Meet SLFC volunteer Fiona Storer. Together with Regional Networker Leonard Campbell, the pair run sessions for SLFC churches who want to get the most out of their membership.

Although I’d been a Torch client for years, I only got involved when Leonard came to speak at my church. He asked if I would share a little from my perspective of being in the church and having sight loss. Maybe because I’m a bit of a talker, he seemed to feel it worked quite well and asked if I would go with him to do sight loss training at other churches. Due to the coronavirus lockdown, we’ve sadly only done one so far, but it was a very positive experience. I think because I still wear glasses and have healthy-looking eyes, most people don’t realise I have sight loss. When I did the sight loss training with Leonard, I think it gave people great insight that visual impairment is not just black and white, there’s a lot of stages in between.

'I have a rare eye condition that, when I was 16, caused my eyes to deteriorate within the space of a year, leaving me with no central vision. I also have Fuchs dystrophy which has affected my peripheral vision too. Nonetheless, I’m quite adventurous. I always think of Isaiah 42:16, “I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them…” I’ve always held on to that promise that no matter where I go, God prepares the way before me, he straightens the path, and protects me as I go. This applies to the sight loss training: if you can help raise a little bit of awareness, help people understand the fact that people with sight loss might not come into the church because it can be a scary place for them, then it will make a difference.

Continued on page 2
...Continued from page 1

‘We do a variety of things in the training – I explain different eye conditions and we use simulator glasses and get people to try doing tasks like counting money or pouring drinks. It’s basic, practical stuff that a person with sight loss will deal with. I also see how well I can access the building, so I can give tips on changes that could help.

‘Leonard also did sighted guide training, helping them understand the best way to guide people. I chipped in with my own experiences – I’ve had people grab hold of me and pull me along! It is quite a responsibility because the blind person has to trust you. I answered questions and helped them think about what they felt as a church they could do better. It’s just helping people to be aware that we’re not all exactly the same, but we all have our part to play.

‘My Torch volunteering ties in well to my other passion. I run Knit Together groups where people, who are maybe feeling a bit isolated or in need of a purpose, can come together and knit Bible stories. I also give talks on this.

I think sometimes we focus on the things we can’t do instead of focussing on the things we can do and doing them to the best of our abilities. I can talk, I can knit and I can share the gospel! I’m just astounded that God can use knitting as a means of ministry, and he can use someone as imperfect as me. That’s how amazing God is. If you can encourage someone to have hope that despite abilities, disabilities, whatever, God has a plan for each one of us, that’s important.

If you have the skills to be a great SLFC trainer, or if your church would like to join and receive training, then please contact us on 01858 438260 or email info@torchtrust.org

PRAYER POINTS

• Pray for more people to volunteer as SLFC trainers.
• Pray for more churches to join SLFC.
• Pray for churches to find ways to become more accessible for people with any disability.
A word from our new chairperson, Dr Mike Townsend

It's an honour to be asked to be the chair of Torch after so many years of involvement. I have known Torch since my final year of school when, as a new Christian, I began receiving Torch books. My involvement has encompassed international work, supporting Fellowship Groups and helping Torch to utilise modern technology.

My vision for the future of Torch is to extend our use of technology to help blind and partially sighted people enjoy the benefits of these things in their relationship with God. For example, helping people use smart phones to read the Bible, to understand it more, extending our prayer support, our worship support.

Now with coronavirus, virtual church is becoming a feature for many, but I do believe it can be particularly helpful for blind and partially sighted people. Virtual church means you don't actually have to go somewhere and it can be tailored to support you in the way you want to be supported. This is an important aspect of Sight Loss Friendly Church, so there are great new opportunities here. The virtualisation of Torch is a key thing for the future.

I'm very keen on SLFC, on really making church accessible to everybody, and on the Torch Together events. It's very sad that we've had to delay these due to the virus, but it is an important part of Torch's future: building people together in fellowship and our relationships with God.

I believe a charity works best when it's close to its core values and I think this is most important for our organisation. Our values are ‘Christ-centred’: that means we're Christian, we're based on Jesus and are close to him. Next is 'people-focused'. People have always been very important to Torch: it's all about building relationships with God and each other. ‘Openness’ next, I like to be open and make sure people understand what's going on. I really enjoy open fellowship with folk, sharing in what God’s saying to us, what God's future for us is. ‘Creative’ is the fourth one and I think we're in a time when creation is really important. The virus has made us rethink a lot about the way we do things, about our hopes, where we're going as Christians and what Jesus means to us. Torch Together, SLFC and virtual services are all a creative part of our future.

I must say I'm frustrated because I'm in the vulnerable age group so I can't immediately get round and visit you folk, but I can be contacted.

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Give thanks for the work of Marilyn, our outgoing chair who remains a valued trustee.

Give thanks for Mike taking up the role and pray for him going forward.

Pray for the future work of Torch and the development of exciting and useful projects.

I'm frustrated because I'm in the vulnerable age group so I can't immediately get round and visit you folk, but I can be contacted.
Give the gift of reading

Christian books have been a mainstay of the Torch offering since the very beginning of our story. We have always believed in the importance of making Christian writing truly accessible to people with sight loss.

