

Building on our strengths

// compiled by Liam Glover

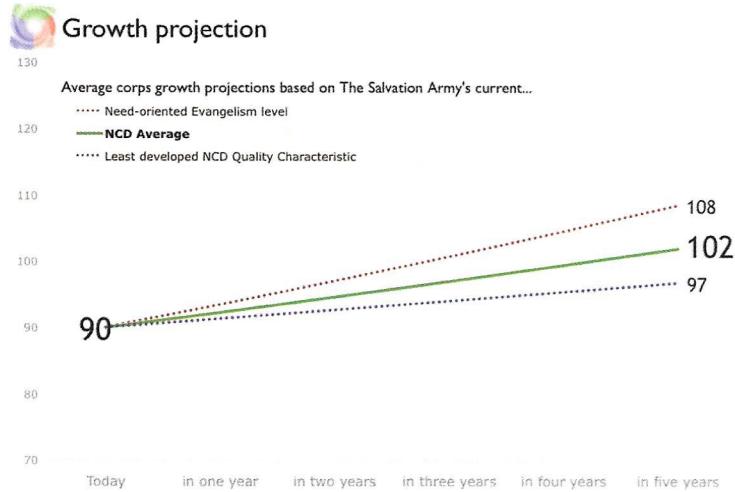
ARTICLE ONE Need-oriented Evangelism

What if, rather than just sharing personal opinions on church growth, we could hear from 15,000 Salvationists in more than 20 countries about the health of corps ministry? What if we could test those perspectives against a global Christianity database covering in excess of 70 countries and 100 denominations? Would that be valuable information? This is the first of two articles presenting some of the findings of that research.

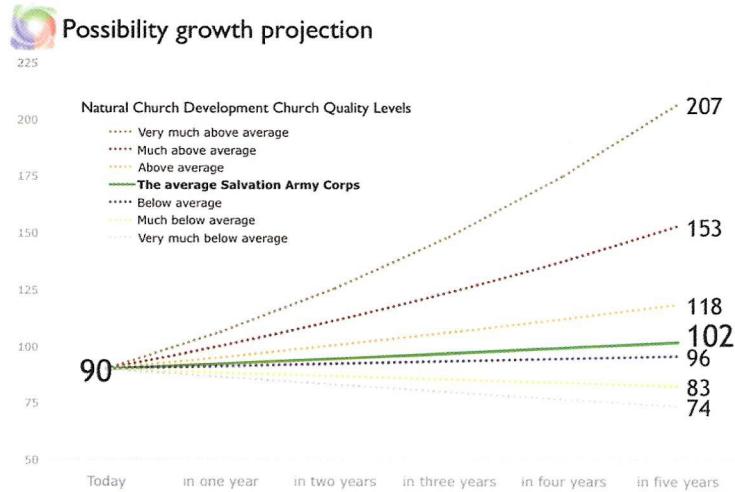
FOR a decade, the Natural Church Development (NCD) process has been in operation. The greatest strength of The Salvation Army identified through the NCD process is Need-oriented Evangelism. This Quality Characteristic almost invariably shows up in the upper half of the survey result for corps – often scoring highest. That should come as no surprise, after all we are The Salvation Army. Whatever else we do, we default to ‘the salvation story’. It is the reason we exist and the dominant theme of an officer’s covenant. We have slogans: ‘With Heart to God and Hand to Man’ and, ‘Where there’s a need, there’s The Salvation Army’; as a movement we continually seek ways to meet needs and connect with the unsaved.

Many churches involved globally in the NCD process envy the strength the Army has in this area and spend time ➤

projection values and starting with the median sized corps in the database, we can say that for The Salvation Army, if every Quality Characteristic was the same level of health as Need-oriented Evangelism, we could expect growth within the average corps as shown by the top line in the diagram below. On the other hand, the lowest line indicates the expected growth based on our least developed NCD Quality Characteristic. The line in the middle indicates how much our least healthy area is pulling down our growth potential.



Looking from another perspective, the next diagram shows what could happen if we did take seriously the need to improve the health of every Quality Characteristic and therefore improve the overall level. The solid line again indicates our average projected growth rate. However, the dotted lines above that show the kind of growth that some corps and churches experience on average when they seek to address their least developed areas and lift their overall 'salvation capacity' ... and this difference in healthy growth is only based on a five-year time span. Perhaps you can see where it would be heading after 10 years.



So while Need-oriented Evangelism is healthy, the other Quality Characteristics are at a level that is counterproductive to growth.

