

The Salvation Army Leadership Letter



Issue 24:

Should the Church become more militant?

Rediscovering the Church's Militant Dream

Dear Mike

I'm glad you enjoyed the Letter on Evangelism to your friend Len. But like Len, you're also a regional leader and you've got questions of your own you'd like to explore.

If I understand you correctly, you agree with Len's strong focus on evangelism but you feel we should put just as much emphasis on social justice. Indeed, you think the church should become more 'militant' and you'd like a Letter on the subject.

I'm happy to write one, although I can only touch briefly on the issues in the space available.

As we're talking about the 'militant' church, we'll start with the 'the military' itself to help us with our picture of what this church looks like. Then we'll work the issues out from there.

Be prepared for some surprises!

What Does the Militant Church Look Like?

With the militant church having much in common with the military, we can say these interrelated things about it:

1. Like the military, the militant church **has a single focus**—to win the wars it fights, which are to set people free from Satan's clutches and change the world we live in so God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven.
2. The committed people of this church (its members or soldiers) are **trained for a purpose**—to make many disciples and win the justice battles, as Wilberforce and his Clapham friends once did in darkest England.
3. The people in the church **know how to use the weapons they fight with**—the spiritual weapons God has given them, some of which are listed in Eph 6.10-20 (written to the whole church and not just one or two individuals).
4. The people in the church are **keen to get on the battlefield** and fight the enemy—sitting around and filling in time is never an option because they're trained to do one thing: *fight and win!* And just as wars sharpen the military's effectiveness, so the church thrives on warfare. As they said in the early church, 'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.' A workout on the Parade Ground can never satisfy it. *Never!*
5. Like soldiers in the military, the people in the church **know who the enemy is** and who their allies are. They know that although their greatest enemies have a human face, be it a Hitler or someone else, the real enemy is the powers of darkness behind the human face (as Eph 6.11-12 reminds us).
6. The people in the church **do their homework** and develop an understanding of the battlefield, so they can defeat 'Satan' and his 'schemes' (2 Cor 2.11). They know that in warfare, 'fools rush in where angels fear to tread'. So, like the king in Lk 14.31, they develop a battle plan before they charge into battle.
7. The leaders and people in the church **start their campaigns** with a clear picture of what victory looks like and show Churchillian determination to get there. Like Wilberforce, and the Allied commanders in World War II, they know the war may be long and unrelenting but they're absolutely clear about what victory looks like.



8. The people in the church **understand where they fit** into the 'military' structure—what their responsibilities are and why the backstage people like the cooks and medics of the military are so important for the success of their campaign (as David seemed to understand long ago; see 1 Sam 30.24-25).
9. The militant church is **light on the ground** and battle ready so it can respond quickly to sudden changes in the environment. The militant church is *not* a peacekeeping organisation; it exists to fight until victory is won.
10. Like their military colleagues, church soldiers are **bound together** by strong bonds of comradeship—watching each other's backs lest the enemy attack them, and they'll do anything to help their buddies or coppers.
11. The members of the militant church are **never off duty**; they can be mobilised for battle at a moment's notice.
12. As officers in the military carry the Queen's Commission, so the soldiers of the militant church **carry a royal mandate to fight**, from the King of kings himself.
13. As every soldier on the field needs **support back home**, so all Christians fighting to extend God's Kingdom need prayerful and practical support from those behind the battlelines, and there will be no victory without it.
14. Like the military itself, the militant church is **incredibly pragmatic** and smart in the way it fights—if one strategy doesn't work, it tries another—as William Booth and Rick Warren found, many things they tried didn't work, but the few that did work gave them the breakthroughs that made their causes what they are today.
15. Like their military counterparts, Christian soldiers are **prepared to give their all**—as an old prayer put it, they're prepared to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labour and not to ask for any reward save that of doing their Master's will.
16. Finally, like the military, people in the militant church **have an absolute fixation** with their history—examining and re-examining past campaigns, telling and retelling the stories and unpacking the principles. And as people in the military know the story of the heroic acts behind each medal, so people in the militant church recount and relive the triumphs of the past (like the man in Ps 105). The militant church **feeds** on its history!

