



# living counter culturally

talk sheet

Abstinence from Alcohol

Issued by authority of the Territorial Commander

APRIL 2010

WHAT ABOUT AN OCCASIONAL DRINK?

let's talk about ...



Why Salvation Army soldiers say 'no' to alcohol

- living conditions for the poor were crowded and filthy
- children began work in the mines at five years of age and were legally able to be served alcohol shortly thereafter
- wages were low or irregular and unemployment was common
- there was little in the way of social or health support

**In such a time and place The Salvation Army began**

The Salvation Army's early work, focused on the poor, began at a time when:

- alcohol abuse and its detrimental effects were obvious
- traditional churches were not prepared to work with and accept the poor as equal members of their congregations and of the Kingdom of God

Founding Salvationists chose to fight the physical and spiritual poverty they saw around them on a number of levels, including health and welfare services, lobbying for law changes for workers, advocating for women's rights as well as calling people to live under the rule of Jesus Christ.

## A counter-cultural choice

19th century Salvationists chose to stand in solidarity with those affected by abuse of alcohol by choosing not to drink themselves ...

- even though they stood in opposition to the predominant medical thinking of the day
- even though they were reviled by alcohol retailers for their stance

They were guided by co-founder Catherine Booth's personal experience of a parent affected by alcohol dependency and her choice to abstain from alcohol as part of her commitment to God. It was Catherine who persuaded husband-to-be William as to the merits of abstinence. Her father had turned from religious temperance to alcoholism, so she had known alcohol's effects firsthand. When William wrote to Catherine before their marriage asking for her opinion on taking a little port wine for his health, he received a strongly-worded reply: 'I abominate the hackneyed but monstrously inconsistent tale—a teetotaler in principle, but obliged to take a little wine for my stomach's sake.' She urged William to 'wage war with the drinking customs'.

The word 'temperance' is associated with Christian virtues of moderation and self-control; a disciplined lifestyle. Although the Bible does not require all believers to leave alcohol completely alone, it does speak strongly against drunkenness:

**Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly! In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper. Your eyes will see strange sights and your mind imagine confusing things. You will be like one sleeping on the high seas, lying on top of the rigging. 'They hit me,' you will say, 'but I'm not hurt! They beat me, but I don't feel it! When will I wake up so I can find another drink?' (Proverbs 23:31-35)**

The relationship between Salvation Army membership and abstinence from alcohol is a Salvation Army distinctive. When someone is enrolled as a senior soldier (adult church member) in The Salvation Army, one of the promises he or she makes is to 'abstain from alcoholic drink, tobacco, the non-medical use of addictive drugs, gambling, pornography, the occult, and all else that could enslave the body or spirit'. Junior soldiers (child members) make a similar (age-appropriate) promise to not drink alcohol.

**Is the Army out of step in maintaining its total abstinence stance as a condition of church membership? Is it still useful for what some describe as 'an outdated temperance pledge' to be part and parcel of The Salvation Army's witness to the world?**

Before we can answer these questions we need to return to the Army's roots in 19th century England. When The Salvation Army began, in 1865, alcohol consumption in England was on the rise, reaching an all-time peak per head of population just 10 years later.

Imagine a place where ...

- the only available water for drinking was mixed with raw sewage and industrial waste causing such diseases as typhoid and cholera
- alcohol was viewed as a safe and healthy option
- the Public House was often the one oasis of recreational activity—open to all, at little cost—in a desert of drabness and squalor. It was also one place people could be warm and dry

Early Salvationists did not want to 'become a stumbling block to the weak' (1 Corinthians 8: 7-12)—those they worked with who were affected by alcohol dependence. This influenced their choice to be alcohol free.

Like the people of Israel who were called by God to stand alone as a 'peculiar people', separated out and dedicated to worship of the 'one true God' (Deuteronomy 6:4-6), early Salvationists stood out in their time in a number of ways as they fought for the wellbeing of others and against physical and spiritual poverty.

Like the Nazirites who took ascetic vows that included abstinence to demonstrate that they were consecrated in service for God (see Numbers 6:1-12), Salvationists made a similar promise. This choice has stood the test of time and continues to provide a safe haven for many in recovery from alcohol and drug abuse.

Like the people of Israel who renewed their commitment to the covenant God had made with them on numerous occasions, the effects of an abstinence lifestyle choice are strongest when renewed with each new generation.

**In the 21st century we live in a time and place where people know more about alcohol-related harm than ever before**

### **The cost of alcohol abuse**

While most New Zealanders exercise moderation, the high social cost of alcohol misuse is well documented.

Alcohol is the drug that causes most problems for New Zealand. The busiest times for Police during the week are always 9 pm to 3 am on Friday and Saturday nights, when officers:

- break up alcohol-fuelled fights
- take intoxicated people to safety (over 21,000 people a year)
- drive home under-aged drinkers as young as 12
- are regularly abused and assaulted by drunken youths

New Zealand certainly has a problem with young people and alcohol. In 2007/08 Police issued 3145 liquor infringement notices to youths under the age of 18.

