



Is yours a sight loss friendly church?



Could you and your church be at the forefront of a new campaign Torch is launching to build a network of Sight Loss Friendly Churches across the UK?

Stepping up to be recognised as our very first **Sight Loss Friendly Church** under this new initiative is St Thomas Baptist Church in Exeter. So how have they achieved this?

- **Training:** They committed to receiving specific training from Torch Trust – hosting a training event attended by 30 people from the church, including the pastor and church leadership.
- **Practical action:** They made sight loss friendly changes around their building – for example, re-whitening the edges of the front steps to give better contrast, making the screen at the front of the church more readable, and changing the seating plan to widen the aisles.
- **Equipment:** They bought a MegaVoice audio Bible for a church member with sight loss, and will buy another to be available. They have also bought braille hymnbooks.
- **Advocacy:** The church has appointed a **Sight Loss Champion** – a nominated person to connect with people with



sight loss, to become familiar with their challenges and work with the leadership to engage with them.

- **Active friendship:** Three people from the church have trained as volunteer befrienders for people with sight loss, reaching out into the local community.

Heading up the **Sight Loss Friendly Church** campaign which will be rolled out across the country from this Spring is Julia Hyde.

‘What St Thomas Baptist has done is amazing! But simply showing a concerned interest and being willing to be open to how Torch can help them is a great first step for any church,’ she says.

So, what are the issues being tackled by the campaign?

‘We hear from people with sight loss that they are often feeling left out at

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for responses to our radio broadcasts: 0333 123 1255. Go to www.torchtrust.org/reflections for details of how to listen to **Reflections**.

TORCH NEWS

is also available in audio CD, braille, email and large print (17-, 20-, 25- and 30-point) and can be viewed on the Torch website.

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church,' says Julia. 'This is not intentional. But churches can be quite unaware of the challenges faced by blind people that make it difficult for them to fully participate in the life and mission of the church.'

'It's easier if someone is carrying a white cane. But there are many people in church who are losing their sight gradually – perhaps through macular degeneration – and it probably isn't obvious. So, for example, they may be struggling to read the hymns on the screen, or they are disorientated when the layout of the church is changed and no one mentions it.'

'Then there's the social aspect. A person with sight loss can't catch someone's eye to start a conversation or respond to a nod or smile. Perhaps they are given a drink in the coffee time, but no one introduces themselves or includes them in a conversation. Also, actually getting to church can sometimes be difficult.'



Julia Hyde

Adds Julia, '**At the heart of the campaign is awareness-raising.** We're not expecting churches to do everything; we're here to help. We have the expertise and resources to advise and assist them.'

What's the difference?

What difference has it made to St Thomas Baptist, a church of around 200 which has pioneered the campaign?

Stephen Cousley has been the pastor there for 10 years and says the church is thrilled to be Torch's first **Sight Loss Friendly Church**. He says that it was blind people attending church who inspired them to contact Torch to ask the question: how can we best help them?



Stephen Cousley

'If you'll pardon the pun, sight loss awareness training was a real eye-opener for us!' says Stephen.

'It lifted us out of our comfort zone to see things from the perspective of the person with sight loss. We could all think, "One day that might be me!" It's made us think too about how to be inclusive of other



disabilities and we've gone on to put in a new sound system which takes account of people with hearing loss.'

There's no question in Stephen's mind of how important becoming a Sight Loss Friendly Church has been: 'We are a friendly Gospel-preaching church and we see our welcome to people with sight loss as part of our Gospel imperative. If we preach the love of Christ, we must show the love of Christ!'

Janet Eardley, Torch's Area Development Officer for the South West who led the training at St Thomas Baptist, describes this church as 'a shining example of how to welcome and fully include people with sight loss.'

The church's new Sight Loss Champion, Ann Daniel, hopes that people feel they can come to her if they have any issue around sight loss. To anyone thinking about training to become a Sight Loss Champion, she says, 'Don't be afraid to get involved. Be natural. Think how you would like things to be if you were in that situation yourself.'