In Summary

Putting it all together, the militant church, like the military, is a highly focused, well-trained, thoroughly disciplined and fiercely determined church—'surrender' isn't in its vocabulary! And whereas the **church triumphant** 'has overcome and left this world' (to quote the dictionary), the **church militant** is 'the church on earth in its struggle against evil.'

But as 2 Cor 10.3-5 reminds us, the militant church fights with different weapons to the military and has different long-range goals in view.

The militant church exists to **rescue** people from the kingdom of darkness and **bring** the whole of life under the rule of God, as Isaiah Is 42.1-4 reminds us.



Does the Bible Support the Concept of a Militant Church?

The Bible is a textbook on war.

1. It opens with the **creation and fall** and Gen 3.15's warning that the war that started in Eden will continue until the final victory is won.

As the *NIV Study Bible* comments: 'The antagonism between people and snakes is used to symbolise the outcome of the titanic struggle between God and the evil one, a struggle played out in the hearts and history of humankind.' The militant church, headed by the victorious Christ, leads the charge to retake what was lost in Eden.

2. Ex 14.14 and 15.3 **portrays God as a warrior king** leading his people into battle, as he will do until the end of time. Later, through prophets like Amos and Micah, he declares total war on all forms of social injustice on the world scene—commanding us to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God (Mic 6.8).

3. **The NT tells us more** about the war we're engaged in, and in Eph 6.11-12 and 2 Cor 10.3-5 Paul tells us **who** we're fighting against and **how** we're to fight the Lord's battles.

4. Finally, in the last book of the Bible, **Revelation chapters 4-5** lead us into 'the throne room of heaven' (as the *NIV Study Bible* puts it) where we see how 'the Lamb assumes the responsibility of initiating the great final conflict with the forces of evil, the end of which will see the Lamb triumphant and the devil consigned to the lake of fire.'

So, the last book of the Bible, like the Bible itself, is a textbook on war—a war that starts in Gen 3, ends in Rev 20, and sees multitudes cross over to Christ's side and every form of evil and injustice at last defeated.

The militant church, like the military it has so much in common with, exists to fight until final victory is won.

Warfare 101—Getting Started on Warfare

If that's the background to this great campaign to take back from Satan what was lost in Eden, how do we join the campaign and get started?

If we've started following Jesus, we could **download Letter 21** ('Rediscovering Jesus' Mission Dream') and begin putting its principles into practice at once. We can start with things we can do at a personal level (like living more simply), getting our church involved in the community (see the low-decile school story), and picking up on the broader 'reforming society' principles at the end of the Letter. Obviously, we can't do all the things suggested, but we can start with two or three things that 'fit' us.

At the beginning of a 'career' in the militant church—God's military—it's not the number of things we're involved in that's important, it's that we actually start with a few things we can do and build out from there.

Being a soldier (member) of the militant church certainly starts with a decision; but once the decision is made, soldiering is a way of life, just as it is in the military.

Warfare 201—Warfare Training at Your Bases

Like Len, you're a regional leader with many churches (or 'military bases') in your care, so here are some suggestions to get your churches and their soldiers/members battle ready for coming conflicts.



Your Church Services

Encourage your leaders to pour huge effort into their church services because that's when they've got the majority of their people together for 'general military training'.

1. Encourage your churches to sing great warfare songs, with great tunes, regularly— but remember to put the songs in context so newer pre-Christian people can sing them as heartily as their Christian friends. And sing the songs at a reasonable clip!

