



Finding a way forward

'My favourite song says "to the family of Jesus, all God's children may belong." And that's what I believe.'

After a lifetime of devotion to God's work through the Salvation Army, John Vale will be retiring this July at age 75. However, as he explained in an interview for Torch's radio show, this work was nearly cut short due to sudden sight loss fifteen years ago. He credits Torch Trust with helping him to keep going.

John explained 'I had been blind in my left eye since a motorbike accident in 1967 that severed my optic nerve. My right eye compensated and I was fine. But one day I was in church reading the Bible and all of

a sudden there was a bright light as though someone had shone a great big torch into my eye and I couldn't see any more, just a pinprick in the middle of my eye.' John visited an optician the next day who told him to go straight to the hospital. 'Ten operations later I was told they could do no more: diabetic retinopathy had taken the sight from my eye. It was just like somebody shooting my legs from underneath me.'

Continued on page 2...

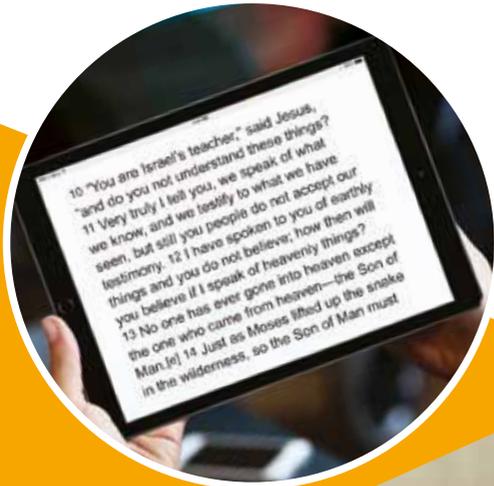


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Immediately John believed that would be the end of his life's work. He had been with the Salvation Army since 1973, when he and his wife moved to Nuneaton. John ran chapters of the Salvation Army in three local areas, before setting up a new branch in Bedworth after the death of his wife. Would sight loss end all of that? John explains: 'I felt so depressed. I just couldn't imagine what I was going to do. I felt terribly lost and dejected.'



He kept encouraging me. He got me an iPad which I could use to make sure that I could learn things, and all my sermons go on my iPad.



But then he remembered: 'Many, many years ago in the 1940s my aunt was blinded as a result of a bomb dropping on her house – she lost her eyes completely. And Torch helped her to get her life back together again. As soon as I was blind the first thing that came into my mind was Torch. And so I phoned them up and a very nice young lady helped me!'

One of the things that John missed the most was reading: 'I had a library full of books and I couldn't read any of them. So now from Torch I have the *Daily Bread* Bible reading notes every month. The other thing is the Christian books which I like to call 'sermon fodder' because they give me a lot of ideas! And sometimes, with apologies to Torch, I don't send the books back for ages because I'm reading and rereading them, using them for my sermons. One little sentence in a book will actually give me a whole sermon, which is amazing. The other thing I really like is updates from Torch on a CD which is absolutely brilliant.'

John has also been hugely helped by a friend turned carer: 'I was very fortunate because I had a very good friend who has now become my carer.'

He drives me around everywhere and does all sorts of things to help me. One of the problems you've got as a blind person is that you can't see when you've spilt your breakfast down you, or what colour shoes you've got on. So he helps me by getting things ready. He has supported me tremendously.' More support has come from his colleagues at the Salvation Army, in particular his friend Jim. John says 'He kept encouraging me. He got me an iPad which I could use to make sure that I could learn things, and all my sermons go on my iPad.'

When asked what he'd say to someone else losing their sight, John replied: 'Don't be afraid to ask for help. Don't be afraid to ring up because Torch is a very, very supportive organisation, they've always been very helpful. If they can't find the answer at first they will come back to me. That's something that's very important to me. If I can't find a book they will search for it and all sorts of things. So I would say: yes, use Torch because that's what it's there for. It's there for you and is a very, very big support mechanism.'



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Summing up his feelings about the journey he has been on for the last fifteen years, John said: 'The most important thing, I think, is that we believe in everybody. No one is beyond the love of God. My favourite song from the Salvation Army says "others may reject the weakling, I believe they can be strong, to the family of Jesus, all God's children may belong." And that's what I believe: Christian church should be an all-inclusive organisation. Not worrying about if you're blind or deaf, got one leg or whatever, that doesn't matter. The important thing is that your heart is right with God.'

