

GOD IS FAITHFUL

SABBATH OBSERVANCE

SERIES: TAKING A STAND**EXPLORING THE ARMY'S INTERNATIONAL POSITIONAL STATEMENTS**

*Members of the International Moral and Social Issues Council (IMASIC) reflect on
The Salvation Army's International Positional Statements.*

STATEMENT OF POSITION

The Salvation Army values and proclaims the scriptural teaching that God, our Creator, established a rhythm of life for our benefit.

This is reflected in the Creation narrative (Genesis 2:2-3), the fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8-11, Deuteronomy 5:12-15) and in the teachings of Jesus regarding a balanced approach to life.

Therefore, regardless of the day of the week on which it is observed, the principle of Sabbath observance provides that opportunity to rest, to give thanks and to worship.

The Salvation Army believes that individuals have the responsibility and privilege to live according to this scriptural framework. Furthermore, The Salvation Army holds that those whose religious beliefs will not permit them to work at certain times should be protected against unreasonable discrimination in recruitment, deployment or advancement of staff.

In its recognition of Sunday as the Sabbath, The Salvation Army aligns itself with the custom of the Early Christian Church, which chose that day on which to commemorate and celebrate Christ's resurrection.

Download the complete *International Positional Statement on Sabbath Observance* at salvationarmy.org/isjc/ips

FOR REFLECTION

- * Is it difficult to set aside time to rest as an act of worship to God?
- * What would change if we considered the Sabbath as a gift from God for our spiritual, mental and physical health and happiness?
- * What would need to change in your life to make observing the Sabbath a priority?

“... if we don't learn how to rest well, we will never learn how to work well, and vice versa ...”

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work (Genesis 2:1-2).

THE CREATION story starts with God working and ends with God resting. After six 'days' of world making, it's done. The universe is 'completed'. And we think *our* weeks are busy and productive?

Make sure you catch that *God* rested! God – who never sleeps, never has a day off or a vacation, who doesn't get worn down or grouchy and is unparalleled with any other being in the universe – rested.

We are made in his image. Therefore, we are made to mirror, or mimic, what God is like to the world. God works, so we work. God rests, so we rest. Work and rest live in a reciprocal relationship, by design. So, if we don't learn how to rest well, we will never learn how to work well, and vice versa.

The Salvation Army's *International Positional Statement on Sabbath Observance* affirms the creation story in Genesis 2, the teachings of Jesus regarding a balanced approach to life and the principle of Sabbath observance in order 'to rest, give thanks and to worship';

regardless of the day of the week it is observed.

So, Sabbath isn't just a day to *not work*; it's a day to delight in the life our partnership with God has given us, to delight in the world around us and to delight in God himself. Sabbath is a day to pull up a chair, sink into it, look back over the work of the last six days, and *enjoy*. But how easy is it to do? >>

PRACTICAL RESPONSES

1. Salvationists will exert every influence possible to make and keep Sunday as a day of worship, rest and family.
2. The Salvation Army also encourages all people to consider how they can promote a weekly day of rest and renewal for others.
3. In support of those who must work on Sundays, The Salvation Army will always seek to provide multiple opportunities for Christian worship and fellowship.

International Positional Statement on Sabbath Observance



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PERSONAL REFLECTION

Observing the Sabbath has always been a challenge to me, being a busy Salvation Army officer and a 'doer' with an eternal to-do list close at hand! Today, the secular society in America has encroached on my Sabbath traditions as well, and Christians must now make tough choices between church, sports, social events, shopping and a myriad of other activities that fill up Sundays like all other days of the week.

Understanding and learning from the Jewish culture's Sabbath practices can be helpful and inspiring. They focus on *menuha* – a Hebrew word translated as 'rest'. But it's not just a nap on the couch! It's a restfulness that also is a celebration and, to the Jews, *menuha* is something you create. It's not just that you stop working one day every week, but something for which you prepare. It's about cultivating an atmosphere to enjoy your life, your world and your God.

I recently went tandem kayaking with my husband, which was a new experience for us. Finding our rhythm of rowing together in cadence took practice, patience and considerable trial and error! But by the second hour, Brad and I could feel our stride had changed, and a synergy resulted as we understood and responded to the synchronisation of the oars.