The classic warfare song, packed with teaching, is 'Onward! Christian soldiers, marching as to war.' At your regional gatherings, help your pastors and worship leaders grasp the robust teaching of the song's great verses: *At the sign of triumph Satan's legions flee Like a mighty army Moves the church of God Crowns and thrones may perish, Kingdoms rise and wane... Onward, then, ye people! Join our happy throng ...*

'Stand up! Stand up for Jesus, Ye soldiers of the Cross' is another song your leaders can use—I heard a large and diverse congregation sing it with great power and impact recently. Of course, the stronger military note to these songs may sound strange to some people at first, but with matching teaching and preaching they'll soon get used to this emphasis in the services.

In fact, to be frank with you, I think one of Satan's cleverest ploys has been to 'dumb us down' and 'PC' us into silence when we ought to be shouting from the housetops that 'Our God reigns' and that he is serious about rooting evil out of his creation. And the amazing thing is that he wants to use people like us to do it!

Urge your leaders to use the great military songs of the faith to get their people battle-ready.

2. Encourage your preachers to preach robust biblical sermons along with their topical messages—messages that don't 'cut and paste' Bible passages to fit their own selective agendas.

When, for example, did your preachers last preach on the Fall in Genesis 3, especially v.15? We cannot make any sense of history or the rest of the Bible without grasping that that's where this messy warfare thing started. So we should include the Fall in our 'Introduction to Christianity' series and other teaching material. The Christian faith is meaningless without grasping this.

And when did your leaders last preach on the shocking moral and social collapse that prophets like Isaiah, Amos and Micah documented in their OT writings? When did they last preach on the great cosmic battle that Paul wrote about in 2 Cor 10.3-5 and Eph 6.11-12? And when did they give their Sunday morning congregations a bird's-eye view of Revelation, that last mighty book of the Bible, with its 'throne room' view of the deepening conflict between Christ and Satan?

The people your leaders preach to need to know these basic things if they're to 'Fight the good fight of faith' (1 Tim 6.12). Enthuse your preachers to also preach this part of 'the whole counsel of God' (Acts 20.27)—and do it with all your might!

Your Small Groups and Discipleship Ministries

Encourage your pastors and leaders to weave the warfare note into their **small group** and **discipleship** studies—to grow dynamic battle-ready disciples.

Encourage them to teach their people what history is about, who the enemy is, how he operates, what God's agenda is, what God is calling us to do, how we should do it, and why Jesus will 'reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet'(1 Cor 15.25).



Challenge your leaders to teach these truths in their small groups and in their discipleship classes so they're battle-ready for the conflict. They short-change their people when they don't do this.

Your pastors' services and small groups are the classrooms where their people learn the science and art of strategic spiritual warfare. So be urgent in getting your pastors and leaders up to speed with this challenge.

Warfare 301—Some Guidelines for Battle

If that's the case for a more militant church, what does all this mean for your churches in practice?

Here are some general principles to share with your pastors and leaders.

1. Encourage them to champion social justice causes in their own communities—and the causes may vary from community to community.

For example, take them back to the Letter 21 story of the church that pitched in to help the low-decile school in their area and the impact this involvement had on that school. Getting involved in community struggles are the training exercises that prepare soldiers in God's army for the greater national and international challenges of our day.

In this sense, charity does begin at home. To have a credible testimony, we need to model justice back home.

2. Encourage your churches to become involved in the wider challenges of our time—here and overseas. For example, poorer people in New Zealand are struggling with a raft of issues, issues that groups like The Salvation Army are addressing with urgency.

Encourage each church to pick one or two big issues and take up the struggle from there.

3. Help your pastors and leaders see that youth often lead the way in tackling social justice issues.

The March 23 *Herald On Sunday* article 'Think Globally, Act Sometimes' notes, the youth activism that has campaigned on so many social issues is changing, with Internet activism on the rise and youth taking a stand by improving their purchasing habits. But the key sentence for me was the first—that we used to say that 'today's student protesters become tomorrow's political leaders'. In other words, on many social issues, youth led the way.

That's still the case in the church. Many young people identify with the image of an army, are passionate about social justice and want to lead the charge to build a better society.

So encourage your regional youth to keep leading the charge for change, and encourage your churches to back them and join them in their push for sweeping social reform.