GET INVOLVED

If you'd like to find out more about volunteering with Torch, just visit the Volunteers section of our website, torchtrust.org



A helpful assistant who lives 'In Your Pocket'!

You may have heard of In Your Pocket in previous Torch communications, and Torch Trust is proud to announce the Torch library is now available to all 'In Your Pocket' subscribers.

In Your Pocket is a mobile device designed for people with sight loss. In Your Pocket, created by RNIB, RealSAM and O2, aims to make accessing talking books and newspapers easy and quick. Torch CEO, Julia Hyde, says 'Torch is delighted to be working in partnership with this group of organisations. Together we are able to offer easy access to Christian resources, encouraging people on their spiritual journey.'

The handy device also functions as a speech-enabled smart phone, able to make phone calls and manage your contacts, as well as enabling users to access over 60,000 talking books, 200 newspapers and magazines, and 50,000 podcasts.

In Your Pocket user and Torch staff member, Sheila Armstrong, had this to say about the device: 'In Your Pocket's easy and convenient to use as it's controlled by my voice. It can use mobile data so it works in most places. I can listen to books, magazines, newspapers, podcasts and even make and receive phone calls – all controlled by my voice on the same device. The RNIB and Calibre are already available on In My Pocket. How wonderful it will be to have Torch Trust's Christian content joining them!'

RealSAM are dedicated to making this device a simple, effective digital assistant and said 'With voice control, In Your Pocket is easy to use, fuss-free and great for staying in touch or listening on-the-go. You can get started right away, without the need for a computer or downloads. You will always have access to the latest editions of newspapers, magazines and podcasts, wherever and whenever you want to listen. There's no waiting for the postman. Just say "Read me *The Guardian*", or "Find books about gardening", or "Play me *The Archers*", and In Your Pocket will oblige. You can also access other useful information, for example "What is the weather in Cambridge?", or "What is the time in Paris?". Asking "Where am I?" tells you your current location, along with the nearest street intersection.'

Torch's Chief Technical Officer, Paul Wood, echoed their sentiment, saying 'With this device, In Your Pocket, you can now have access to the rich variety of Torch's audio library content built up over many decades by our volunteers and staff. Just by saying a few chosen words you can listen to God's word through a wide variety of genres and enjoy over 10,000 hours of audio. You will have Torch in your pocket!'



ORDER YOUR DEVICE

The device comes setup and ready to use, along with a protective case, headset and audio CD with instructions on how to use it. To order call the dedicated helpline **0333 7727708**, email helpline@realsam.co.uk or order online at inyourpocket.net



A day in the life

We're often asked about how Torch works, so we thought that you might like to learn a bit about the daily tasks our staff do to keep Torch running smoothly. This is a day in the life of Suzanne, our Client Services Manager...



I arrive at Torch at 8:30am to get ready for the day – reading new emails that have come in overnight, checking my calendar for any upcoming deadlines and, of course, turning on the coffee machine!



At 9 o'clock I join my colleagues for our daily Prayer Time. Here we spend time with God, preparing for the day ahead and sharing information about our work with each other.



On a Monday I'll brief my team at 9:30am on anything they will need to know for the week ahead, and we'll take a moment to pray for the clients we serve.

Phone lines open at 10am and we're all ready to take calls from our lovely clients.

During the morning I'll be actioning requests such as registering clients to receive literature or magazines, booking people on to holidays, and taking orders. I'll also check whether any new clients need a call to see how they're getting on with what they've received from Torch so far.



In Client Services we stagger our lunch breaks so that the phone lines are never closed. However, our phone lines can get very busy so if you don't get through on your first try, please do try again or leave a message as we will always get back to you! For my lunch break I often like to pop into the town and get a mocha!

Throughout the afternoon I'll continue to take calls as well as processing incoming funds and preparing invoices. I will regularly check in with my team, supporting them and ensuring they know what they need to be doing.



I also take care of hospitality at Torch House – whether that's greeting guests, looking after room bookings or liaising with caterers. We always want to be sure Torch provides a warm welcome!

Our phone lines close at 4pm so we'll finish our final calls and tie up any loose ends from the day.

I'll spend the rest of my day taking care of other tasks such as compiling the Prayer Diary that we send out with Torch News.

At 5pm it's time to go home! I'll make sure everything is switched off and tidied up, ready for the start of another busy day!