Reading remains one of the nation’s favourite pastimes, how many of us love to snuggle up with a good book? Losing one’s sight and finding that that’s no longer an option can be a devastating blow. At a time when everything is changing, being able to continue a favourite hobby can be a real lifeline to a person whose sight is deteriorating.

If you want to see how important stories are, you need only to turn to the Bible where you’ll find numerous examples of Jesus sharing his message through the power of storytelling. Have a think for a moment about what Jesus achieves with his parables – he distills tricky concepts down to crystal clear ideas, he teaches morality, he gently rebukes and he awesomely inspires. Words are powerful and no one should be denied access to them.

That’s why we’re committed to keeping our lending library up-to-date and full of great reads in a huge variety of genres: from Christian fiction, to biographies, to study books and much, much more. But your support is needed to keep this great operation going – producing books in audio, braille and large print is a big undertaking! A great example of this can be seen in the equipment we use. After many years of faithful service, our guillotine (used for cutting sheets of paper down to book-size) has finally been retired. We urgently appealed for the funds to purchase a new one, as well as a new CD printer to enable us to keep producing audio books for people who don’t or can’t use braille or large print. We have been humbled by the response which has meant we were soon blessed with the total funds for the guillotine.

As an added blessing the old guillotine, via our suppliers, has found its way to Africa where it will continue to serve in that environment.

“
A terrific service as I used to be an avid reader and sadly missed this very much! You have no idea how much I really do enjoy this wonderful service. Every blessing for 2020 as you serve the Lord and others.
”
We know our library makes a difference and it is only through your continued support that we can carry on making that difference. One of our readers recently contacted us with this amazing feedback: ‘Could I take this opportunity to say a big thank you to all of you for a great service to all the people who need and use your help. Since I started to get books on USB from you I have received over 100 books. A terrific service as I used to be an avid reader and sadly missed this very much! You have no idea how much I really do enjoy this wonderful service. Every blessing for 2020 as you serve the Lord and others.’

Another reached out to share her joy at being able to engage in Bible study through Torch resources: ‘I’m just writing to thank you for another year’s supply of Bible study notes on USB stick and CD. You can’t know what a difference this makes to my life and my walk with God.’

It is our heartfelt desire to continue to serve in this way and we humbly entreat you to join us on this journey and bring the power of the written word into the lives of some of the people who need it most.

### PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for the funds for new equipment to be available when needed, currently for a CD printer.
- Pray for everyone involved in keeping the Torch library work going.
- Pray for the readers who engage with God through the books they receive.
- Pray for more people to discover that accessible books can work for them and bring the joy of reading into their lives.

We urgently appealed for the funds to purchase a new one, as well as a new CD printer to enable us to keep producing audio books for people who don’t or can’t use braille or large print.

The old guillotine begins its voyage to Africa

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Our response to Covid-19

At the end of March, Torch realised that it needed to take action to help people keep safe.

The first thought was to continue to maintain a service for our clients and to protect all the staff and volunteers working at Torch House.

Thanks to government funding we were able to furlough half the staff and keep some working safely at Torch House. Others were able to work from home thanks to some amazing technology.

It was a challenge but with God’s help we have been able to continue to provide Bible reading notes, a library service and Christian magazines to our clients.

Whenever anyone rang Torch there was still a friendly helpful voice on the end of the phone. We laughed and prayed together and acknowledged how fortunate we were.

Using technology, that was new to some of us, we even managed to have staff meetings and lunch time fellowship using laptops and telephones.

We have been delighted to welcome new clients to Torch and to continue serving all those who rely on Torch to help them grow in faith and thrive in Christian community.

A big thank you for all your prayers.

### Whenever anyone rang Torch there was still a friendly helpful voice on the end of the phone.
Making an impact on church health with SLFC

Pastor Adrian Roberts of Zion Baptist Church, Mirfield, signed his church up to SLFC after hearing about it at a training event in October 2019. He was aware of at least one person with sight loss in his congregation – a young lad at the Messy Church sessions whose eye condition caused tunnel vision. Pastor Adrian wanted to know how they could support him and encourage other people with sight loss to attend the church.

Little did he know, when he announced to his congregation that the church was making a commitment to sight loss friendliness, they already had several more members who were affected by sight loss. Three members of the Sunday morning congregation stood up, sharing for the first time in church that they too were partially sighted.

The difference now is huge. Two of the members have started attending prayer meetings as they can now read the accessible notice sheet and know they’ll receive materials in a format that works for them. The third member had struggled to join in with services, not being familiar with the songs used. Now she receives a large print order of service every week. She has also joined the reading team. All three feel more valued and that their quality of Christian life has increased simply because they received the tools they needed.

Pastor Adrian is pleased to report that the young boy in Messy Church has become much more comfortable and able to join in now that the helpers know how best to support him. Using the SLFC guidelines for best practice, the welcome team have improved the quality of welcome and a slight layout change has helped people with mobility needs move around the church more easily. Due to the changes made, they were also much better equipped to serve a blind lady at a recent outreach event, making sure they introduced themselves by name. The lady said she felt so valued and much more likely to return.