Evangelism is one aspect of making disciples. New Christians need to be helped to serve God through their own gift-based ministry. The new convert needs to develop spirituality and attend worship inspired by the presence of God as well as finding Loving Relationships in the corps family; and Holistic Small Groups can enhance the search for these. The structure needs to be effective in fulfilling

and money emulating it. What comes naturally in our corps is anything but instinctive for some denominations. Dr Billy Graham once said, 'The Salvation Army is the best evangelistic movement I know.'

It is no wonder that in corps beginning the NCD journey, Need-oriented Evangelism appears at the top of their results. Some of those things (the survey measures) we do well and assist our efforts to meet the needs of people, namely:

- we help people in need
- we encourage new Christians to get involved in evangelism
- the activities of our corps are seen by responsible members as relevant to their own friends and family who do not know Christ
- we spend time in prayer for those same friends, colleagues and relatives, that they will come to faith
- we deepen relationships with those people.

These themes, which have a direct relationship to the evangelistic heart, consistently rate well in surveys returned by Army corps. The international NCD database allows us to project the likely growth of corps in accordance with the average growth experienced by churches of a certain level of health. Based on these growth

the purpose of the corps – disciple-making. Just as healthy human beings require all of their vital organs, which must function normally, so healthy churches require all eight Quality Characteristics (see diagram below right) at a certain level of health.

How do we improve the health of our corps and increase their evangelistic effectiveness and disciple-making ability? If not by taking measures to improve and increase our outreach efforts – which are already relatively healthy – where are we to begin?

RELEASING OUR POTENTIAL (Holistic Small Groups)

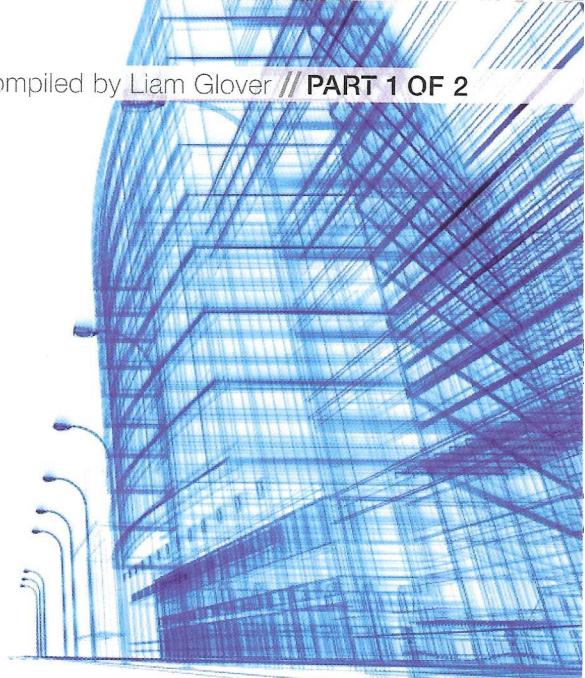
It has been suggested that we should start something with the end in mind. Could it be our leadership? Surely our structures! What about the extent to which ministry in corps is based on spiritual gifts? These may be correct for your particular setting. However, the NCD international database has revealed a certain culture within The Salvation Army, that shows up in a similar 'health profile' round the world. While it might not be true for each individual corps, when you add a division or territory together, a clear picture emerges. Part of this is that we generally are in good health in the area of Need-oriented Evangelism.

Just as certain is that we also find the area where there is room for improvement is Holistic Small Groups. If the end we seek is healthy, growing and multiplying disciples, small groups, leaders, ministries and corps, the NCD database confirms that for the Army as a whole, focusing on Holistic Small Groups will be one of the best places to begin.

The average corps has numerous groups, we hear you say. NCD seeks to measure the adjective (holistic), not the noun (small groups). That is to say, it is not a measure of the quantity of small groups, but a measure of how holistic small groups are. The chart (to the right) reveals the relative difference between the most well-developed characteristic, Need-oriented Evangelism, and one of the least developed, Holistic Small Groups. ▶

What leads to an underdevelopment of holistic small groups becoming a culture within a denomination? Every denomination will have a minimum factor, so why not simply accept Holistic Small Groups as our minimum factor and continue with what we know. We think there are a few reasons we should not accept this reality:

With Need-oriented Evangelism as a strong characteristic, our capacity to conduct evangelistic programmes and lead people to Jesus is a natural expression of our faith. This expression answers the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples: 'Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven'. However, it seems we are not as faithful in fulfilling the words of Jesus captured in Matthew 28:19, 20 – the great commission, paraphrased as: 'Make disciples (learners after my ways, apprentices of my life) as you go about your life, submerging these new disciples in the trinitarian reality, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded' (Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*). This is Christ's mandate that calls us to facilitate the discipleship journey for those who make faith decisions. As officers, we are limited in the number of people we can effectively disciple (by virtue of the fact that there are only 168 hours per week, in which we are to sleep, eat, care for ourselves, our family, practise spiritual disciplines and develop a missional culture within the corps). Small groups provide the best environment for people to be discipled.



