



# Central Connection

The Salvation Army / USA Central Territory  
News and Views from the Midwest

"We are all one body, we have the same Spirit, and we have all been called to the same glorious future." Eph. 4:3,4 (NLT)

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## Songs of Love tour hits a high note

by Matt Woods

Postponed since Easter 2020, the International Staff Songsters (ISS) tour this spring of the Central Territory was well worth the wait. Considered the standard bearer for Salvation Army choral music globally, they wowed audiences with their performances but more importantly shared Christ's all-encompassing love.

After landing at O'Hare Airport, they headed to Portillo's for a taste of Chicago. They burst into song, giving thanks for safe travels and the good meal, which was met with rapturous applause by employees and patrons.

Their first performance was on Good Friday at the Chicago Adult Rehabilitation Center (ARC) where they were warmly welcomed by beneficiaries and staff. The Easter message



hit home as expressed in the men's testimonies. When one man shared he knew God loved him but is working on loving himself again, ISS members were touched and it became a matter of prayer for them.

After free time exploring the city, they headed to the Chicago Ray and Joan Kroc Corps Community Center for a united North & Central Illinois (NCI) Division Good Friday service. It was the first time many of them had visited a Kroc Center, and their jaws dropped when they saw what The Salvation Army has been blessed with to meet the community's needs.

The large chapel was full, and excitement permeated

the atmosphere as people anticipated hearing the world-class choir. The central part of the ISS presentation reflected on Eastertide, transporting listeners through the emotions of

Holy Week from Palm Sunday through Resurrection Sunday. People readily responded. It was a hallmark of the concerts on this tour.

After the service, some ISS members toured the Kroc Center, and a few even tried out the spin bikes in full uniform!

Saturday morning presented an opportunity for people to "Come and Sing" with the ISS at the Oakbrook Terrace, Ill., Corps. Songster leader Dorothy Nancekievill led an engaging open rehearsal with 100-plus participants. This was followed by a mini-concert which showcased the ISS's abilities, including a saxophone solo. One of the more poignant moments occurred when

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## SMTs head out into the world

Three summer mission teams (SMT) are embarking on service in Scotland, Malaysia and the Dominican Republic. While originally two teams were slated, a third location was added due to the large response this year from Central Territory young adults, ages 18-29, who are eager to engage in The Salvation Army's mission around the world.

Over the course of eight weeks in this leadership and discipleship program, the six-member teams will partner with Salvationists across the globe to serve others and meet specific needs in each location, all three of which are new for SMT.

This year all team members are also new to SMT, although some have mission experience through a Global Mission Team, Revolution Hawaii in the Western Territory, or with their church. Since the parameters for being on a team were broadened last year, this year's teams include not

only soldiers but three members who have a Salvation Army connection (like working at camp or volunteering at Christmas) and a spiritual life connection (like attending corps services, being a member of a Bible study or a campus ministry such as Intervarsity).

"We want to engage more young people in the international Salvation Army," said Kristin Caddy, World Missions department director which oversees SMT.

"For me SMT can be summed up simply in love God, love people," said Hannah Kim, who will be part of the team to Scotland. "This summer, I hope to share and bask in the love of God as I serve and walk with His people abroad."

In Scotland, the team will be stationed in Northeastern Scotland, and their ministry will stretch from the Scottish Highlands to coastal villages and the Orkney and Shetland Is-



lands, archipelagos off the north coast of Britain and west of Norway. They will be involved in youth programming, Holiday Bible Clubs and work projects, as well as new outreach efforts to communities which have seen a population boost in recent years as more people have exchanged large cities for more rural living.

"As soldiers and Christ followers, we believe that life is a mission field, and every day we should be equipped with the gospel to further God's Kingdom while meeting human needs," said 18-year-old twins BilliJo and BobbiJo Middendorp, who will serve on SMTs to Malaysia and Scotland and

whose family are first-generation Salvationists. "That is why we are overjoyed with what The Salvation Army is doing all over the world and can't wait to team up with other young adults in the overall movement of spreading God's love to every person we meet."

In Malaysia, the team's ministry will focus on programming at a Salvation Army girls' home, boys' home and home for older adults in the city of Ipoh. Located about 120 miles north of Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh is set among limestone hills and has a population of approximately 760,000, making it the country's eighth largest city.

"Both of my brothers served on SMT, and I witnessed how those experiences greatly impacted their lives. I am excited also to serve in this way," said Christian Johnson. "I am prayerful that my time in

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# The splendid love of God

by Colonel Steven Howard  
Chief Secretary

When I considered the contents of this issue of Central Connection, I began to recognize that there is an underlying theme that love is a many splendored thing. Within the articles you will find much evidence of the spirit of love within our territory. Of course, "Love is a Many Splendored Thing" is the name of a song recorded by Andy Williams, which I can hear playing in my head, and a 1955 film that I have never seen. Love truly is a many splendored thing. The dictionary definition of splendored includes "having magnificent features

or qualities." The song talks about love between a man and a woman, but I want to explore the love of God.

The love of God is a many-splendored thing. There are so many magnificent features and qualities about God, and there is no way to comprehend it all with our finite, human minds. We can only begin to scratch the surface of God's love as we try to understand it.

In 1 John 4:16 (NIV) we read, "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God



and God in them." God is love, and as we read scripture, we come to realize that love is not just a quality of God but is the very essence of His being. When we sing, "Come, let us all unite to sing: God is love," we are singing theology. He has expressed that love in so many ways: in creation, by sending His Son to die for us, by forgiving us, by giving us what we need to sustain life, in the promise of eternal life, and so many more things. How could we do anything else but return that love to Him and also to love others?