4. Encourage your pastors and churches to involve their children in shaping the world of tomorrow. More and more churches start their children on the social justice journey (often with adults help!) through sponsoring needy children overseas. Some churches involve children in collecting sponsorship money in church; they and the adults get an object lesson in what social justice looks like.

I know from over 18 years in my previous job that the children who sponsor in childhood become champions of the poor when they're older.

When it comes to involvement in social justice, the younger you start with people the more likely they are to champion justice later.



5. Advise your pastors that there may sometimes be a place for demonstrations and non-violent protest or other behaviour that captures public attention.

When The Salvation Army was born into 19th Century England, it was met with ridicule and opposition as people struggled to come to terms with its unconventional methods, open-air street meetings, drums and other musical instruments. But the Salvationists prevailed and later became a mighty force for social justice on the world scene.

In the 20th Century, Dr Martin Luther King championed civil rights in America, and especially through the famous 1963 march on Washington DC to demand racial equality. Surely, Dr Martin Luther King and his colleagues were right to march as they did! And surely many of us would have joined them if we'd lived there at the time.

Advise your leaders that there may be situations where they and their people need to demonstrate and protest if there is no other way to bring about social change. But advise them to pick their causes wisely, and act wisely, as Martin Luther King did before them.

One Final Thing—Lest we Forget!

However, if those are the broad features of the battle we're fighting as the church militant, there is one final thing you should emphasise to your pastors and leaders—we will only win this battle if we fight in the Lord's strength.

For this reason you must encourage your leaders and their people to build a strong devotional life that grows out of daily Bible reading and prayer, as 2 Cor 10.4-5 and Eph 6.10-18 clearly remind us. *This is the first requirement for a Christian soldier.*

Indeed if we go back to the rise of social reform in modern history, it was the evangelical Wesley who birthed the movement, the evangelical Wilberforce and his Clapham friends who continued it, and the evangelicals who came after them who spearheaded the completion of the first phase. It was the same in America: the evangelist Finney led the charge with his converts, and his astounding claim that 'the great business of the church is to reform the world'.

Later, the first Salvationists did the same. They were bold and fearless followers of Christ who drew strength for their long campaigns from their relationship with God. Fearing only God, they fought with all their might, refused to be silenced and later took their campaign to the nations.

Encourage your leaders and people above everything else to walk with God. It's an absolute requirement for victory.

Should the Church Become More Militant?

So we come to our final question: Should the church become more militant? Of course it should!

As we've seen, our God is a militant God. Our Bible is a militant book. And beginning with Wesley, the greatest victories in modern times have been accomplished by a militant church.

And if we're to solve the great social justice challenges of our time, we'll need a militant church to lead the charge, often working through the institutions of the day, as Wilberforce tended to, or working outside the institutions, as Martin Luther King tended to in his campaign.

But whether working from inside institutions or outside of them, God works through the church militant to accomplish his redemptive purposes on earth.



Mike, I wish you all the best of God's good things as you take these challenges to your leaders and people.

We're with you in prayer and will celebrate every victory with you.

Let's keep in touch.

Gordon Miller

Territorial Church Growth & Development Consultant

Email: gordon_miller@nzf.salvationarmy.org

To Discuss at Local Church Leaders Meetings

1. How many of the 16 stated marks of a militant church does your church display? And what steps will you now take to help your church become more militant (write the answer and steps down)?
2. Read the 'Bible Support' references in section 2, talk about the place your church has given to these passages in your church life till now, and discuss what place you'll give them from now on. Write your responses down.
3. Allowing plenty of time for discussion, talk about the challenge to become more militant in your services and small groups. Answer the four 'preaching' questions and jot down steps you'll take to address these challenges.
4. Looking at the 'Warfare 301 Guidelines', build this Letter's insights into your next strategic plan with clear steps to involve all your people at an appropriate level. Alternatively, develop a separate strategic plan for your church's future warfare, with the needed steps as above.