There are close links between alcohol abuse and serious offending, not just in the streets but in homes as well. At least one-third of all offenders apprehended by Police have consumed alcohol prior to their arrest. That rises to two-thirds during the weekend period.

According to the Police National Alcohol Assessment (April 2009), alcohol is a factor in:

- around half of all homicides
- one-third (over 20,000 a year) of violent offences
- one-third (over 28,000 a year) of family violence offences
- one-in-five road crashes.

**'Police have to actually deal with the violence, disorder and crashes caused by drunks. We are spending an increasing amount of time and energy dealing with alcohol, when we'd far rather be able to use those resources to combat serious crime.'** Police Association vice-president Chris Cahill ('Light-Night Antics an Eye Opener', NZ Herald, 31 July 2009)

## **FACTS COMPETE WITH ADVERTISING**



Marketing by the New Zealand alcohol industry is a very powerful instrument that influences the thinking of the New Zealand community. Generally, the central message of alcohol marketing is that alcohol is a 'must for fun' or 'an essential to be somebody'. Alcohol advertising contains no reference to possible harm.

At the same time, there is growing concern in the community about our New Zealand drinking culture, particularly its effects among young people who are especially vulnerable to the pressures of both advertising and their peers.

These concerns have some similarity to those felt at the beginnings of The Salvation Army, indicating the value an alcohol-free alternative community continues to have today.

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

*10 Facts about Alcohol ...*

- 1 Has more relative intoxication effects than some illicit drugs such as heroin or cocaine**
- 2 Drinking too much alcohol will make you fat**
- 3 Alcohol is a neurotoxin that can cause brain damage**
- 4 Incidence of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome is 1% of all births**
- 5 The alcohol industry actively markets alcohol to young people**
- 6 The association between alcohol and aggressive behaviour is well known**
- 7 Over half of murders, rapes and assaults are undertaken by the perpetrator under the influence of alcohol**
- 8 50% of the alcohol consumed in NZ is consumed during heavy binge drinking episodes**
- 9 The liquor industry depends for continued profits on binge drinking and binge drinkers**
- 10 Alcohol can cause some cancers and diseases of the liver (according to the World Health Organisation)**

Source: Adapted from Professor Doug Sellman's lecture '10 Things the Alcohol Industry won't tell you about Alcohol' (2009)



## We took up the challenge

### Young Adults (reprinted from War Cry, Aug '09)

**Stuart:** ... it was quite a lifestyle change ... I had made a conscious effort to change my life and give it to God ... It also gives some real interesting opportunities to share what I believe and stand out against the crowd ... I can have just as much fun on a night out with friends—and I remember it the next day!

**Irene:** After a while, word got around that I didn't drink, and that's what made questions arise. Friends and strangers were asking me why I didn't drink: that was my opportunity to explain how I choose to live my life. I was very surprised at how many people said that they admire me and wished they didn't drink too. The best feeling was when one girl asked me the next day to tell her more about my love for God.

**Laura:** It's sad to see that everyone thinks they need to depend on alcohol and drugs so much. There's so much more you can do on a weekend than go out to a party. I hang out with friends and I do things that I'm not going to regret in the future ...

### Those in recovery from alcohol addiction

**Charlie:** Every time I was drinking, alcohol got the better of me and I ended up in court. The effects were devastating: family violence and assault ... Life's a lot clearer now that I'm free of dependency on alcohol or drugs. I've got my thinking back.

**Valerie:** Everything had fallen apart for me and my life was chaos ... Alcohol had total control over my life ... The Salvation Army people taught me how to live life in a different way ...

**Leonie:** The Army stance on abstinence was the difference between life and death for me ... The Salvation Army stands apart, unique in its abstinence stance. This for me in my recovery is the only way. There are no half measures—you either choose life (truth) or death (deceived). Chemical is deception. Alcohol, in my experience of addiction, gives counterfeit, temporary pleasure. God is the only everlasting pleasure.

## Stand Up and Be Different

### To spread the word about choosing to be alcohol-free:

- be prepared to explain simply the benefits of your choice and your reasons for choosing to be alcohol-free
- invite your drinking/drug-using mate(s) to an alcohol/drug-free fun event. Let them see what is possible
- identify other alcohol-free people at social occasions and encourage them for their stand

### Simple ideas for drink refusal ('choosing' rather than 'refusing')

Get together with some alcohol-free mates and practice your best lines for pressure times.

Firstly, think about your most vulnerable places and times: party scene? with work mates? at a sports club?

Now, think about the type of refusal you want to make:

- **Quick refusals with people you are unlikely to relate to again:** Avoid risky situations; use a simple 'no'; ignore; change the topic
- **Polite refusals with people you intend to have good future relationships with:** Include an explanation; for example, an ongoing lifestyle choice, a health condition. Include a request for an alternative, such as juice, water or a soft drink.
- **Blunt refusals with people who annoy to attack your self-confidence:** Assertive repetition: 'No, I don't drink. No, I don't drink.' Use this approach with care!