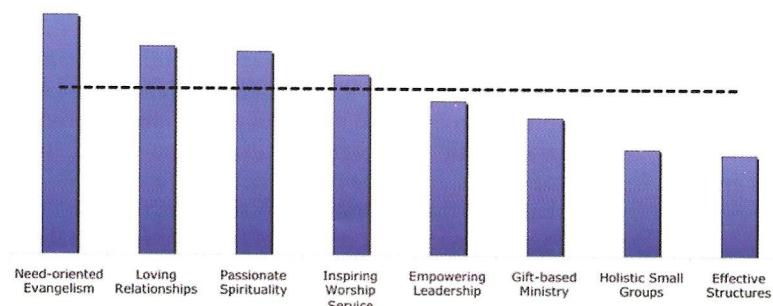
NCD research reveals that often the reason a person begins to participate in the life of a church is because of the maximum factor (Need-oriented Evangelism). Conversely, the reason they leave is because of the minimum factor (Holistic Small Groups). Hence just as we may have a large open door through which the lost, last and least enter, we equally have a large 'back door' through which 'spiritual babes' exit.

Pastoral care is often cited as key within any church. Effective pastoral care can be developed within Holistic Small Groups. Having an appointed pastoral carer (a role defaulted to officer/s) limits the capacity of the spiritual depth of the church as effective pastoral care can only be provided to a limited number of people or to many at a shallow level. ▶



What is the experience of our church?

---- The Salvation Army Overall Average



► If we are serious about the development of people entrusted into our care, a culture of improving the quality of Holistic Small Groups will play a significant role in sustaining their spiritual development.

At the risk of sounding trite, we are a holiness movement and an obvious expression of such a group is sanctity within our relationships. Holistic Small Groups facilitate the development of meaningful and accountable relationships, allowing the holiness that God desires to be manifest with our Saviour and with those with whom we journey towards Jesus. This process is beautifully stated by John: 'Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples' (John 13:34, 35 *NLT*). Our desire to become increasingly holy as a movement necessitates intentional focus on the development of a culture of Holistic Small Groups.

However, our deepening affection for one another actually de-programmes evangelism while Jesus wants our loving relationships to be a witness of him to the world.

The Army has a ready disposition to take a need-oriented approach to evangelism. If we apply that strength to small groups, what would it look like to have small groups that meet the needs of spiritually immature or new Christians? What shape would they take if we applied the same amount

of vigour and capacity towards the development of faith-growing small groups as we do towards evangelism? NCD suggests that we would meet wider and deeper needs than we currently do.

Loving Relationships within corps participating in the NCD process is well developed, often sitting in the top half of church life characteristics. Metaphorically speaking, Loving Relationships measures the breadth of relationships across a church. By way of contrast, Holistic Small Groups measure the depth of relationships. For many people today, meaningful friendships can be found at the local sporting club or at work. However, having depth of relationships brings relational transformation. Holistic Small Groups facilitate this.

Back to the original question: What prevents Holistic Small Groups becoming a predominant within the Army? Organisational research consistently reveals that the extent to which key influencers embrace and live out a culture directly impacts the extent to which that is expressed organisationally. An officer within the local corps is more often than not the most influential Christian within the corps. Hence, the extent to which an officer embraces a particular expression of faith impacts its prevalence within corps life. Holistic Small Groups depend upon a culture of intimate accountable relationships among participants. If the corps officer is not engaged in this,

then it will be implicitly and explicitly transferred to others within the life of the corps.

I have heard 'triumours' that years ago some cadets were taught not to develop significant relationships with 'corps folk' as these relationships will be (necessarily) severed as the officer moves from the corps. This raises the issue of how the frequent move of officers affects not only the development of small groups, but the health of a corps in general. This is a sensitive discussion.

The appointment system is an integral part of Army culture. Depending on whom you listen to it can be our greatest strength or weakness. We base our convictions on personal experiences and anecdotal evidence. Is there a way we can move beyond feelings and look for empirical evidence? Can we say whether our culture of relatively short stays for corps officers has any effect on the health of a corps, and if so, is this effect positive or negative?

ARTICLE TWO WILL ADDRESS THESE QUESTIONS.

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