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Audience with a delegation of the Salvation Army

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a delegation of the Salvation Army, led by General Brian Peddle, superior of the Army, and addressed the following greeting to them:

Greeting of the Holy Father

General Peddle,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am happy to have this opportunity to renew to you and to all the members and volunteers of the Salvation Army my grateful appreciation for the witness you give to the primacy of discipleship and service to the poor. This makes you an evident and credible sign of evangelical love, in obedience to Lord's commandment: "Love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples" (*Jn* 13:34).

As I have mentioned on several occasions – also now, in our conversation – it was by encountering members of the Salvation Army that I received, many years ago – I was four! – from my grandmother, my first lesson in ecumenism. Their example of humble service to the least of our brothers and sisters spoke louder than any words. I am reminded, General, of the insight expressed by your predecessor when we met five years ago: "Holiness transcends denominational boundaries". The holiness that shows itself in concrete acts of goodness, solidarity and healing speaks to the heart and testifies to the authenticity of our discipleship. On this basis, Catholics and Salvationists can increasingly assist one another and cooperate in a spirit of mutual respect, also in the life of holiness.

Such common witness is like the leaven that in Jesus' parable, a woman took and mixed with flour until the whole mass of dough began to rise (cf. *Lk* 13:21). The gratuitous love that inspires acts of service to those in

need is not only a leaven; it also has the fragrance of freshly baked bread. It attracts and convinces. Young people in particular need to breathe in that fragrance, since in many cases it is absent from their daily experience. In a world where selfishness and divisions abound, the noble fragrance of genuine self-giving love can offer a much-needed antidote, and open minds and hearts to the transcendent meaning of our existence.

As the Bishop of Rome, of this diocese, I would like to thank the Salvation Army for all that you do in this city for the homeless and the marginalized; there are many in Rome, so many. I am also aware of your significant involvement in the fight against human trafficking and other modern forms of slavery. May God bless your efforts.

Thank you once more for your visit. Let us remember one another in our prayers and continue to work together to spread God's love through works of service and solidarity.