For Christians, love is a result of our relationship with God. It is an outgrowth of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. In scripture, the description of the fruit of the Spirit starts with love. We love others because God is love and He is living in us. Love is the ultimate expression of us becoming more like Jesus. It is evidence of our faith.

As I conclude my service in the Central Territory and as an active officer, I must say that Janice and I have enjoyed our time here. We have grown to know and love the people of the Central. We want the best for you as you continue to follow Jesus. I pray that you will become more and more like Him in your love for each other and especially for those who are unloved. May the Fruit of the Spirit flow from your life.

ISS Continued from page 1



After unloading luggage in the heavy rain at Echo Grove Camp, everyone was ready to rest and prepare for the next day's visit to South Bend, Ind.

Upon arriving at Notre Dame University, they were met by Mark Doerries, head of graduate conducting and director of the Notre Dame Children's Choir, who gave them a short walking tour of the campus. It ended in university's Basilica where the ISS sang "Ubi Caritas" and "God So Loved the World." People who happened to be visiting the basilica stopped to listen as the ISS lifted their voices in worship with the two songs that highlighted the soundscape of the glorious church.



What a blessing this depth of talent is to the group.

"The ISS were a tremendous blessing to the South Bend community," said Major Jason Poff, South Bend Kroc Center senior officer. "It was also an incredible reminder that we are one Army, and, no matter where in the world we are, we serve the same God who has called us to the same mission."

This was the final stop in the Central before they headed to the Eastern Territory and then to Canada for the history-making Choral Convocation in Toronto with five other Staff Songsters, including our own Central Territorial Staff Songsters (CTSS), and the Canadian Staff Band.

"From the Gala gathering on Friday evening to the massed rehearsal with Major Len Ballentine on Saturday afternoon, we knew we were in for an opportunity of a lifetime," said CTSS member Major Heather Holman.

Each group had spent hours of preparation in prayer, studying music and memorizing lyrics to bring glory to God. With more than 1,100 in attendance, it was a glorious evening of music and praise.

We are grateful to the ISS for their ministry. Their singing was excellent, and their heart and love for Christ has left a lasting impression.

To watch the Choral Convocation visit [salvationist.ca/choralconvocation](http://salvationist.ca/choralconvocation)

William Himes, O.F., conducted them in his composition, "When God Comes Near," which the ISS holds dear since they recorded it in 2020 when they had to rehearse and record in their separate homes due to the pandemic.

"The ISS were an incredible blessing to all of us," said Lt. Colonel Jonathan Rich, NCI divisional commander. "Their commitment to Christ shines through their music in a powerful way."

That evening saw the ISS tackle something they had never done as a group—hockey! Fortunately, they were singing "America, the Beautiful" at a Chicago Wolves game. Although not part of the usual ISS repertoire, they came well-rehearsed, and a glorious sound filled the Allstate Arena. Fans gave enthusiastic applause and cheers. Unfortunately, it didn't help the Wolves win.

On Easter Sunday, the ISS were back at Oakbrook Terrace. In the "Son-Rise" service, they set foot tapping with "My Redeemer Lives," a helpful wake-up call. Breakfast provided another chance for connections, and some members managed to participate in the Easter egg hunt! A highlight during the worship service was the opportunity for corps songsters and a sextet from the corps band to join the ISS in "To God be the Glory."

Monday saw the ISS head to Royal Oak, Mich., for a concert that night. That evening corps songsters joined with the ISS in "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands" and "When God Comes Near."

The audience was astounded by the group's prowess, singing complex music and was moved by moments of tender reflection. They also were dazzled by red-glitter tunics that four members of the group wore for "Coming King." This choir knows how to have fun!

"They are a superb vocal ensemble with a very simple gospel message," said Doug Holman, Royal Oak, Mich., Corps Songster Leader. "We were inspired!"



After a quick visit to the campus bookstore to purchase some university swag, ISS members headed to a Notre Dame Children's choir rehearsal to encourage the young singers in their musical journey. It was great to witness the generations singing together.

That evening it was off to the South Bend Kroc Center for a concert. Unfortunately, due to illness, ISS pianist Andrew Wicker had to miss this concert, but members Mel Ellis and Cliff Matthews shared the piano duties.



"Come and Sing" open rehearsal with the ISS at the Oakbrook Terrace, Ill., Corps



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# Finding love in unexpected places

**N**athan and Praise Hellstrom's love story is as much about God's faithfulness as themselves.

At 33, Nathan was struggling to make sense of God's plan for his life. He didn't want to be single. Yet, as he sat in Chicago, there were no prospects.



Brothers David and Nathan Hellstrom

"I had prayed a lot about it, but God didn't answer," Nathan said. "So, I told God I was done trying to find someone, and honestly I was angry and bitter with Him."

His youngest brother David continued to pray for Nathan. In fact, God made it clearly known to David that He had someone for Nathan—in Africa—if he would just have an open heart.

As it so happened in the summer of 2021, in the midst of an ongoing worldwide pandemic with travel restrictions, a Chicago Staff Band (CSB) ensemble was headed to Nigeria to help celebrate that territory's

Centenary Congress. Nathan, a CSB member, had been called upon to fill in for the principal euphonium player who couldn't go. Would David's message come true? Nathan committed to pray about it but had no expectations as he boarded the 12-hour flight to Lagos.

