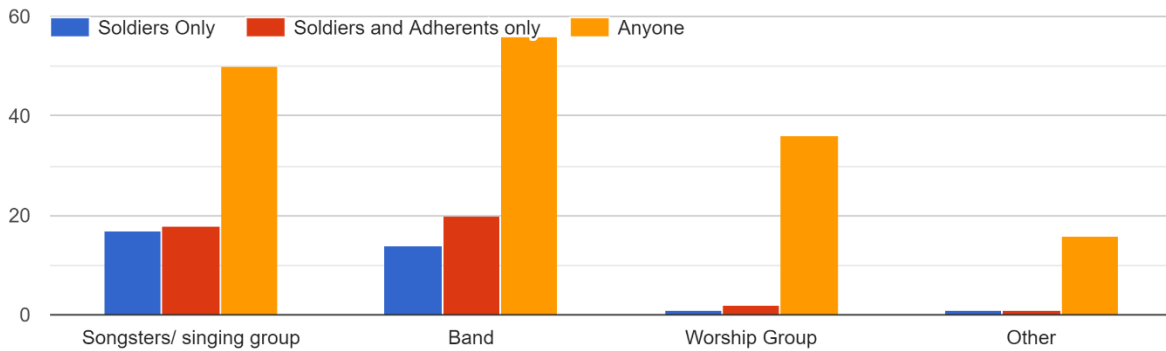
Which musical groups do you have?

96 responses



The survey asked about the membership criteria for organised musical groups.

Who is eligible to be a member of each musical group? (Please tick all that apply)



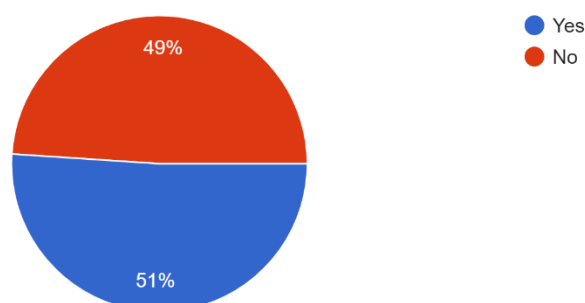
Of 85 Songster brigades responding, 68 (80%) were open to non-soldiers, and of 90 bands which responded, 76 (84%) were open to non-soldiers.

The next diagram shows whether recent changes to membership had taken place.



Have there been any changes made to the membership criteria of musical groups in your corps in recent years?

96 responses



Around half of the responses with musical groups introduced membership changes recently. However, interestingly, this number is less than the 68 Songster brigades and 76 bands who reported earlier that they had moved to some kind of open membership. This may be because the membership changes happened some time ago.

These 49 corps, with recent membership changes, were then asked to outline the changes that had been made. Out of the 47 responses received, 44 responses confirmed that changes had been made to allow musical sections to be opened to non-soldiers.

Next, the Corps Officers were asked for some reasons for this decision. 31 responses were received, which are analysed below.

Reason for change in membership criteria:	No. of responses
Being more inclusive	9
Being more welcoming	5
Responding to the interest of new people who were not soldiers	4
Involving more people from the congregation in music making	3
Seeing open sections as being a way of nurturing people in their faith	3
Older folk were leaving/dying	2

Sections are an extension of worship and should be open to everyone	2
Numbers were starting to dwindle	1
It was more helpful for growth	1
Ministering to the prodigals	1
Total of responses:	31

58% of respondents gave positive reason for changes in membership, to reach out towards others, to include, and welcome them. 16% of respondents made changes to use music making to grow people's spiritual lives, nurturing them, and in worship. 16% gave practical reasons for change, responding to people's interest, and ministering to the prodigals. However, 10% gave reasons that might be more negative, dealing with issues such as dwindling numbers, and less members.

The last question asked for a description of the outcomes of the change. 44 responses were received.

Outcome of the changes to membership criteria:	No. of responses
More people joining music sections	39
(New soldiers / adherents made, in addition to more people)	(5)
Nothing	4
Problems	1
Total:	44

39 respondents (89%) said that the change had brought increased numbers to music making. One respondent said, 'Both sections have grown by 25%. Some of the growth is from soldiers who don't wear uniform.' Five corps reported that in addition to this, new commitments had been made. Others said that new members felt welcomed, integrated and accepted, that there was a more relaxed atmosphere, and positive relationships.