Pastor Adrian is now championing SLFC to the local church network and will be hosting Mirfield Churches Together SLFC training.

Give thanks for everyone at Zion Baptist Church for their great approach towards sight loss friendliness.

Pray that more people will feel they can talk about their sight loss in church.

Pray for more churches to take up SLFC and improve their church health as Zion has done.
A herd of happiness in Malawi

We are so thankful to Torch UK for the provision of the resources and as Torch Malawi we shall be always in contact with the beneficiaries for monitoring so that we keep on advising them on the care and safety of the goats.

We’re so happy to report that our partners at Torch Malawi have seen great success from the relief project implemented in November 2019. This project is part of an ongoing financial commitment from Torch UK of around £25k per year.

So far the money has been used in a variety of fantastic ways including the distribution of 664 bags of maize flour, the building of two houses for blind families, the provision of canes and braille, sun cream for people with albinism, and, excitingly, a large number of goats!

Yes, Torch have so far provided 50 goats to various blind families in Malawi. This is a truly sustainable way of supporting blind people to provide for themselves. Families were chosen on the basis of need and how well equipped they were to care for the goats. Stanley Moyo, Torch Malawi Administrator, and his team have trained the families in how to look after the goats well, and return regularly to monitor their well-being.

Stanley was thrilled to report that the families are greatly benefiting from their animals. The goats are doing very well and a good number are now expecting offspring! ‘We also expect within the space of one year or two another 50 beneficiaries shall get their goats from these first beneficiaries as a Pass On Scheme.’

Stanley’s regular work continues too with visits to the Fellowship Groups throughout Malawi, he reports that ‘Generally all the visits for the month of March 2020 were good and fruitful. The blind people of Malawi have many basic needs that need to be fulfilled. We wish to extend our profound gratitude to Torch UK for the funding. We promise to work expeditiously and well whenever we are entrusted with resources for the benefit of the blind people in Malawi.’

If you would like to support the work of Torch Malawi then please do get in touch.

Any money donated over the sum needed for specific projects will be committed to other helpful provisions.

PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for the blind people of Malawi during the coronavirus pandemic.
- Give thanks for the goats, pray that they may thrive and sustain many more families.
- Give thanks for the incredible hard work of the Torch Malawi team.

Stanley’s recent message to us was as follows: ‘We are so thankful to Torch UK for the provision of the resources and as Torch Malawi we shall be always in contact with the beneficiaries for monitoring so that we keep on advising them on the care and safety of the goats.’

Blind people receiving their goats
Please consider supporting us through prayer or giving

Torch relies on the generosity of our faithful supporters. Your financial gifts to Torch are vital for our ministry, your support enables those with sight loss to grow in faith and thrive in Christian community.

Ways you can give to help Torch sustain its mission:

Direct from your bank
You can set up a regular monthly payment or a single donation. This is the most cost-effective option as everything comes directly to Torch Trust.

Torch's bank details are:
Torch Trust for the Blind
Sort Code: 40-52-40
Account Number: 00017072, Cafbank Ltd, 25 Kings Hill Ave, West Malling, Kent ME19 4JQ
Alternatively set up a Direct Debit or make a single donation via Charities Aid Foundation at: cafdonate.cafonline.org/1187

Donate by phone
Call Client Services on 01858 438260 between 10am and 4pm Monday to Thursday.

Send a cheque
Post cheques to us made payable to: Torch Trust for the Blind.

Boost your gifts with Gift Aid
If you are a UK taxpayer, you can increase the value of your donations by 25% by making a Gift Aid declaration, at no extra cost to yourself. When you make a donation, please ask for a form to be sent out to you to complete and return.

What our clients are saying:

“I heard of you from a friend and I want to thank you for all you do, I really enjoy the CDs, they help me a lot.”

“I pray for Torch every day. I really enjoy the magazines I get from you, I’m very happy with the font size!”

“I love everything I get from you and appreciate the good work Torch does – keep it up!”

Sight Loss Friendly Sunday

Sight Loss Friendly Sunday was planned to have taken place in June, however, it was felt wise to postpone it this year. The event was to be the first in what will become a yearly celebration of sight loss friendliness at church, as well as an opportunity to raise awareness. Due to the current situation, we don’t know exactly what shape the event will take but, regardless, we know your passion for helping us make church more accessible will see us through. Whatever happens, we look forward to sharing more in our next issue.

If you’d like to hold a Sight Loss Friendly Sunday at your church, you can do this any time throughout the year! All the resources and helpful tips can be found on our SLFC website at sightlossfriendlychurch.org.uk

USEFUL INFORMATION

Client Services
01858 438260

Prayer Line
01858 438277

Sight Loss Friendly Church
sightlossfriendlychurch.org.uk

Reflections
for responses to our radio broadcasts: call 0333 123 1255
For more information or to hear the show visit: torchtrust.org/reflections

Torch News
is also available in audio CD, braille, email and large print (17pt, 20pt, 25pt and 30pt) and can be viewed online at: torchtrust.org/downloads

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Chair: Dr Mike Townsend
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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