But there on the other side of the world was Praise—although he went nearly the entire 14-day visit without meeting her. It was in one of the final services that their paths crossed after Nathan again had wrestled with his faith. In Nigeria, he'd lived with joy. When he got back to Chicago, would he continue to live this way and trust God? In America, David was praying for Nathan's full surrender and then for the woman to be bold.

"I came to a decision that no matter what happened or didn't, I was going to have an open heart, fully surrendered, and continue to serve God," Nathan said.

Suddenly, the bandsman next to Nathan was tapping his shoulder and

pointing to someone in another section of the massed band who wanted to say "hi."

"Something happened in my heart," said Nathan at the sight of Praise. He planned to talk with her the next day at lunch, but the morning meeting stretched straight into the afternoon, lasting seven and a half hours! Afterward, the CSB rushed to catch their flight. The opportunity seemed to have been lost until Praise reached out via Facebook with her contact information.

Back in Chicago, Nathan asked if it would be ok to call her via WhatsApp, a free messaging and video calling app. She agreed. They found they had much in common, like officer families and a love for the Lord, The Salvation Army and music. Wanting to be upfront and direct, Nathan soon shared the message he felt God had given to him.

"Her response was perfect," said Nathan. "She didn't overreact. She wasn't too eager, nor did she hang up."

"I could tell he was very genuine and serious," Praise added, admitting she was surprised but intrigued.

Praise said she would pray about



Praise and Nathan with (from left) his brother David and sister-in-law Kasey and their daughters Ava and Anina, parents Majors Randy and Kathleen Hellstrom, sister Moriah and brother Joshua.

it, and consult with her parents, of course. In the meantime, each vetted the other through mutual acquaintances and liked what they found out. So, they kept talking—an hour every day. And their feelings quickly grew.

By October, they wanted to see each other in person again, but the process for a visitor's visa for Praise was backlogged terribly in Nigeria. So, Nathan planned a trip back there in November and bought a ring. If their feelings were confirmed in person, how long would a fiancé visa take? It was better to go prepared. When he stepped off the plane, Praise's dad was there to greet him, but that didn't temper Nathan's excitement. And when he saw Praise again, he knew it was meant to be. And so did she.

"I saw it coming," she said. "But maybe not quite as fast as he did."

Engaged on that first trip and entering into a traditional Nigerian marriage, they began the visa process that was completely out of their control. What was estimated to take six months, turned into 10, then 15. It would take a solid two years before Praise was able to move to the U.S.

"I learned a lot about prayer and about having patience, lots of patience, waiting on God's timing," Nathan said.

"We struggled sometimes," said Praise. "But our families encouraged us, and we reminded each other to 'keep the faith.'"

During that time, Nathan made six more trips to Nigeria. Due to safety concerns, few people

knew. But as soon as Praise was in Chicago, they told everyone—starting with an introduction of his wife to the whole CSB on her first day.

"I am enjoying life here. I miss my family, but when you're with the right person, it's ok," said Praise, who mentioned she cherishes praying daily with her husband. Together, they are finding joy in everyday things like grocery shopping and attending church.

"I feel a part of my life is no longer missing," said Nathan. "God didn't give up on me. He reached out His hand to me even when I wasn't at my best. God is good, and God is faithful."

"Our story," Praise added, "is evidence of His faithfulness to us all."



On their happy wedding day in January 2024 at the Norridge Citadel, Ill., Corps.



Nathan and Praise in "Isi Agu" garb of the Igbo Tribe which Praise is from in Nigeria

# A family focus on faith, love and service

For Majors Vong and Ting Luangkhamdeng and their three children, ministry is a way of living that has built strong, loving bonds within their family and enabled each to experience God's love through a common desire to serve Him.

God calls us to do," said Major Vong.

From the time their children were small, the majors have included them in daily ministry, instilling in them the importance of using their unique gifts and talents to share His love with others. Joshua 24:15 (NIV), "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," is their family verse.

"Our goal is to train our children in such a way that they too love to see God's Kingdom expand. We like them to be a part of God's work," said Major Vong. "Having them be a part and involved, they see God working in mom and dad's life and see the changes in others as we minister."

Now young adults, the Luangkhamdeng's children have become integral in ministry at the Madison, Wis., Corps, where their

parents currently are stationed. Emmanuel, 23, is using his college degree to manage the corps' media, including Sunday livestream and video editing. He also teaches the teen Sunday school class and leads the children's moment during Sunday worship. Esther, 18, sings in the praise team and helps teach children's church. Ephraim, 20, steps in to assist with whatever is needed when he is home from college.

"We all focus



Members of the Madison, Wis., Corps frequently enjoy fellowship over a meal.

on serving the Lord together," said Major Vong. "We talk all the time, in the car, at the table. We let the kids know we appreciate them. The way we talk as a family makes us bond together."

"It's a blessing that we serve the Lord as a family and we can bless other people," added Major Ting. "That other people can see that we love one another and help each other."

The diverse congregation in Madison provides a unique opportunity for the majors to share Christ both in their native language, Laotian, and in English, enjoying the melding of cultures as they worship, share fellowship over meals, and learn to love and grow together as a body of believers. They credit God for the work He is doing in and

through their family and corps.

"It is all about God. He is the One that works in us to be like Him," concluded Major Vong. "We try to be salt and light for our community, talking with people, listening and trying to understand, praying with them, and through that letting them know how much we love them and God loves them."



