

SALVATION STORY (1998)	HANDBOOK OF DOCTRINE (2010)
<p>A sacrament has been described as an outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace.</p> <p>It is a sign of grace that can be seen, smelled, heard, touched, tasted.</p> <p>It draws on the most common human experiences to express the most uncommon divine gifts.</p> <p>It takes what we take for granted and uses it to overwhelm us with the surprising grace of God.</p>	<p><i>1. A sign of grace</i></p> <p>A sacrament has been described as ‘an outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace’.⁸</p> <p>It is a sign of grace that can be seen, smelled, heard, touched, tasted.</p> <p>It draws on the most common human experiences to express divine gifts.</p>
<p>A sacrament is an event in which the truths of our faith move into something that is quite beyond theological formulation and our attempts at comprehension.</p> <p>It brings the Incarnation to our doorstep, invites us to swing open the door of our intellectual caution and calls us to allow God’s incomprehensible grace to enter – and transform – our ordinary lives.</p> <p>Sacraments deal with the extraordinary in the ordinary –</p> <p>extraordinary things like God’s saving sacrifice, his inclusive fellowship, his call to discipleship, his forgiving family – ordinary things like a meal shared with those we care about, or a meal for strangers, water for washing, a flag to stand under, a joining of hands.</p>	<p>A sacrament is an event in which the truths of faith move into something that is quite beyond theological formulation and human attempts at comprehension.</p> <p>It enables the believer, through experience, to set aside intellectual caution and rationalisation and to allow God’s incomprehensible grace to enter and transform their ordinary life.</p> <p>Sacraments deal with the extraordinary, that is the ‘inward and spiritual grace’, experienced through the ordinary, or the ‘outward and visible sign’ –</p> <p>extraordinary things like God’s saving sacrifice, his inclusive fellowship, his call to discipleship, his forgiving family – ordinary things like a meal shared with those we care about, or a meal for strangers, water for washing, a flag to stand under, a joining of hands.</p>

	<p>How the relationship between the visible and ordinary and the invisible and extraordinary is understood varies with church tradition. At one extreme, for the Roman Catholic Church the sign becomes what it signifies; at the other extreme, the relationship is viewed as purely symbolic. All agree that the sacraments point the believer to Christ and his death and Resurrection.</p>
<p>Christ, the one, true, original Sacrament, invites us to the ordinary, the common stuff of human existence, invites us to where he entered the scene in a stable, to where he subjected himself to an unsophisticated baptismal initiation rite, to where he sat at a humble table with family and friends, sinners and outcasts, to where a lively party was going on, to where he presided at a simple banquet using pieces of bread and a cup of wine to celebrate his coming death, the most significant event in the history of the human race.</p> <p>He invites us to the sacrament of his life, death and resurrection, the sacrament of the ordinary in the extraordinary.</p>	<p>2. The one true Sacrament Christ has been described as the one, true, original Sacrament.</p> <p>‘He is the way by which men come to the Father and the way by which the grace of God comes to them, the indispensable way.’⁹</p> <p>He invites us to apprehend the ordinary events of his life – birth, baptism and temptation, shared meals and teaching – and his death and Resurrection, in the light of eternal and invisible grace.</p>
<p>As his sacramental people, we find him living and at work in our own life-experiences.</p> <p>We celebrate the presence, the gift, the healing, the reconciliation, the joy in our own story by connecting it with the story of Jesus.</p>	<p>3. A sacramental people As his sacramental people, we find him living and at work in our own life-experiences.</p> <p>We celebrate the presence, the gift, the healing, the reconciliation, the joy in our own life by connecting it with the earthly life of Jesus.</p>

<p>We are a sacramental community because our life, our work, and our celebrations centre on Christ, the one true Sacrament.</p> <p>Our life together is sacramental because we live by faith in him and our everyday lives keep stumbling onto unexpected grace, his undeserved gift, again and again.</p>	<p>We are a sacramental community because our life, our work, and our celebrations centre on Christ, the one true Sacrament.</p> <p>Our life together is sacramental because we live by faith in him and our everyday lives reveal and offer unexpected grace, his undeserved gift, again and again.</p>
	<p>We also recognise that God uses human beings to bring grace to each other. In a similar way to the prophets and apostles, all believers are called to speak on behalf of God by their words and through their lifestyle. The call to holiness of life is a call to sacramental living – demonstrating the grace of God in the ordinary.</p>
	<p><i>4. The Salvation Army and the Sacraments</i> The Salvation Army is a permanent witness to the Church as to the possibility, and practicability, of sanctification without formal sacraments. Through the experience of holiness, ‘the believer has direct communion with God through the spiritual presence of Christ in the heart ... the real presence of Christ is mediated through sanctification to the believer apart from outward forms’.¹⁰ This ongoing commitment to model the conviction that ‘no particular outward observance is necessary to inward grace’,¹¹ demonstrates obedience to a specific calling to a distinctive and prophetic role within the Church.</p>
<p>Early in our history, The Salvation Army chose not to observe specific sacraments as prescribed rituals.</p>	<p>Early in our history, The Salvation Army was led of God not to observe specific sacraments, that is baptism and the Lord’s Supper, or Holy Communion, as prescribed rituals.</p>

	<p>In this we remind ourselves and others of the danger of trusting in the external rather than the grace it signifies or points to, and are a witness to the evidence and availability of that grace in all of human life. Nevertheless, we would also guard against the possibility that non-observance of the sign may also lead to neglect of the reality that is represented.</p>
<p>However, we do identify with the historic Church through its confession of one faith, one Lord, one baptism of the Holy Spirit, one salvation, and one Church universal.</p> <p>We confess one sacramental meal, not administered ritually, but presided over by Christ himself at any table where he is received and honoured.</p>	<p>We do identify with the historic Church through its confession of one faith, one Lord, one baptism of the Holy Spirit, one salvation and one Church universal.</p> <p>We confess one sacramental meal, not administered ritually, but presided over by Christ himself at any table where he is received and honoured.</p>
<p>We observe the sacraments, not by limiting them to two or three or seven, but by inviting Christ to suppers, love feasts, birth celebrations, parties, dedications, sick beds, weddings, anniversaries, commissionings, ordinations, retirements – and a host of other significant events – and, where he is truly received, watching him give a grace beyond our understanding.</p> <p>We can see, smell, hear, touch, and taste it.</p> <p>We joyfully affirm that in our presence is the one, true, original Sacrament.</p> <p>And we know that what we have experienced is reality.</p>	<p>We observe the sacraments, not by limiting them to two or three or seven, but by inviting Christ to suppers, love feasts, birth celebrations, parties, dedications, sick beds, weddings, anniversaries, commissionings, ordinations, retirements and other significant events and, where he is truly received, watching him give a grace beyond our understanding.</p> <p>We can see, smell, hear, touch and taste it.</p> <p>We joyfully affirm that in our presence is the one, true, original Sacrament – Jesus Christ.</p> <p>And we know that what we have experienced is reality.</p>
	<p>⁸ Catechism of the Church of England. ⁹ <i>Handbook of Doctrine</i> 1969 The Salvation Army: International Headquarters: 187 ¹⁰ R. David Rightmire, 1990 <i>Sacraments and The Salvation Army: Pneumatological Foundations</i>. Scarecrow Press :184 ¹¹ Robert Street, 2008 <i>Called to be God's People</i>. London: Salvation Books:109</p>