Not all responses were positive. Four corps (9%) said that nothing had resulted from the change. Two corps (5%) reported some problems. The first said that the change

had happened at the cost of other people, and the second reported positive and negative change at the same time, saying that they had 'lost two band members, gained four'.

Considering all these responses, the survey shows that a significant proportion of corps responding who have made these changes have experienced growth in numbers as a result.

### **Reflections on Contemporary Salvation Army Music**

Considering the interview and survey, it seems that the major change in Salvation Army music making at this time is the opportunity of open membership for bands and Songsters.

The survey responses indicated compellingly that the numbers of bands and Songsters with open membership had increased and that there had been new commitments of soldiers and adherents within these groups. However, other evidence of this success is difficult to obtain. Although anecdotal positive evidence exists, there is a lack of official statistics.

However, I have selected three issues which are worthy of consideration from the literature, survey and interview; those of inclusion, evangelism and change.

To examine these issues, I will undertake theological reflection, describing each issue, and considering insights from sociology and psychology, theology and faith traditions. Further on, I will identify some appropriate actions, to offer practical ways forward for Salvation Army music making today.

#### Inclusion

Results of the survey and literature indicate that the two most important reasons for introducing open sections were those of inclusion. So, what insights does scripture and other faith traditions give regarding inclusion? One example is found in Luke Chapter 19, verses 1 – 10, where Jesus meets Zacchaeus. When Jesus saw Zacchaeus, he immediately invited himself to his house. Later, after Jesus' visit, Zacchaeus proclaimed that he would give half of his possessions to the poor.

Jesus went out of his way to meet Zacchaeus, and spent time with him. This authentic encounter changed Zacchaeus's life.

Another example is seen in John Chapter 4, verses 1 – 30, where Jesus meets a Samaritan woman. This astonishing personal conversation with an outsider changed the woman's life, and many others believed in Jesus because of her testimony.

I believe that insight for Salvation Army music making is given through Jesus' example. Jesus was inclusive, spending time with people and challenging their beliefs and behaviour. Can music making be used to include people?

Burke (2005:89) argues for a 'come as you are' culture in church. He says that the world needs grace, 'that seeks out lost people like God does.' This contrasts with early Salvation Army thinking. Burke recognises the fear (2005:100), that if wrong behaviour is accepted, then others may not change. However, scripture shows Jesus accepting people as they were, but also challenging their beliefs and behaviour, so that their beliefs and behaviour changed. Harris (2012:212) believes that 'inclusion, community and open-heartedness' are central, arguing that acceptance and belonging lead to transformation in belief and behaviour.

If acceptance and inclusion are steps in relationship with people, how easy it will be for each musical group to adjust their mindset to include and accept others in their activities?

### Evangelism

The importance of evangelism in music making has been declining. However, will open membership of musical groups lead to evangelism reappearing as an objective for The Salvation Army?

Blyth (2015:122) argues that The Salvation Army's evangelism focus has been neglected, as culture has changed. Russell agrees (2000:68), saying that 'the brass band movement has ultimately lost the powerful – in some areas, central – position that it had held in popular musical culture.' Guy (1983) believes that many people

lack any basic Christian doctrine, and argues that this poses problems for Salvation Army evangelism.

Additionally, Caffull (2009:10) describes the tension in churches between the demands of 'mission' and 'maintenance', arguing that 'maintenance' churches are 'anchored' to their heritage, keeping tradition as a priority over mission. Therefore, could it be possible that open membership has happened in some corps so that traditions can be maintained?

Evangelism is a challenging factor. However, insights from other writers, and from scripture, will help in this reflection.

Webber (1999:50) argues that evangelism is about community and providing healing to life's hurts. Burke (2005:101) believes that the first step for newcomers is acceptance, and establishing relationships, before moving forward.

Perhaps open membership fits into this view of evangelism. As Ingalls (2018:112) says, community is made when people come together in a shared musical experience. This places individuals into an environment where God's spirit is working, bringing people closer to Him.