Ann Daniel

Our front page group picture shows (left to right) Befriender Penny Rowland, Church deacon Liz Bailey, Minister Stephen Cousley, Sight Loss Champion Ann Daniel, Jenny Langley and her guide dog Patty.

Look out for the new Torch website with news of the Sight Loss Friendly Churches initiative – or ring Torch Client Services if you want to know more about what your church could do. ■



2018 – Torch’s Year of Advancing in Faith

Torch CEO Dr Gordon Temple writes:

Last September the RNIB with Specsavers produced a report based on recent research revealing that now around 250 people across the UK start to lose their sight each day. That’s 100,000 a year! Every few minutes someone somewhere in the UK is confronted by the prospect of living the rest of their life with little or no useful eyesight. Only one in six are offered emotional support – yet almost half will experience depression. One in five of us will live with sight loss in our lifetimes.

One of the simplest enquiries that Torch’s Client Services team receives from people with sight loss goes something like this: ‘Is there someone I could have a chat with?’ Over the phone we can, and we do. But what many would really like is a face-to-face conversation over a cup of coffee.

That’s difficult. How could we be on hand in every community across the UK? But, together with the churches of the UK, it’s a challenge that only Torch among all the sight loss charities has the potential to rise to. That’s why Torch’s **Sight Loss Friendly**

PLEASE PRAY

Recruitment for a Chief Executive to succeed Gordon Temple is under way, seeking someone who will lead Torch forward into the future. Please pray for God’s wisdom and guidance.



Church initiative is so extraordinary, so necessary – connecting churches that spontaneously welcome people with sight loss, to join in and find community and belonging.

Torch’s vision is that *no-one should face sight loss alone* and that *Christian help should be at hand for everyone impacted by this challenge*. Our mission is national and, with indigenous partners, extends internationally.

So as we begin 2018 the task before us is scarily enormous. It’ll not be done in a year! Words from a relatively modern Christian song come to mind:

‘Step by step we’re moving forward; Little by little, taking ground...’ 

(from *We Want to See Jesus Lifted High* ©1993 Thankyou Music)

And so this year will be Torch’s **Year of Advancing in Faith**. We do not expect to ‘see’ all that is to come, but to take the steps in the direction in which by faith we sense God’s leading, trusting him for what is to come.

Taking our **Sight Loss Friendly Church** campaign nationwide will be costly and involves committing to take on more regionally-located staff. Torch turns to God in prayer for the funds needed to tackle what he leads us to do for him and we invite you to join your prayers with ours as we step out in faith. As Paul challenges us: ‘... *we live by faith, not by sight*’ (2 Corinthians 5:7). This is our verse for 2018.

Though the staggering data about sight loss is galvanising, this Scripture reminds us that our vision of the future



is not adequately informed by facts and faculties alone. The faith we have in God releases us to get on with what we believe he gives us to do. ■

Behind the scenes at a Torch Holiday

Torch News often brings its readers stories of guests who have amazing times at the Torch Holiday & Retreat Centre, set in the idyllic Sussex countryside. But what goes on behind the scenes to make a holiday for people with sight loss all that it should be – happy, fun, inspiring, safe and memorable?

Holidays Leader Janet Caughley – profiled in the last **Torch News** – says the holiday programme is born out of a huge brainstorming session with the team, when all the ideas – ‘even the crazy ones’ – get noted on huge flipcharts.



‘There’s so much to consider. What worked well last year? What new ideas do we have? What’s the

balance going to be between general holidays and special interest breaks? What’s going on locally – music, drama, theatre – that would be good to build into the programme? There’s always one high energy holiday for our more active guests – what fresh challenges can we provide for that?’

So what’s new for 2018?

‘We’re doing a history-focused break for the first time,’ says Janet. ‘And we’ve also had a number of

enquiries about quiet retreats so we’ve included some. People can come for a contemplative, spiritually refreshing break, with plenty of support for meaningful times of quiet and prayer. Of course, every holiday has a spiritual aspect and that takes planning: we search for gifted contributors we can invite in to provide that.’