Majors Ting and Vong Luangkhamdeng

"Serving together helps to bring our family closer to each other, and it helps to prioritize our tasks and gives us a clear focus toward what



The Luangkhamdeng family, Emmanuel, Ephraim, Esther and Majors Ting and Vong on a trip to Vancouver, Canada.



Esther Luangkhamdeng helps a younger corps member make her plate at a corps pot luck.

## This Kind of Fruit

by Commissioner Evie Diaz  
Territorial Commander

Over all these put on love. The final spiritual fruit we will look at in this series is love.

Mark Bender, territorial corps and community mission department director, recently wrote about this kind of fruit:

"When you run into Jesus in the gospels, there's a kind of love that defies description. It's raging, extravagant, illogical, over-the-top. It's revolutionary. It pushes the boundaries of how we define love.

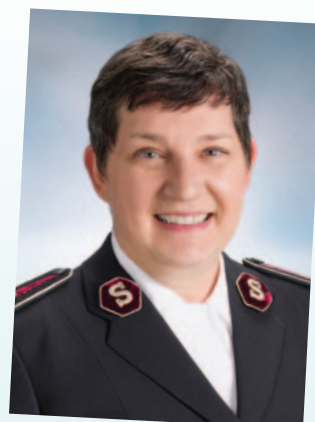
Jesus had been preaching for a little while when He suddenly says (Luke 6:27-31, NLT):

*But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those*

*who hurt you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other cheek also. If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also. Give to anyone who asks; and when things are taken away from you, don't try to get them back. Do to others as you would like them to do to you.*

Here's what I want us to rethink: How many of us have thought of God like that or like all the descriptors Jesus just gave?

- God gives the shirt off His back to those who hate Him.
- God lends to those who will never repay.
- God loves those who despise Him.
- God gives to anyone who asks Him.



- God is kind to those we think don't deserve His kindness.

That is a very different picture than most people have of God—distant, punishing, demanding. But this is who He really is, showing us a different kind of love."

This is the kind of love we can share with our neighbors, family, community—and even our enemies. But we cannot love like this in our own strength or out of our own resources. It is when the Holy Spirit lives in us that we can love extravagantly and unselfishly.

This kind of love is also peace-loving, joyful, kind and good. And there is no law that keeps us from sharing this kind of love.

Share how you are experiencing and expressing God's love in your community. Visit [salarmycentral.org](http://salarmycentral.org) or email [bearingfruit@usc.salvationarmy.org](mailto:bearingfruit@usc.salvationarmy.org)

***But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! Galatians 5:22-23 (NLT)***

# Housing Summit seeks solutions

by Kayleen Ruthberg

The Territorial Housing Summit “Innovative Homeless and Housing Solutions” held this spring in Madison, Wis., brought together housing experts to address the issue. Five plenary sessions and 20 workshops provided opportunities for learning and consideration of developing innovative mission-centric housing services that are sustainable, impactful and responsive to community needs.

Dr. Maribeth Swanson, territorial social services secretary, opened the summit by sharing sobering data:

- The rate of homelessness increased by 12 percent in 2023.
- The lack of affordable housing is contributing to the rise of un-housed adults and children; seniors, disabled and working adults have been severely impacted.

Referencing Founder William Booth's book *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, she shared The Salvation Army was at the forefront of providing shelter for the homeless, then asked, “Are we ‘Doing the Most Good’ now with our resources,



Richard Townsell, Lawndale Christian Development Corporation executive director

organizational capacity, and grounded in our holistic mission? What will it take for the Army to continue to lead the way out?”

Richard Townsell, Lawndale Christian Development Corporation (LCDC) executive director, passionately shared the organization's goal to build 1,000 affordable homes. Through sound business practices and community action combined with prayer, LCDC demonstrates its mission, “Loving God. Loving our Neighborhood.” by reclaiming vacant lots and abandoned buildings in the Chicago Lawndale community. Mr. Townsell emphasized that “affordable housing doesn't have to look cheap,” while sharing examples of beautifully re-

habbed apartments and newly built homes now occupied by happy families.

Dr. Sam Tsemberis, founder of the Pathways Housing First Institute and the Housing First Model, shared the revolutionary housing initiative. The model's premise is that housing is a basic human right; so, a person should not have to meet certain criteria before being housed.

A panel of experts shared the complexities of developing permanent supportive housing.

Lt. Colonel Robert Webster, territorial secretary for program, encouraged delegates to stay true to the Army's mission and foundation in Jesus Christ, our true home. Envoy Theo Coleman, summit chaplain, gave morning devotions and shared his powerful testimony of transformation both in word and song.

Break times and evenings provided opportunities for conversation and connection. Delegates also worked together on a mural project for the Madison Women's Shelter.

Four locations were recognized for demonstrating excellence and innovation in their housing or shelter programs: Wings (Wisconsin/Upper Michigan Division), Shield of Hope (North & Central Illinois Division), Ruth Lilly Women and Children's



Delegates work on a mural art project for the Madison Women's Shelter.

Center (Indiana Division), and Booth Center Emergency Shelter (Kansas/Western Missouri Division). Each received a \$1,000 grant to be used to support staff development and program enhancement.



Shield of Hope in the North & Central Illinois Division (NCI) is recognized for excellence and innovation. Pictured (l to r): Chief Secretary Colonel Steven Howard; Leon Denton, NCI divisional social services director; Alisa Rodriguez, Chicago Area Command director of social services; and Dr. Maribeth Swanson, territorial social services secretary.

