



CEO Prayer Letter

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Large print 25pt

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**The Torch Trust for the Blind
A charity registered in England and
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**This letter is available in the following
formats: audio CD, braille, email and
large print (17, 20, 25 and 30 point).**

Dear Prayer Partners,

Christmas approaches rapidly, bringing the usual blend of anticipation and urgency. It's a shame when the blessing of the anticipation gets overwhelmed by the urgency of Christmas preparation. Luke's Gospel account builds with expectancy towards the arrival of the Christ-child. The climax of the narrative for me is the moment Simeon takes the baby in his arms and says, ' . . . my eyes have seen your salvation'.

What are you looking forward to this Christmastime? My wife Pat and I are helping to run Torch's Christmas Houseparty for blind and partially sighted people at our wonderful Holiday & Retreat Centre and right now our Torch Holidays team are working hard, preparing everything to ensure that our guests have a really memorable Christmas, and know the touch of God upon their lives. This is a part of Torch's

response to those whose Christmas is lonely.

2017 has been a great year across the spectrum of Torch's activities. We are now routinely transcribing Christian books into braille and large print on request, with readers choosing from a rapidly widening selection, a result of deepening relationships with Christian publishers. Many of our accessible editions are available for order alongside standard print books on the Eden online Christian bookstore.

It been a good year for accessible Bible shipments too. Alongside the very popular MegaVoice audio Bibles with the David Suchet reading of the Bible has been the new Accessible Edition New Testament. Torch worked in a partnership led by Biblica (NIV) translators to present the 'easy English' NIrV text in 16 point text with clear

layout and easy navigation, and at an affordable price.

MegaVoice audio Bibles are in demand internationally too. It's been hugely encouraging to see the joy with which they are received by blind people in Malawi. Life there remains incredibly tough but during the year I've been privileged to join Janet at two overnight gatherings of blind people in poor rural areas and witness the joy and hope they find in Christ in spite of everything.

Some years ago, I was galvanised by a simple single fact: that each day across the UK around 100 people learned they were losing their sight. For many, the loss of their sight is devastating and impacts almost every aspect of their lives. We realised that impact was not just practical and physical, but that it was emotional, social and spiritual too.

Many organisations were responding to the physical aspects with various gadgets, training and services. So was Torch with its provision of accessible Christian books and magazines. But were we doing enough in response to the emotional and the spiritual impact? It struck me that as the distinctively Christian organisation among the many charities serving people with sight loss it was down to Torch to take a lead in addressing the emotional and, especially, the spiritual aspects.

As we got closer to the issues around those experiencing loss of sight I began to wonder if it was actually more than 100 per day. Then, a few weeks ago a new report from RNIB set out their latest research. Now it's 250 a day that begin losing sight. That would make it about 100,000 a year spread throughout the UK! That's a lot of people . . . and a whole lot of distress.

One lady calling out-of-hours left this message: ‘My sight is very poorly . . . soon I shall be blind. I’m just wondering what I should do then . . . It would be nice to talk to somebody, it would be nice to think somewhere somebody would be interested in my plight’.

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.

At our annual Torch trustees retreat meeting in October, with the scale of problem so much larger than we had originally understood, we sensed a new urgency to get on with building our response to this need and to accelerate the growth of Torch’s Presence ministries nationally.

For one thing, we need to continue to take on the staff that, based from home, will allow us to reach out across

the UK. It also requires that we raise awareness of sight loss in churches that will engage them in responding to local need. And we need to stimulate volunteering. Torch's presence through local groups, befriending and churches has never been needed more than now.

Mounting this response means that we will intentionally increase Torch's operating expenditure. This time last year I wrote frankly about the then very challenging state of Torch finances. We were in overdraft and I proposed we mobilise a 'chorus of prayer'. Clearly the prayers went up and God has blessed Torch finances since then. We went from a growing overdraft to today when we hold just enough to cover our minimal cash reserves policy of holding two months expenditure. As I called for a chorus of prayer then I now call for a 'chorus of thanksgiving'. The Lord is good!

Some of the money came to us through new Direct Debits or Standing Orders from those wishing to support the work of Torch on a regular basis. I want to say a very big THANK YOU to all among you who support Torch this way. This is the only income of which we can be assured and we deeply appreciate your committed support. However, this is still a small share of the overall cost of running Torch which now totals around £1million per annum, or over £2,700 per calendar day, even though we have carefully controlled our expenditure and offset inflating costs by taking advantage of new technology and more efficient ways of working.

Some made one-off donations, and some among them wrote and told us touching stories behind the prompting to give so generously. THANK YOU to each and every one who joined with us in prayer and for every donation made.

Some money came to us through legacies. In recent years legacies have contributed almost half of Torch's income but of course it's not something for which we can plan! We've not had any notifications of legacies over recent weeks so this may be our next challenge. Please keep praying with us. The Lord is our provider.

Nevertheless, we enter 2018 with a strong conviction that we should act in faith to develop Torch's presence across the UK, bringing us closer to blind and partially sighted people and especially those losing sight, working with local church to bring the presence of our loving God to them where they are and at their times of greatest need.

In a verse that's apt to Torch, we are challenged to 'live by faith, not by sight' (2 Corinthians 5:7). Faith, we are told is 'assurance about what we do not see' (Hebrews 11:1). We cannot see all that

the New Year holds for us but we go ahead seeking God's guidance and trust him for his provision.

God bless you,

Gordon Temple

PS. On a personal note . . . The most recent Torch News carried a message from Marilyn Baker our chair of trustees about the recruitment of a new CEO for Torch. Responding to an unequivocal call of God I have served in this capacity since 2002. However, it is time the leadership of Torch's thriving ministry to be passed to someone who can lead it forward under God, rising to the challenge and opportunity before us. While the search for the person of God's choosing is underway, I will continue to lead Torch with unwavering commitment.