Because guests have sight loss, and some have reduced mobility, there are special preparations to make. Risk

Meet the team

Guests are often delighted to discover that the team at the centre are so much more than staff. They quickly become friends. It’s their care and commitment that creates the special family atmosphere at Torch HRC that everyone notices.

Kasia Tymbarska (33) has been at the holiday centre for a year and a half. At university in Poland she studied Law and Public Administration but well before she finished her degree she realised, ‘It wasn’t really me. I wanted to work with people.’



She went to Burrswood Christian Hospital in Kent where she trained as a nursing assistant and worked for seven years. A nominal Catholic by upbringing, she says it was at Burrswood that she came to real faith. She was baptised in Israel in November 2015 and after that began praying about where to go next.

‘Through a friend I found out about Torch. I loved the place, the atmosphere. I became a hospitality assistant at first, then coordinator for the bookings, and I’m now working alongside Janet in the planning and delivery of our holidays.’

‘I love what I do,’ enthuses Kasia. ‘I love our guests, I love

opening the house up to so many people, and it’s lovely when they come back again and again.’

What does she think makes Torch HRC different to a hotel?

‘We have a heart to welcome people. We know that many of them are lonely. We want to give them the best time possible, to bring them closer to God, to renew their faith and their energy for life. The love and acceptance work both ways, because as a team we find we are also renewed.’

Ben Lois (40) is a former electrician from Madrid who has worked for two years with Torch. After redundancy from a stressful career, he wanted to



assessments are carried out for every activity; and trained Christian volunteers lined up to provide guiding and practical support as well as friendship. The shopping lists, of course, are enormous – not just the food to ensure the guests eat well and healthily, but items like craft materials. Then there's musicians needed to accompany singing, and helpers for the cleaning and cooking. Transport needs to be planned too. Is the centre minibus serviced and ready to ferry people around, not just to and from the station but for arrivals and departures but during holidays on trips out?

Last and certainly not least, there is one vital preparation: prayer. 'We meet as a team at the start of every day to pray,' says Janet. 'And that includes prayer for every holiday and every guest.' ■



fulfil his dream of doing something quite different. He had always wanted to come to the UK and felt, 'It's now or never'. He knew of Torch through his Baptist church. Realising his English was not

so good, he began by volunteering; but after two months he was offered a job on the team.

'Sharing with blind people is really rewarding,' says Ben. 'They are thankful for every little thing you

do for them. We seek to behave like friends, to make a community. We are family to them, and they are family to us.'

Newcomer to the team is **David Knight** (27) from Chippenham, who's been with Torch for just a few months. Previously, David worked at Mencap, and before that he studied for three years at the Blue Ridge Bible College in Virginia. As a hospitality assistant, he's currently spending a lot of time in the kitchen. He says that



was stressful at first as he got used to different equipment, but he's enjoying it now.

What David most enjoys about being at the centre is the freedom to share Jesus. 'It's a pleasure to serve the guests. The highlight for me is talking to them and getting to know them.' Like Ben and Kasia, he feels at home at the centre, and says he can sense the peace of God in the building.

Maybe there's someone you know who would benefit from a Torch holiday? See the website for the Torch 2018 holiday programme. ■



Audio books in demand!

As demand for audio books in all Christian genres increases, Torch Trust is appealing for more volunteer audio transcribers and editors.

The demand for audio is much more than for braille or large print, so we would love to double our current output of audio books,' says Torch Resources Leader David Shepherd.

Torch holds around 2000 titles in audio for distribution to readers with sight loss. Currently most audio users access books via CD or memory stick and in time many more will access them on demand by electronic download. With new technologies, providing braille and giant print books has become easier, explains David. But technology has not so far produced similar acceleration in the production of audio books.

Labour intensive

Audio Transcription Co-ordinator James Brookman says, 'Perhaps by the end of the year, readers will be able to stream our books from the internet. However, in terms of actually producing audio books, we have found using synthetic voices still has many glitches. So, for now, we prefer to use the human voice, which is very labour intensive.'

So what does it take to be a Torch volunteer transcriber or editor?