In the final address, Chief Secretary Colonel Steven Howard focused on Isaiah 58 and said housing people is very much aligned with our mission. In the words of William Booth, he closed by challenging us to, “Go and do something.”



Guest speaker Dr. Sam Tsemberis leads a workshop.

## Somewhere to call home

by Captain Kristina Sjögren

Over the past decade the dream of Salvation Army staff and officers in Dane County, Wis., has been to build a structure that provides permanent supportive housing for those in the community who have experienced homelessness and/or have struggled to find affordable housing. Thanks to dedicated staff, community supporters, the Dane County

Advisory Board and The Alexander Company, that dream became a reality this spring as a 44-unit apartment building, The Shield, welcomed its first tenants to their new home.

For many of us, walking into a newly constructed building may seem familiar. We have been fortunate to walk into a new space. We've seen and smelled fresh paint, carpet and polished floors. For others, the concept may be foreign and can

even be overwhelming.

On move-in day, one extremely excited woman and her friend, who was helping her move in, were trying to identify the smell in the hallway. Overhearing them musing that it smelled like a shoe or department store, I



Captains Mike and Kristina Sjögren, Dane County Area coordinator and director of programs, Susie Bell (Alexander Company), Majors Andrew and Melissa Shiels who began the project, Jason Ballweg (Miron Construction), and Erik Blank (Miron Construction)

interjected, “That's what new smells like!” What an amazing opportunity to be a part of someone's life as they venture into new experiences and the blessing of calling a brand-new place home.

“With the lack of affordable housing in our community and the rising number of people experiencing homelessness, we knew we needed to do something,” said Melissa Sorensen, Dane County executive director of social services. “Our goal was to provide quality, affordable

housing to people, giving them the dignity and respect that they deserve. I am really excited to be a part of such a beautiful building that people can call home.”

The Shield Apartments is the first phase of a new larger complex that also will include the corps community center, a shelter and Dane County Administrative Offices, and will provide a campus approach to ministry in Madison. We give God the glory.



# Growing together in Goshen

Leaders at the Goshen, Ind., Corps, are all about making connections. By connecting people, programs and purpose, Captains Joseph and Kendra Hixenbaugh, corps officers, are beginning to see growth in the corps' attendance and in the spiritual lives of those they serve.

"We have all these different aspects of ministry in the corps," said Captain Kendra. "Social services, youth activities, adult programs...and we want to see them grow together, not

silos but everyone working together."

Over the past two years, the corps has worked to unite its programs and services by encouraging leaders to invite individuals and families to activities and Sunday worship services. They restarted programs that had been on hold and introduced new programs to meet the needs of the community and provide a path for people to connect with one another, the corps, and the Lord. As a result, participation in activities, including the senior program for older adults and character-building programs and archery for youth, is on the rise.

The senior program, which started out strong with 30 participants in 2021, has more than tripled to 97 members who meet three times a week for devotions, fellowship and fun. They have learned about additional opportunities at the corps, including Sunday worship and messy church for the whole family. To further engage those who aren't able to make it to Sunday services, a mid-week worship service was added.

According to program director Kay Stewart, who also serves as the young people's sergeant-major, the senior program has been pivotal in bringing new families to the corps and building connections. By encouraging a family-friendly atmosphere,

people have become comfortable moving outside of their usual programs and finding new ways to participate at the corps.

"I saw it as an opportunity to grow the corps," Kay said, adding that the older adults are welcomed to bring their grandchildren to the program, which has led to those children joining youth programs and some families attending Sunday services.

"It's been really cool to see all the new connections," said Captain Kendra. "People are starting to see The Salvation Army as their church home."

The increase in program partici-



Moonbeams Helena Hixenbaugh and Emsley Calderon

pants highlighted a need for more leaders to continue providing quality programming. Corps members rose to the occasion, and the corps has enrolled two senior soldiers and one junior soldier and commissioned new local officers.

Kay concluded, "It's a matter of praying a lot over the direction of the corps. We're just excited to see what will happen."



Olivia Aimone signs her junior soldier promise.



Captains Joseph and Kendra Hixenbaugh with Michael Aimone and Ashten Klopenstine

# New day dawns in Niles

by Merri Bennett

When Majors Nic and Jodi Montgomery began leading the Niles, Mich., Corps in June 2021, everyone they met—in restaurants, stores, the library, and even on the street—asked, "When are you going to build that building?"

For several decades services have been provided from the current building, a former church, but due to its age and condition the building has become obsolete. Stairs in the non-handicap accessible, two-level facility are deteriorating, which makes serving seniors especially unsafe.

The majors knew something had to be done. They began working to reinvigorate a previous fundraising campaign. Thanks to several anonymous donors and foundations, they reached the goal of \$3.8 million late last year.

On March 19, Majors Nic and Jodi welcomed community leaders and dignitaries to a groundbreaking ceremony. It was a blustery first day of spring, but the excitement was palpable.

"After more than 15 years of patience and hard work, today is the day we begin to build that building...A new facility allows us to build a pathway of hope and dignity for our neighbors in Southeast Berrien and Cass counties," said Major Nic. "It's been such a long journey for our donors. We couldn't have done it without them."

After working with architects at Abonmarche, DJ Construction was selected for the project. Due to inflation, the size and scope of the building is modest, multifunctional and practical for current and future needs.

It will include a commercial kitchen to use for the corps' hot lunch program, a dining room for meals with fellowship, and flexible spaces that foster education and can host multiple community venues. Plans also include a client-choice food pantry, community vegetable garden, warehouse storage for large donations, administration and social services offices, and a chapel.