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Working together to enable people with sight loss to have fulfilling Christian lives:



60 years of relationships is the key

Reverend Michael Heaney, Torch's Chief Operating Officer, reports...

As our 60th anniversary draws near, along with our time of thanksgiving for Torch's ministry over the years, I regularly receive a question that I suspect will have always been asked of Torch: 'Where do you get your money from for the work?'

Folk are generally aware that we are not a charity who overtly fundraises, routinely charges for services, persistently asks for money or has funding relationships with other agencies. At the same time, Torch does so much serving thousands of people with sight loss in the UK, Malawi and beyond!

The first and most important response I would always give is, 'It is from God'. After all, we know that all that we have is from God. Anything we have personally is entrusted to us for us to use, and as Christians we are exhorted to give! Therefore at the heart of Torch's financial provision is recognition of faith: that we are beneficiaries of God through God's people who align themselves with our work in His kingdom. It's a matter of relationship, and that is the key.

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In 2018 we had an income of approximately one million pounds, the vast majority via donations and legacies, and each one could tell a story. Every one would be an example of relationship with God and Torch. Can we ask for your prayers in this special year and beyond, that we are diligent in developing all our relationships and have opportunities to build many, many more new ones?

SUPPORT TORCH



If you would like to know more about how you could support the work of Torch financially in our 60th anniversary year do refer to our website, call **01858 438260** or email **info@torchtrust.org**



Sharing and caring in the Digital Café

Regular readers of Torch News may have heard about the Digital Café, a Facebook group we set up for people with sight loss to connect and share together. The group is going strong after over a year and we thought we'd ask some of the participants how they felt about the community they've built up. Here are their comments:

'The gathering of community is the heart of what goes on here day to day and we love to support, encourage and pray for one another. I've met some amazing inspirational people who I otherwise would not have met.'

'The real strength to this group is the sense of family it fosters. People can be real here. They can share how tough life with sight loss can be and know that they will get non-judgemental, loving support.'

'This family is wonderfully diverse in terms of life experience with sight loss. We are also diverse in terms of where we are on the Christian journey, church expression and theological belief. None of this matters: we achieve a level of unity many churches would envy!'

'It's true fellowship – sharing the reality of Christian life with sight loss. We support and encourage each other and look forward to meeting any new members.'

GET INVOLVED



If you have sight loss and would like to join the Digital Café all you'll need is a Facebook account – once you're on, just search for **Torch Trust Digital Café**.

My volunteer story

The work of Torch Trust simply wouldn't be possible without our wonderful volunteers – but we know you may be wondering what exactly volunteering with Torch involves! So we've decided to showcase some of their work – here's Sheila Dunning's volunteer story...



I'm Sheila Dunning and I volunteer in the audio department at Torch House where I read and record audio books and magazine articles. I also edit and correct books that other people have recorded, as others do for books that I have read.

I retired four years ago as a Director of Hothorpe Hall, a large conference centre in Leicestershire. My main responsibility was for the 12 acres of gardens and grounds where I did everything from growing and planting, pruning, digging, chopping, mowing lawns, and cultivating soft fruit in the extensive Victorian greenhouses and kitchen garden. It was a huge and demanding job and I loved working outside in God's creation.

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I feel that volunteering gives me that purpose and value to my life, and helps me to know that God can use even my small offering in His Kingdom.

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I've always been an active person, so I knew I would relish some kind of work where I could continue to serve God in the local and wider community. So I offered to volunteer at Torch House and was delighted to be accepted. I spend one day a week in the small studio and feel it is such a blessing and privilege to read Christian books, magazine articles and parts of 'Every Day With Jesus', a daily devotional. I always pray before I start for all who will be listening that they will be blessed, encouraged and challenged by what they hear.

I'm aware that when one retires, one can lose one's sense of identity and worth. I feel that volunteering gives me that purpose and value to my life, and helps me to know that God can use even my small offering in His Kingdom.



GET INVOLVED



There are lots of different ways to get involved as a Torch volunteer. We produce audio books, so maybe you'd like to be an audio editor in our studio or from home? Or how about guiding at our Sussex holiday centre? If you enjoy public speaking, you might like visiting communities to tell them all about our work and initiatives. There are lots of vital tasks to be done out and about, at Torch House and from the comfort of your own home! If you'd like to find out more about volunteering with Torch, just visit the Volunteers section of our website, torchtrust.org

A huge thank you for your generosity!