'A transcriber needs to have a good clear reading voice and good concentration,' says James. 'A couple of local transcribers work at Torch House in the soundproofed studio. If working from home, a transcriber needs a quiet room, ideally with soft furnishings, and away from



Ann Barraclough

main roads and railway lines. The technical skills are straightforward and can be taught in an hour or two.'

Star transcriber

Ann Barraclough, from Welford in Northamptonshire, is one of Torch's 'star' transcribers. She has voiced some 200 books since 2005. She first heard about Torch and the need for volunteer transcribers from some Torch leaflets left at her church.

'I had spare time, especially in the winter months, so did a voice test,' recalls Ann.

In her younger days Ann taught languages at secondary school, becoming a stay-at-home mum when her family arrived and later a volunteer at the village school.

Working at Torch House, she reads through a book, recording as she goes, then listens back and corrects any errors. Then it goes to an editor to check for any

remaining mistakes, which may need some re-voicing.

She enjoys the work and loves all kinds of books – theology, devotional, biography, history, fiction, children's – but especially missionary books.

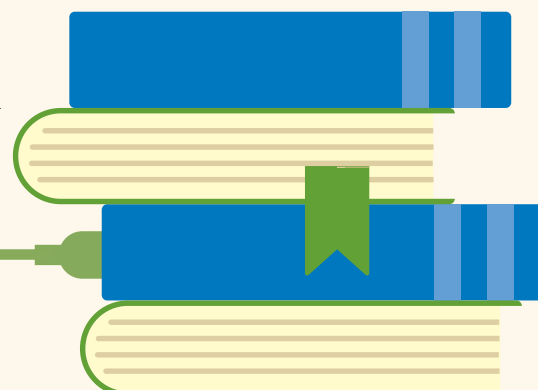
'I love travel. I have a daughter with a family in Utah who I visit a number of times each year, also a son in Australia. My daughter lived in China for a while, so reading missionary stories set in China are special favourites.'

She records in sessions of up to four hours. And she doesn't mind spending stretches of time alone in the studio. 'It's somehow de-stressing,' says Ann. 'You have to concentrate completely on the book, so whatever's on your mind or worrying you, it has to go.'

Ann is one of 16 volunteer transcribers. Most of them work at home, equipped with a small recording machine supplied by Torch. Currently there are just two volunteer editors, so if you feel editing rather than reading is your skill, Torch urgently needs your help. Most people can be taught how to use editing software very quickly. So, if you have a minimum of six hours a week to spare and are interested in joining the audio team, email James (info@torchtrust.org). ■



James Brookman



The wonder of MegaVoice!

Often it's the search for a Bible they can access that brings someone who's blind or losing their sight into first contact with Torch Trust. And it's the MegaVoice – the robust pocket-sized solar-powered Bible that's been used in various models all around the world for 30 years. – which is the most popular audio Bible.

'Audio is magic! MegaVoice works around the world, it's an absolute lifeline. It's literally life-changing for a person with sight loss to have their own Bible, spoken in their own language,' says Torch CEO Gordon Temple.

'We've had some amazing donations in answer to prayer as we try to keep up with the huge demand for the MegaVoice.'

Around the world

Recently, for example, a donor gave £5000 through MegaVoice in Australia for blind people in Malawi and Mozambique. This, combined with a £500 gift received from a UK donor, funded a shipment of 372 MegaVoices, made up of two thirds in the Chichewa language and one third in Portuguese. These arrived in February at Torch House ready for distribution. Twenty of the Chichewa versions are full Bibles for giving to blind pastors. The rest are New Testament and Psalms only, to maximise the number of people reached.

Torch was also given funding to buy 50 MegaVoice New Testament and Psalms in Romania via George Jordan of Pro-Lumina.



Tibor and Eva

MegaVoice Bibles are also distributed in Eastern Europe by Tibor Miklós through his Bartimaeus Foundation.

'During 2017 we distributed 1030 MegaVoices to unreached blind people and illiterate gipsy people in Hungary, Transylvania, Slovakia and Ukraine,' says Tibor. 'There is so much demand for them. They are small, easy to use, and people can listen while they are travelling.'