# Forever Friends

Major Lee Ann Thompson reflects on her friendship with Commissioner Susan Bukiewicz

It was the summer of 1991 when I met my best friend, Susan Bukiewicz. My husband, Greg, and I were new lieutenants appointed to the St. Louis West Page Corps. Susan and her husband, Ralph, were Midland divisional youth secretaries. From the start, we clicked.

Those years were the foundation of a friendship that has lasted more than 30 years. We shared commonalities. We both loved the Lord. We were wives, daughters, sisters, and each of us was a mother to a girl and boy. But there were differences too. Susan was a city girl; I was from the country. She has four fabulous sisters and moved around the Midwest while growing up; I have just one sister and lived in the same house my entire youth.

As officers, we knew we wouldn't be stationed in the same place long, but even after moving we continued to share ministry through the years. In fact, that may be the biggest indication that God forged our friendship. Despite living long distances from each other, our bond has grown stronger. There has been a current of connectedness.

We were privileged to be stationed together from 2010-2014 at Metropolitan Divisional Headquarters. Susan was director of women's ministries, while I was women's ministries secretary. Because our friendship had a strong foundation, we just kept doing what we had always done. We prayed together, cheered each other on to achieve goals, shared struggles and



victories, laughed, cried and celebrated. We experienced much joy in our shared ministry. Those years were a gift that still bring a smile.

In recent years, ministry opportunities have put many miles between us, making the times we spend together even more precious. Interestingly, no matter how long it's been since we've seen each other, it's like no time has passed.

God planned our friendship before our first meeting. He's provided for us the kind of relationship described in Colossians 3:14 (ESV): "And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

My prayer for you is to have a philia kind of friendship with someone, authored by Him and full of every good gift.



Breaking ground for a new corps in Niles, Mich., are (l to r): Niles Mayor Nick Shelton, Great Lakes Divisional Commander Lt. Colonel Steve Merritt, Niles Township Supervisor Marge Durmhiatt, Niles Corps Officers Majors Jodi and Nic Montgomery, Advisory Board Chair Margie Hadsell, Abonmarche Architect Arvin Delacruz, Territorial Secretary for Business Administration Lt. Colonel David Harvey, and Gareth Troyer of DJ Construction.

**SMT** Continued from page 1

Malaysia will have a lasting positive impact on those we serve, as well as give me some tools and experience to impact my ministry back home."

The last team also will have a programming focus in the Dominican Republic, a Caribbean island about twice the size of New Jersey and home to approximately 11 million people. While its 200 beaches and high mountain ranges draw tourists, more than a third of the island's population lives in poverty. The Salvation Army's ministry there is vital.

Bramwell Carr, who spent several years growing up in the Caribbean when his parents, Majors Jeff and Valerie Carr, were stationed in Jamaica, concluded, "I'm excited to head to the Dominican Republic this summer to be a part of ministry and learn the different ways Jesus works in different cultures."

Indeed, partnering in God's work in the world and growing in faith is what SMT is all about. Please pray for the three teams as they embark on this life-changing summer.

**Dominican Republic**

- Cadet Marcos Gutierrez\***
- Mariah Boateng**
- Bramwell Carr**
- Abigail Ortman**
- Aleena Polanco**
- Kaleah Toran**

**Malaysia**

- Cadet Charles Cloak\***
- Christion Johnson**
- Angelica Lara**
- BilliJo Middendorp**
- Julia Ross**
- Evan Shiels**

**Scotland**

- Cadet Christina Trejo\***
- Hannah Kim**
- Nyakuar Kuon**
- Meosha Mason**
- BobbiJo Middendorp**
- Mallory Soffran**