### A challenge for today's Salvationists?

In 1889, Catherine Booth explained what led her to become 'an abstainer'. 'With all my trust in the promises of God, and blessings of the Holy Spirit, I felt that I must be able to say to the people not 'Forward' but 'Follow'.' Catherine was determined that she would not only point out a way for people to go that would reduce harm in their lives, the lives of their families and in wider society, but that she would lead the way as well. This thinking still motivates 21st century Salvationists.

Salvation Army General Shaw Clifton has said: 'I have never met anyone who regretted being teetotal, but [I have met] many who wished desperately they had never started to drink.'

*Imagine a faith community where ...*

- we are proud to stand apart from the crowd in our choice to care for our bodies and minds as God would want (since we are made in his image)
- we encourage our friends to join us in our choice (even when they are not considering soldieryship within The Salvation Army)
- our leaders regularly remind us of why we make this stand, as part of our spiritual teaching
- people make their own counter-cultural choice rather than taking on inherited values (of parents, peers or wider society)
- decision making is influenced by young people's willingness to lead rather than by parents' fear of harm from the world
- we confidently have fun with clear minds
- we see being alcohol-free as one of the choices in our commitment to live counter-culturally, refusing to be drawn into a culture of excess
- we continue to provide an alternative, alcohol-free haven for those affected by the havoc of addiction

In making a stand against alcohol abuse by choosing to abstain from alcohol, Salvationists will want to heed Paul's words: 'Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way' (Romans 14:13). By taking a personal and corporate position of abstinence, Salvationists do not mean to imply that there is anything inherently 'unChristian' about drinking alcohol in moderation. However, the stark reality is that alcohol is causing great harm to families, communities and individuals.

### FOR MORE INFO:

The Salvation Army New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga Positional Statement on Alcohol and Harmful Substances is online at [www.salvationarmy.org.nz/positionstatements](http://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/positionstatements), or email [masic@nzf.salvationarmy.org](mailto:masic@nzf.salvationarmy.org) to receive a printed copy.

## GROUP TALKING POINT

What's happening in your community?

Get a group together and reflect on alcohol use in your own community, using these questions as a starting point:

**What causes harm or feels threatening in our community?**

**What gives life to our community?**

**What part does alcohol play in each of these situations?**

**What is God saying to us about this issue?**

**What have we learned or want to change?**

# M.A.S.I.C.

## Background

The Moral and Social Issues (Ethics) Council (MASIC) studies and formulates Salvation Army responses on significant moral, religious and social issues. Its aim is to help The Salvation Army New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga Territory take a proactive stance in relation to such issues, and to support Salvationist decision-making in everyday life.

MASIC 'Living Counter Culturally' Talk Sheets are intended as Internal Discussion and Resource documents for Salvationists. They provide biblical and theological reflection on the intersection of faith in the everyday world.

WANT TO

influence THE  
drinking tone

IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD ?

You can be a positive influence where you live through engagement with:

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

LOCAL RETAILERS

LICENSING TRUSTS

BROADCASTING AUTHORITIES

ADVERTISING REGULATORS

Check out [www.alcoholaction.co.nz](http://www.alcoholaction.co.nz)

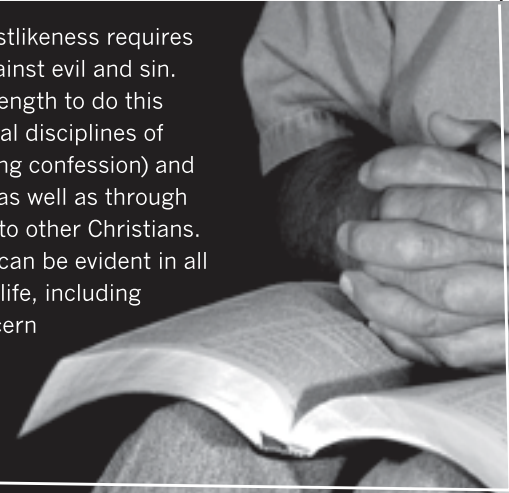
## The 'Ethical Life'

The 'ethical life' is the Christ-like life. Through Jesus' incarnation, death and resurrection, our broken relationship with God is restored. We are then able to grow more and more like Christ, our Saviour and Lord. His words and example and the teaching of the Bible help us in this journey.

Growth in Christlikeness is expressed in the integrity of our character (who we are), in our ethics (the choices we make) and in our lifestyle (our actions). We live a Christ-like ethical life in our everyday activities when there is a clear synergy between the leading of the Holy Spirit and our own choices:

**'Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.'** (Galatians 5:25)

Growth in Christlikeness requires us to stand against evil and sin. We find the strength to do this through spiritual disciplines of prayer (including confession) and Bible reading, as well as through accountability to other Christians. Christlikeness can be evident in all aspects of our life, including our social concern for others.



## Lost control over your own life?



We can help you get it back

*I've regained my family's respect + I'm getting on with my life.  
- Bradley.*

The Salvation Army Bridge Programme provides a high-quality treatment service to people whose lives have been affected by the use of alcohol or drugs.

For more info: [www.salvationarmy.org.nz/addictions](http://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/addictions)



## FOR MORE INFO:

Moral and Social Issues (Ethics) Council

Contact The Chairperson: PO Box 7342, Wellesley St, Auckland 1141.

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