Tibor describes Eva, a blind woman who is diabetic and has lost both legs. She listens with joy to the Bible on her MegaVoice during dialysis in hospital three times a week and finds other patients nearby enjoy listening in, so she shares the Gospel with them.

Double blessing

Gordon explains that there's a kind of double blessing at work when someone buys a MegaVoice in the UK. Around £50 not only buys a complete MegaVoice audio Bible but also funds a MegaVoice New Testament for a needy blind person in another country.

'That could be in Mozambique, for example,' says Gordon. 'Braille is not widely taught in Mozambique and often several church congregations have to share one copy of a print Bible in the local language. So imagine how blessed a blind person there feels to be given a MegaVoice.' ■

About MegaVoice

MegaVoice audio Bibles have a wide appeal, and have proved to be particularly attractive to blind and partially sighted people. As a dedicated audio player, ease of use is a key attribute. Similar in size to a mobile phone, it has simple clearly marked and tactile buttons to move through the books and chapters of the Bible. It bookmarks your place, so picking up from the last use. In the UK, Torch offers it as an NIV Bible read by well-known actor David Suchet.

On the back of the MegaVoice player is a solar panel. So in places where the sunshine is strong and there's restricted access to mains electricity, solar recharging keeps the Bible 'alive'. Together with availability in many languages, this makes MegaVoice uniquely suitable for bringing the Bible to blind people in rural communities across Africa.





25 – and still going strong!

The very first Torch Fellowship Groups in Malawi celebrate their 25th birthday this year.

'I was privileged to address a meeting of one of these groups last September and found them excited about their upcoming 25th anniversary,' reports CEO Gordon Temple. 'They sang and they clapped. The singing was at the same time hearty and mellow. The clapping was extraordinary, with such energy and rhythm that they couldn't have done better with a drum kit!'

Gordon describes how about 40 adults plus children gathered in the grounds of the Bangwe Weaving Factory, a few miles south of Blantyre. The factory is run by the Malawi Council for the Handicapped and gives employment to disabled people. Some among the group, which is led by gifted blind people, work at the factory. Others live nearby. Some have multiple disabilities.

After the meeting, the team offered braille and large print Bible volumes in the local language of Chichewa.

'I was struck by their enthusiasm to have more of the Bible,' said Gordon. 'Many wanted Torch's very large print editions. When some MegaVoice audio Bible players were offered, many hands shot up! We had just a few, which were wisely allocated, but the appetite is enormous.'

'It was a positive and joyful occasion and I was touched by the appreciation of the blind and partially sighted people I talked to. This is a community in which God's love is shared and encouragement found. There's life and energy here, and an eagerness to have more to read.'

'We need to pray for them – and all the Fellowship Groups of Malawi – as they continue to reach people who are too often overlooked by society and, sadly, by churches too,' said Gordon.

Gordon will be travelling to Malawi with International Leader Janet Stafford on March 11th. They would value your prayers, especially as they share with Torch Malawi trustees in seeking God's way for the future development of this vital work. ■



Easter in Three Words

This year's Easter giveaway from Torch Publications is a booklet by William Taylor, published by the Good Book Company. It sums Easter up in three words, showing how the events of the first Good Friday and Easter Sunday are true, wonderful, and life-changing.

The companion to *Christmas in Three Words*, this is ideal for giving away at missions and evangelistic meetings, and to friends, family, colleagues and neighbours. And we know it will prove very popular in Torch Fellowship Groups.

It's available in braille, large print, and on audio CD.



Join the team!

As Torch continues to build its presence in churches across the UK, there is a need for more **Area Development Officers**. There is also a vacancy at the Holiday & Retreat Centre for a **Cook**. And Torch always has an ongoing need for **volunteer** support. On page 6 you can read about becoming a volunteer audio transcriber or audio editor. But there's a wide range of other volunteer roles – working in the regions, at Torch House in Leicestershire or at Torch Holiday & Retreat Centre in Sussex – details of which can be found on the Torch website.