What does scripture say? Matthew Chapter 13, verses 31 – 33 contains two parables about the Kingdom of Heaven, using the examples of the mustard seed and the yeast. These both illustrate the natural growth of God's kingdom, reminding us that sometimes, things take time to reach their full potential. Also, as Green (2000:158) says, the growth of the yeast is unseen, hidden within the bread.

These parables help our understanding of evangelism. In a culture where faith decisions are rarely made quickly and publicly, these parables help us to reflect that belief often grows steadily but slowly, and very privately.

Does the opportunity of open membership mean that evangelism is reappearing as an objective for Salvation Army music making? I believe so. This conclusion leads to some practical recommendations which are discussed in the next chapter.

## Change

The last issue with open membership of musical groups is that of change. The results of my research indicate that some have struggled with this, and Cobb strongly believes that leaders should recognise how complicated, painful and damaging change can be.

Edinburgh Napier University human resources and development (2019) has written about the 'change curve model', based on work by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. This model argues that there are four stages of adjustment to change. They can be described as 'shock or denial', 'anger or fear', 'acceptance and learning' and 'embracing and rebuilding'. Making changes can be a challenging process.

Teike's research (2012) studied individuals belonging to churches, and classified them either as 'insiders' or 'outsiders'. It could be that in membership of musical groups, 'insiders' are being asked to include 'outsiders'. Members of musical groups that were internally focussed are now being challenged to become externally focussed.

How do other Christian writers view the issue of change? Catherine Booth said, 'there is no improving the future without disturbing the present, and the difficulty is to get people to be willing to be disturbed' (1883:18). Booth agrees that change is difficult, but she strongly believes that future success depends on it.

Coleman (2019) also writes of the pain of change from a Christian perspective, arguing that people only change when the pain of change is less than the pain of staying the same. Could it be argued that for some, change has not been a problem, because they have concluded that their future situation is looking bleaker than the pain which the change could bring?

What does the bible have to say about change? Ecclesiastes chapter 3, verses 1 -3 says 'For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is

planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal.’ In this passage, the opposite actions of birth and death, and planting and plucking up are coupled together. Van Leeuwen (2006:894) argues that these pairs represent life’s totality and variety, illustrating that our times are in God’s hands. Catherine Booth (1883:18) also commented on this passage. She said that ‘it is as much the work of God, however, to “root out, and to pull down, and to destroy”, as to “build and to plant”, and God’s real ambassadors frequently have to do as much of the one kind of work as of the other.’

However, it is also important to reflect on God, and his nature, when considering the issue of change. Psalm 119, verses 89 and 90, say, ‘The Lord exists forever... your faithfulness endures to all generations’. Weanzana et al (2010:742) believe that the best response to change is to turn to God’s word, and to know that God is faithful. This passage provides a reminder that God never changes. He can be relied upon, in the midst of change.

Are there any practical ways forward when dealing with change? This will be discussed in the next section.

### **Practical recommendations for Salvation Army music making today**

These reflections will now be translated into practical recommendations for Salvation Army corps today, in the knowledge that each corps is different, and to be considered in the light of the individual circumstances in which each corps finds itself.

#### Inclusion

Regarding inclusion, I agree with Burke (2005:92) that each corps should create a culture of welcome and acceptance, perhaps by giving people from the corps and wider community opportunities for worship and fellowship together.

I would also recommend that a way is created for newcomers to be accepted. For example, there may be activities which people at different stages of faith could join. A strategy of using music making to include people could be developed, such as that used by the Portsmouth Citadel leaders (2019).

Having achieved these things, as Harris (2012:212) recommends, I suggest continued teaching, reminding the congregation of the transformation possible in people's lives as they come to faith. This could encourage leaders of musical sections who have newcomers with them, to remind their members to regularly pray for transformation in those peoples' lives.

I recommend that music leaders are intentional about offering chances for newcomers to explore faith within music making, through teaching about the words associated with a certain piece, for example, or through organising meaningful epilogues at the end of rehearsals.

However, inclusion can sometimes be challenging, so members of the congregation might find themselves in tension with certain relationships, until transformation takes place. Therefore, my last recommendation relating to this issue is that leaders give teaching in line with Burke's belief (2005:100), that acceptance of newcomers does not mean agreement with their lifestyle.