In the previous edition of Torch News, we put out an appeal for any white canes, braille styluses or hand frames that were not needed and could be sent to Malawi to help blind people there. We're very happy to report that we had an excellent response!

During a visit to two local fellowship groups in mid-December, Torch Malawi Administrator Stanley Moyo was able to give out some of the equipment received, along with braille paper...



Stanley said of his team's arrival at the Weaving Factory Group: 'It was a moment of joy and happiness as we were received by the members of the fellowship. We started our service with opening prayer and then went straight to choruses, after which the word was read from the book of Luke 1:28-30 which speaks about the birth of Jesus Christ.'

Visiting the group along with Stanley was Pastor Lemi Chisi who spoke on the reasons for celebrating Christmas. Pastor Chisi talked about how 'Christmas exists to remember the birth of Jesus. It also unites the people as Christians and non-Christians celebrate the day. Christmas also helps people to forget and forgive trespasses as we are in union with Christ. The old things must go and new things come.'

Stanley reported that members of the group were very happy to receive the canes and paper donated from the UK, saying that 'it was greatly appreciated for this was a real need among the people'. The people benefiting included a young student from the local university.

The Machinjiri Fellowship Group also received a visit from Torch Malawi, where more canes were distributed. Stanley said, 'I thank God for the provision of the canes and do hope more canes shall be coming for the blind people as the need here is great.'

In January Stanley was able to visit fellowship groups in the Balaka District and give out more canes, braille books, and a pair of sunglasses for a young boy

with albinism. Stanley reported that the canes in particular were extremely helpful as most had previously had no access to such things and were truly benefiting from the supply.



I thank God for the provision of the canes and do hope more canes shall be coming for the blind people as the need here is great.



DONATIONS



We would like to say a massive thank you to all who donated items and please do keep them coming. If you have any white canes, braille styluses or hand frames that you no longer need please send them to Torch House, Torch Way, Market Harborough, Leicestershire, LE16 9HL.

Support us while you shop with Amazon Smile

Torch has registered with Amazon Smile which gives the opportunity for a small proportion of certain sales to be donated to a charity of people's choice – smile.amazon.co.uk If you would like to support Torch in this way just follow the link and type Torch Trust into the search box when prompted.

amazonsmile

TORCH 



Late availability on the Spring Quiet Retreat

Our Spring Quiet Retreat at the Torch Holiday and Retreat Centre will be taking place from the 8-11 April. This lovely holiday is a time of spiritual rest and rejuvenation. There are still a couple of spaces left so call Client Services now to book. There will be two further Quiet Retreats in Autumn and Winter, also available to book now.



Thanksgiving and 60th Anniversary Celebration – June 22

This year we are thrilled to be celebrating our 60th anniversary! It is an extremely special milestone for us and we'll be marking it with a celebration day at Torch House and at Torch Holiday and Retreat Centre. In recognition of the wonderful diversity of Torch, we'd also like to encourage you to celebrate wherever you are, within your local communities. More details to come!



Week of Prayer – June 17 to 21

This year we'll be having a whole week devoted to prayer while we get ready for our 60th anniversary. We would love to ask you, our wider community, if you will pray with us from home during that week. Nearer the time we'll be putting out information about specific prayer points, all to do with the work of Torch.

Support us with prayer



We really appreciate all those who pray regularly for the staff and the work of Torch. If you would like to pray for us, we have a dedicated Prayer Phone which is updated every 2 weeks on a Wednesday. You can ring direct on **01858 438277** or read it on our website torchtrust.org

TORCH 

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Chair: Marilyn Baker **Chief Executive:** Julia Hyde

Council of Reference members:

Revd Dr Steve Brady; Revd Dr David Coffey OBE; Revd Malcolm Duncan;
Jonathan Lamb; Revd Roy Searle; Dr Elaine Storkey; Revd Dr Derek Tidball.

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USEFUL INFORMATION



Client Services
01858 438260

Reflections
for responses to our radio
broadcasts: call **0333 123 1255**



Library
01858 438266

For more information or to
hear the show visit:
torchtrust.org/reflections



Holidays
01858 438260

TORCH NEWS
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braille, email and large print
(17-, 20-, 25- and 30-point)
and can be viewed online at:
torchtrust.org/downloads



Prayer Line
01858 438277