

Salvation Army Founders: William & Catherine Booth



The Salvation Army founder, William Booth was born in Nottingham, England, on April 10, 1829. He married Catherine Mumford - later known as 'the Army Mother' - in June of 1855, and the couple went on to raise nine children.

From his earliest years, William was no stranger to poverty. He was just 14 when his father died, and was already working as a pawnbroker's apprentice to supplement the family income. Although he despised the trade, William completed his six year apprenticeship to help support his family. Nevertheless, working as a pawnbroker created in him a deep hatred of the poverty and suffering he saw daily.

A fiery, impulsive teenager, William became a Christian at age 15 and began attending the Wesleyan Chapel in Nottingham. A passion to reach the down-and-out of Britain's cities with the Gospel of Christ became the driving force throughout his life. Booth's talent for preaching was evident even as a teenager and his concern for the poor led him to take his message to where the people were - the streets. Booth later worked as a travelling evangelist with various branches of the Methodist church; however, it was through preaching in the streets of London's slums that he discovered his life's purpose and The Salvation Army was born.



William's wife, Catherine Mumford, was born in Ashbourne, Derbyshire, on January 17, 1829. From an early age she was a serious and sensitive girl. She had a strong Christian upbringing and had read her Bible through eight times by the age of 12. But it was not until she was 16, after much struggling, that she was really converted. In her hymn book she read the words, *'My God I am Thine, what a comfort Divine'*, and realized the truth of this statement for herself.

At 14, she was seriously ill and spent a great deal of time in bed, but she kept herself busy and was especially concerned about the problems of alcohol. She wrote articles for a magazine, which encouraged people not to drink.

She met William when he came to preach at her church. They soon fell in love and became engaged. During three years of engagement, Catherine was a constant support to William in his tiring work of preaching, through her letters. At last on June 16, 1855, they were married. Unlike most weddings, theirs was very simple with no great expense. They wanted to use all their time and money for God. Even on their honeymoon, William spoke at meetings. Together they accepted this challenge of being used by God.

At Brighthouse, Catherine first began to help in the work of the church. She was extremely nervous but found the courage to speak in children's meetings. She enjoyed working with young people. However it was unheard of for women to speak in adult meetings.

Catherine was convinced that women had an equal right to speak. At Gateshead, when the opportunity was given for public testimony, she went forward to speak! It was the beginning of a tremendous ministry, for people were greatly challenged by her preaching.

Catherine found the courage to speak to people in their homes, especially to alcoholics whom she helped find a new start in life. Often she held cottage meetings for converts.

She was also a mother with a growing family of eight children and was dedicated to giving them a firm Christian knowledge. Two of her children became Generals of The Salvation Army, William Bramwell Booth and Evangeline Booth.

When the work of The Christian Mission began in 1865, William preached to the poor and ragged, and Catherine spoke to the wealthy, gaining support for their financially demanding work. In time, she began to hold her own campaigns.



When William Booth became known as the General, Catherine was known as the 'Army Mother'. She was behind many of the changes in the new movement, designing a flag and bonnets for the ladies and contributing to the Army's ideas on many important issues and matters of belief.

She died in 1890. Her son, William Bramwell Booth, describing the last moments of her life, wrote:

"Soon after noon, I felt the deepening darkness of the long valley of the shadows was closing around my dear mother, and a little later I took my last farewell. Her lips moved, and she gave me one look of inexpressible tenderness and trust, which will live with me forever. Again we sang:

My mistakes His free grace doth cover,
My sins He doth wash away;
These feet which shrink and falter
Shall enter the Gates of Day.

Holding her hand, William gave her up to God. It was a solemn and wondrous scene...the dear General bowing over his beloved wife and companion in life's long stress and storm, and giving her, his most precious of earthly joy and treasure, to the eternal keeping of the Eternal Father. ...Their eyes met the last kiss of love upon earth - the last word till the Morning, and without a movement the breathing gently ceased, and a Warrior laid down her sword to receive her crown."

Historical Information Courtesy The Salvation Army Australia (<http://salvos.org.au>)