### Evangelism

Practically, drawing on writers such as Burke (2005:101), it is possible to see the importance of community and relationship in evangelism, as it has conversion has become a process rather than an instant decision. I recommend that this is seen as an opportunity, and that plans are made to use it. For example, bands and Songsters could provide places of acceptance and relationship to people exploring faith, where individuals can be welcomed into an environment where God's spirit is working, bringing people closer to him.

I also recommend that members are given opportunities to learn how to engage with people wanting to deepen their faith. Some teaching could be offered around creating authentic connections with people. For example, as Wells (2015:86) advocates, intentionally 'being with' other people is a good mode of engagement that could be practically used in Salvation Army music making.



In teaching, modern insights into evangelism could be contrasted with historic situations where decisions were quickly made. This could be based around Matthew Chapter 13, where the quiet, certain and powerful growth of the Kingdom of God is likened to that of yeast. It could be linked practically to the potential for growth in faith which open membership could bring.

It also seems that bands and Songsters are a natural environment where patience and perseverance, for example, can be practiced, in relationship with others beginning their faith journey.

However, all these practical recommendations rely on new connections being made with people, and that this is a matter for the whole corps fellowship. Therefore, I recommend that every person is involved in prayer to discern God's leading.

Could it be that evangelism is reappearing as an objective for Salvation Army music making? I believe so, but very differently than previously. For leaders, helping others to work through a change in ethos from seeing evangelism as an external activity, to internal relationships will be challenging, but fruitful.

### Change

I am recommending that leaders remember, as Cobb says, that change is difficult, and can be painful, bringing about different emotions for different people.

So, good practical preparations should be made, and leaders should plan to give each issue good consideration. As Coleman (2019) says, if change is needed an unchanged future should also be visualised, to be able to describe to others 'the pain of staying the same'. Any consequences of the change should be anticipated. For example, careful thought should be given to the people affected, and plans and capacity for pastoral care should be put in place. I recommend that members of the Pastoral Care Council are actively involved in the process.

As news of the change is shared, I would recommend that written information is distributed, with detail, to avoid confusion and to quash incorrect assumptions. An

explanation of the reasons for the change should be included, with the timescale, and details of how things will work, giving members some reassurance that structure is in place.

Edinburgh Napier University human resources and development (2019) recommends that time is allowed for people to adjust to the change, and for help to be given to people affected by it. Practically, in a Salvation Army setting, where members meet just once a week for practices, this time may equate to months, rather than weeks.

As people adjust to the change, I recommend that leaders set aside time to deal with individuals, and to listen to concerns. This stage should be surrounded by prayer, so that leaders have the strength and wisdom for proactive pastoral care. Open channels of communication should be maintained, and leaders should pick up people's concerns and endeavour to address them, while remaining open-minded about others' viewpoints.

Then, after queries, concerns and emotions have begun to subside, members should be supported by leaders to revise their view of the change, being helped to imagine what the new future could look like.

Connections could be made with another corps who have successfully navigated this journey, to share experiences and receive encouragement. Edinburgh Napier University human resources and development (2019) report that this part of the journey takes time, so leaders may need patience to wait for people to emerge positively from this time.

The issue of change is challenging, and demands time and focus from leaders. But change can help to bring about a different future.

## **Conclusion**

Salvation Army music making has had a long history. I began by considering the historical context of Salvation Army music making, affirming its contribution to the early success of the movement. Consideration has been given to the strict regulation and

control of members, music and musicians, at its beginning, together with the strict framework for music making which existed for many years.

I then assessed the situation in Salvation Army music today, through literature, a survey of Salvation Army officers, and an interview with the Director of Music and Creative Arts at Territorial Headquarters. An analysis of these sources showed the major change in Salvation Army music making today, of moving to open membership. The impact of this change featured in a large part of the research.

Three major issues were identified from this change, of inclusion, evangelism, and the problem of change itself. Theological reflection brought in other factors to a discussion of each issue, and lastly, practical thoughts and ideas were recommended for leaders facing this change today. Some recommendations could be challenging, for the whole congregation.

I believe, however, that if these challenges can be negotiated well, Salvation Army music making can be reborn with new potential for this day and age.

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