**\* Leader**

The Salvation Army  
**PRAYER CENTRAL**  
USA Central Territory

*July Prayer Calendar*

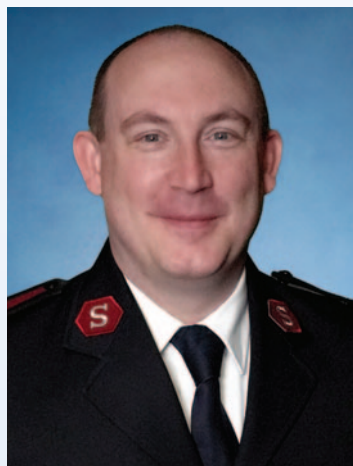
<i>My Prayer List</i>	<i>Day</i>	<i>Bible Reading</i>	<i>Pray for The Salvation Army</i>
	<b>1 Sunday</b>	Philippians 1-2	Caribbean Territory
	<b>2 Monday</b>	Leviticus 10-12	Blue Island, Ill., Corps
	<b>3 Tuesday</b>	2 Kings 1-	Chicago Midway Citadel, Ill., Corps
	<b>4 Wednesday</b>	Psalms 78-80	HAPPY BIRTHDAY AMERICA
	<b>5 Thursday</b>	Proverbs 8-9	Clinton, Iowa, 360 Life Center
	<b>6 Friday</b>	Ezekiel 19-24	Des Moines Citadel, Iowa, Corps
	<b>7 Saturday</b>	Luke 17-18	Cicero Templo Laramie, Ill., Corps
	<b>8 Sunday</b>	Philippians 3-4	Boone, Iowa, Corps
	<b>9 Monday</b>	Leviticus 13-15	Denmark and Greenland Territory
	<b>10 Tuesday</b>	2 Kings 6-10	Escanaba, Mich., Corps
	<b>11 Wednesday</b>	Psalms 81-83	Hillsdale, Mich., 360 Life Center
	<b>12 Thursday</b>	Proverbs 10	Grand Forks, N.D., Corps
	<b>13 Friday</b>	Ezekiel 25-30	Hastings, Neb., Corps
	<b>14 Saturday</b>	Luke 19-20	International Falls, Minn., 360 Life Center
	<b>15 Sunday</b>	Colossians 1-2	Kansas City Eastside, Mo., Corps
	<b>16 Monday</b>	Leviticus 16-18	Lansing, Mich., Corps
	<b>17 Tuesday</b>	2 Kings 11-15	Indianapolis, Ind., ARC
	<b>18 Wednesday</b>	Psalms 84-86	Emporia, Kan., Corps
	<b>19 Thursday</b>	Proverbs 11-12	India Northern Territory
	<b>20 Friday</b>	Ezekiel 31-36	Branson, Mo., Corps
	<b>21 Saturday</b>	Luke 21-22	Madison, Ind., Corps
	<b>22 Sunday</b>	Colossians 3-4	Council Bluffs, Iowa, Corps
	<b>23 Monday</b>	Leviticus 19-21	Milwaukee Cold Spring, Wis., Corps
	<b>24 Tuesday</b>	2 Kings 16-20	Fond du Lac, Wis., Corps
	<b>25 Wednesday</b>	Psalms 87-89	Des Moines, Iowa, ARC
	<b>26 Thursday</b>	Proverbs 13	Muncie, Ind., Corps
	<b>27 Friday</b>	Ezekiel 37-42	Japan Territory
	<b>28 Saturday</b>	Luke 23-24	Oak Creek Centennial, Wis., Corps
	<b>29 Sunday</b>	1 Thessalonians 1-3	Peoria Citadel, Ill., Corps
	<b>30 Monday</b>	Leviticus 22-24	Chicago LaVillita, Ill., Corps
	<b>31 Tuesday</b>	2 Kings 21-25	Tanzania Territory

Go to [www.salarmycentral.org](http://www.salarmycentral.org)  
If you follow the prayer calendar during the year,  
you will have read through the Bible!



**Blessed in joy and sorrow**

by Captain Matthew DeGonia



In the short seven years I've been an officer, I've had many opportunities to share the love of Jesus. There are many things I would have missed if I hadn't answered God's call on my life.

There have been happy times. I've watched children learn their worth in our gym when people were patient and kind when they made mistakes. I've listened to older corps saints share their wisdom with the younger generation.

There have been harder times as well. For instance, I prayed with one of our young adults who lost his baby to a miscarriage. I prayed with a homeless man who was dying as we waited for an ambulance to take him to the hospital. I've hugged people as they cried because their home was destroyed by a tornado.

Perhaps the experience I think of most often occurred in October 2022. As divisional youth secretary, I was on my way to work at Midland Divisional Headquarters when I heard on the news there was a shooter at the Central Visual and Performing Arts High School in St. Louis. I felt compelled to help, and in God's strength called our emergency disaster services (EDS) director to ask if I could go to the evacuation staging area where our canteen was stationed. With his permission, I went straight to a grocery store parking lot just two blocks from the school. I found people standing in shock, crying and making frantic phone calls. Our awesome EDS staff and volunteers were serving people as best they could, and I joined them.

As the parking lot emptied, I was asked to go to another school to be with the teachers and students who had been evacuated. In that school's gym I realized as I spoke, hugged people and prayed with them that God was doing a

work in their hearts. Teachers came and asked for prayer. Some shared how scared they were, while others just wanted someone with whom to cry.

God provided me with the strength and courage I needed that day and used The Salvation Army to send me to minister to people in this extraordinary circumstance. If I hadn't answered God's call to this ministry, I never would have had the opportunity to be used by Him then or at other times. I am so glad I said "yes" to my calling.

**--Mustard Seeds--**



## Promoted to Glory

### Mrs. Lt. Colonel Marjorie E. Cheyne

Mrs. Lt. Colonel Marjorie E. (Midge) Cheyne was promoted to Glory on March 13, 2024.

Midge's love for the Lord, her family and the people she was called to serve endeared her to many. She is remembered for her warmth and wit.

Born on September 27, 1932, in St. Louis, Mo., to Brigadier and Mrs. Cyril (Phyllis) Payton, Midge was the second of four children and the only girl. After graduating from high school, she entered officer training in 1950.

Commissioned in 1951, she married Captain John R. (Jack) Cheyne the following year. Early in their officership, they led the Chicago Belmont Corps, the Evangeline Residence in Detroit, Mich., and the Grand Rapids Men's Social Services Center (adult rehabilitation center).

After a series of city command and divisional appointments, they led the Northern Illinois, Central Illinois and Eastern Iowa, and Metropolitan divisions. Their leadership made an indelible impression on the territory.

After retiring in 1988, they served at the divisional headquarters and ARC in Grand Rapids, Mich. After her husband's promotion to Glory, Midge remained involved in volunteerism and ministry, often engaging in Bible studies and sharing God's Word.

In addition to her husband, Marjorie was preceded in death by her brothers William, Robert and Charles Payton. She is survived by her children, Craig S. (Laurel) Cheyne and Lt. Colonel Barbara (Jonathan) Rich; grandchildren, Andrew (Chelsea) and Allison Rich, Alexandra (Taylor) Cochran and Victoria Cheyne; great-grandchildren Sloan and Cooper; and many more friends and family.