Just like kayaking, with continued practice, patience and trial and error, and by realising what the Sabbath is not, I am beginning to internalise what

Sabbath really is:

- It's a day with no to-do list.
- It's a day I don't accomplish anything, and I don't feel guilty.
- It's a day when my phone is off and my email is closed.
- It's a day when I don't have to buy, but just enjoy what I already have.
- It's a day to celebrate life in God's very good world.

I'm still a busy officer, and I'm still a doer, but I'm discovering a new joy in my Sabbath cadence where working for six days and resting for one is becoming a built-in rhythm in my life. It's not a day of rules, but rather a day of *menuha*; relaxing and rejoicing in the life God has gifted me.



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PERSONAL REFLECTION

When I was a corps officer at Chelmsford Citadel, I was told that many years ago children in UK Salvation Army Sunday schools sang a song about spending money on a Sunday being a sin: 'You mustn't buy sweets on Sunday, because it is a sin.'

How things have changed. Gone are the days when the streets in many towns and cities in the UK were mainly quiet on a Sunday, and many bus services did not commence until midday; when spending was discouraged and only people involved in industry, police or military service might be working. Only small shops were allowed to open to sell newspapers. Sunday was, for the general public, a day of rest. By contrast, in those days most Salvation Army corps would have had three open-air meetings, three worship meetings and two Sunday school meetings every Sunday!

The UK is now a more liberal, secular and commercially-driven society where, as allowed by government legislation, most shops are open, and many corps have reduced their Sunday worship activities to one morning meeting and a Sunday school. Some have even dispensed with most forms of open-air outreach.

Things are different in Pakistan, my home country, to which I have recently returned. For almost three years in the mid-70s, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan declared Friday to be the official day off in the week instead of Sunday. This resulted in citizens, including Salvationists,

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needing to work on Sunday. I felt that the dignity of Christians was deeply challenged by changing the weekly official holiday from Sunday to Friday. As children we had been used to going to Sunday school but that stopped, and instead we started going to Friday school. Sometimes we had to appear for examinations on Sundays during the school year, and when this happened on Easter Sunday, it was especially hard. That change was never really accepted by Christians in those years. However, we believe that God's desire is to observe the authentic spiritual commitment of his people and not a routine-based ritual or schedule without faith and purpose.

These days, Friday is not an official holiday in Pakistan, although it is still the day when the majority of the population gathers for worship. Prayer time is allowed from 12noon to 3pm for our Muslim friends to worship and then go back to their work. During these hours, Pakistan is mainly quiet and most of the shops and businesses are closed.

As Christians, we have every legal freedom to worship on Sunday at any time of the day (which will vary according to different denominations), but only in our churches or halls. Most corps hold one or two worship meetings on a Sunday.

What we have concluded is that regardless of the day of the week on which it is observed, the principle of the Sabbath observance provides that opportunity to rest, to give thanks and to worship.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

As a sleep scientist, I have spent many years learning about the importance of healthy sleep and rest. Good sleeping habits support healthy growth and development and play a vital role in the healing and restoration of cells and organs. Getting enough quality sleep each night is vital to keeping us healthy and has an impact on every part of our lives.

However, in today's hectic world prioritising rest can be viewed as a weakness. Making time to stop often feels like a burden that slows us down, something that we do as a last resort. We live in an on-the-go world where we can check our email 24/7, order groceries online at 2 am and catch up with work projects on the weekend. With ever growing to-do lists and the pressure of always having to be available, it can be hard to find the time to switch off.

Yet, from the beginning of time, the concept of rest has been sacred and set apart. Rest is so important to God that he demonstrated it when he created the world: 'Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done' (Genesis 2:3). The all-powerful, all-sufficient God rested. And it was holy. God knew the importance of rest.

The idea of Sabbath is countercultural and can sometimes be confusing. Is having a Sabbath necessary to being a Christian? Is it optional? What things am I not allowed to do? Do I have to have a Sabbath every week? What if I am too busy to have a day off?

But Jesus explains in Mark 2:27: 'The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.' The Sabbath was made for our benefit, it was never meant to be a burden! Our Sabbath is one day a week when we can let go of our worries and our tasks and give them over to the Lord. It's an act of trust and faith, an act of worship and a blessing from God. When God commanded us to have a Sabbath, it was because he knew to rest in him is what we needed to function well.

Just as sleep is designed to restore and reinvigorate our body for the day ahead, a Sabbath is designed to restore and reinvigorate our soul. God created rest to recharge us, to keep us healthy physically and mentally, and to be a holy act of worship to him.