### Colonel M. Lee Hickam

Colonel M. Lee Hickam was promoted to Glory on March 30, 2024. The hallmarks of his ministry were humility and servant leadership. He often could be found on his knees spending time with the Lord.

Lee was born on May 15, 1934, in Prairie Home, Mo., to Ernest and Mary Grace Hickam. As a teenager selling newspapers on a street corner, he followed a Salvation Army band to the St. Louis 7th Street Corps where he gave his heart to the Lord.

He entered officer training in 1954 and was commissioned in 1955 with the "Soulwinners" session. He married Probationary Lt. Patricia Driskell in 1957.

After corps and divisional appointments, Lee served as divisional commander for the Kansas and Western Missouri, Western, Indiana and Midland divisions. He then was territorial field secretary for personnel.

In 1993, the Hickams were chosen



by General Eva Burrows to re-open the work of The Salvation Army in Russia after the fall of communism.

Returning to the U.S. in 1996, the Hickams again led the Western Division, appointments from which they retired. They continued to serve the Lord as soldiers at the Omaha Citadel, Neb., Corps.

Lee is survived by his wife of 66 years, Colonel Pat Hickam; children, Major Pat (Jim) Irvine, Jim (Annette) Hickam, Major Carol (Lt. Jack) Huffman, Major Carla (Greg) Voeller, and Chris (Jack) Docken; 13 grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his siblings Nadine, Ernest, Jimmy and Peggy, and his son-in-law Captain Scott Lewis who was like a son to them.

### Major John Price

Major John Price II, 64, was promoted to Glory on March 22, 2024. John's heart for ministry was evident in his passion for sharing Christ, especially with men struggling with addiction and in his emergency disaster services (EDS) work. He also was a talented musician and used his gifts in ministry.

John was born in Danville, Ill., to John and Patricia Price, the oldest of seven siblings. After graduating from high school in 1977, he joined the U.S. Air Force Security Police in 1980. He was humbled by his experiences overseas and surrendered himself to God's will.

Called to be a Salvation Army officer, John entered training in 1984 and was commissioned in 1986. He married Lt. Jo-ann Ritro on January 3, 1987. The Prices served for 28 years in corps, adult rehabilitation center and harbor light appointments before being appointed to the Central Territorial Historical Museum. In 2015 John retired from being assistant director after a diagnosis of early onset Alzheimer's. An avid reader and writer, he was a lifelong learner who researched his condition and openly shared his journey.



## 8,500 journeys



by Lisa Hancock

John Erickson has visited 48 states, but the journeys closest to his Rockford, Ill., home hold many of his fondest memories. For 22 years, he's been at the helm of The Salvation Army's *Eden Express*, a 15-passenger bus that has whisked low-income older adults on sightseeing trips. He's made 8,500 trips in all! From Dubuque, Iowa, to Madison, Wis., John has driven seniors to museums, zoos, iconic landmarks, art galleries, apple orchards, theaters and sporting events—creating cherished experiences and enriching their lives.

The *Eden Express* traces back two decades to when then corps officer Lt. Colonel Dan Sjögren and Norma Baker, community relations director, sought to expand the senior outreach program. Inspired by a meeting at Anderson Gardens, the idea took shape. The Anderson family's generous donation of a 15-passenger bus provided the means to realize this vision, and they have gifted two additional buses as each needed to be replaced.

The excursions have offered new adventures for many older adults who would otherwise be constrained to familiar surroundings by the burden of driving and financial constraints. Whether the thrill of catching a baseball game at Miller Park in Milwaukee or the serenity

found viewing a Christmas light display at Sinnissippi Park, outings have been met with gratitude. With an intimate knowledge of back roads, John has crafted each journey with care and consideration, taking a different route home to maximize the sightseeing.

But the biggest blessing has not been the destination, but the experiences shared, friendships made and joy experienced along the way.

For John, who is a Salvationist, it's been a ministry. He has been a witness of God's love and goodness, and he has prayed for passengers on each trip. John recalls a time when he needed prayer himself. On a trip to historic Galena, he received a call saying his mother-in-law had passed away. All of the passengers surrounded him to pray for his family. "I will never forget that," John said.

During the pandemic, trips via the *Eden Express* ground to a halt, but with John's dedication, the bus found a new purpose delivering hot meals during the holidays. John also delivered groceries via other vehicles.

It's hoped that the *Eden Express* will hit the road again soon, but a new person will be in the driver's seat as John has made the bitter-sweet decision to retire. But his witness and service will continue to inspire others that one person really can make a difference.

His favorite role was as a grandparent.

John was preceded in death by his parents and sister Dixie Lynn Whalen-Westlund. He is survived by his wife; children Rebekah (Rey)

Lozada and Stephanie (Alandon) Price; two grandchildren; siblings Penny Chrisman, Melody (Mike) Lunsford, Vincent (Sandra), Donald (Angie), and Julie (Eddie) Bunch; and aunt Betty Kennedy.

GO OUT INTO THE HIGHWAYS AND HEDGES, AND COMPEL THEM TO COME IN... LUKE 14:23

## STURGIS, SD MOTORCYCLE MISSION 2024

August 2-8, 2024

Cost—\$200



For more information visit:

The Salvation Army MM Central, USA Facebook page  
or contact: Jerry.O'Neil@usc.salvationarmy.org

Register here: [events.uscthq.org](https://events.uscthq.org)