

# **Torch News – Autumn 2017**

**Enabling people with sight loss to  
discover Christian faith and lead  
fulfilling Christian lives.**

**Christian activities and resources for  
blind and partially sighted people  
worldwide.**

**Large print 25pt**



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# **Ground-breaking new Bible for partially sighted people**

**[Reading the Bible can be a mammoth challenge for people who are partially sighted. Compared to other books, the Bible is uniquely presented in a complex way and in the smallest type people are ever expected to read.]**

**The good news is that people with sight loss now have a new easier-to-read Bible, which could also benefit huge numbers of people with learning disabilities or literacy challenges.**

**An affordable New Testament has been produced using a carefully selected larger print font (16 point), with layout, illustrations, paper and reading level all chosen with accessibility in mind. What's more, blind people will benefit**

**from the audio and eBook versions soon to be produced.**

## **Readable and clear**

**As one of several Christian organisations involved in three years of extensive planning, research and consultation for the new NIrV Bible, which was produced by Biblica (the International Bible Society), Torch took part in the official launch at All Souls Church in London this summer.**

**‘We have delivered a Bible that combines readable language, imaginative design and illustration, straightforward navigation and clear text and page layout,’ said Gordon Temple, Torch’s chief executive.**

**‘This NIrV Accessible Bible is a new translation with great integrity. It has**

**echoes of the NIV, so will be familiar to the many people used to that version. But the sentences are shorter and the language simpler – though this is a Bible for adults, not children. It will be a special blessing to many of the 110,000 people in the UK who have both sight loss and learning disability. And it will also be a help to people for whom English is not their first language,’ he said.**

## **Access and inclusion**

**‘The NlrV Accessible Edition is one step towards greater Bible access and inclusion within the Church,’ said Catherine McKinley of Biblica. ‘Ensuring that everyone has access to the Bible is at the very heart of the message contained within it. You were made by God. You are loved by God. You matter**

**to God. You are equal to all others in God's sight. And God wants you to know Him through His Word.'**

**'It's absolutely fantastic!' says Trevor Roach, who was at the launch of the new Bible. Trevor's sight loss means he normally reads 24 point. 'The layout is done with chapter and verse numbers down the side, not in the text, and that means it's easier to find a verse you want. And the illustrations are excellent.'**

## **Recommended**

**'I can't recommend it enough. It's the first Bible I've been able to see at a normal distance,' says Will Williams, a church minister who has the inherited eye condition nystagmus. Will usually needs 18 point, but finds the Nlrv very readable.**

**‘Having the single column and verse numbers on the left mean I don’t get lost. The clarity of the print is great. My mother in law reads using a magnifier and she tried it and immediately loved it.’**

**‘It’s a real pleasure to read for me personally. I love the scene-setting introductions to each Bible books. But it’s also going to be a great help in my ministry too. I can use it to preach from. We have a big additional needs group in our church in Liverpool. I’ve show it to them and they really love it. Those that can’t read enjoy the illustrations.’**

## **Affordable**

**Mark Conquer of Suffolk, partially sighted and with learning disability, was particularly impressed by the affordable price of the NIrV.**

**‘This is a really good price. Usually things for visually impaired people are very expensive. So it means a lot that it’s been kept so low.’ Mark normally uses a Bible app on his phone to read the Bible so he’s glad to have a print Bible with simplified text that he can use, and he says he’s looking forward to getting the audio version.**

**Contact Torch Trust to get your own copy of the ACCESSIBLE EDITION NEW TESTAMENT at only £7.99. Postage and packing is free to anyone registered partially sighted or qualifying for registration.**

## **From ‘dyed-in-the-wool atheist’ to modern-day Jonah!**

**[Simon Wilkes (38) likes an adventurous life. Perhaps that’s why his**

**Bible hero is Jonah. Though he's never yet found himself in the belly of a whale, his favourite sport is open water swimming – a challenge for anyone, yet even more so for a blind person.]**

**This year Simon was at Torch Holiday & Retreat Centre in West Sussex for his fourth consecutive high-octane Activities Holiday, within days of being baptised. But on his first Activities Holiday, things were very different. Describing himself as a 'dyed-in-the-wool atheist', Simon made no attempt to conceal his opinion of the spiritual content of the holiday.**

## **Disrespectful**

**'I was there for the activities – and I was rather disrespectful towards the**

**devotions,' says Simon. 'In fact, during the God-slots I would go to the pub, have a few beers and think, what a load of rubbish!'**

**But change was on the way. While continuing to ignore the spiritual content during his next holiday, Simon openly admitted that others on the holiday really seemed to benefit from the devotional times.**

**During his third holiday, Simon decided that he might 'pop along to the God slot'. Somehow it all started to make sense, and he found himself praying to receive Jesus into his life. As everyone who was there recalls, he began that prayer with**

# **Stress melted away**

**Simon, who was born without eyes, says that the biggest difference in his life since becoming a Christian is that a lot of his anger and stress has melted away. ‘Now I can give that into the hands of the Lord,’ he says. ‘I’ve even tried to give up swearing!’**

**Another big change is to Simon’s social life. He describes himself as ‘not the average conformist person’, but now ‘I’m actually meeting more people, people who want to know me and I’ve got something important in common with – the Christian faith.’**

**Simon’s friends from the Activities Holiday keep in touch with him through social media and encouraged him to join a local church, Providence Baptist Church in March, Cambridgeshire, where he now operates the sound desk.**

**As for his admiration for Jonah . . . the parallels are clear. ‘The Lord asked Jonah to go to Ninevah, Jonah didn’t want to do it, he tried to leg it, but you can’t hide from the Lord. Being a fanatical open water swimmer, I can understand him volunteering to get thrown into the sea. That’s why, when I was baptised, I wanted to do it in the sea. There were very good waves that day!’**

## **Have you been on a Torch Holiday?**

**There’s something for everyone on a Torch Holiday, with a team of committed staff including our new Holiday Leader, Janet Caughley. The autumn line-up includes a week enjoying the local Hurstpierpoint**

**Festival in September; the popular annual book week for readers in October; and in November there's a week of music and teaching with Marilyn Baker, our Torch Chair of Trustees, together with Tracy Williamson; and also our Moving Forward short break – full of practical advice to equip you on your sight loss journey. In December you can be part of two different festive holidays to celebrate Christmas. Go to the Torch website for details or call Torch Holiday Retreat Centre.**

## **‘Lonely, bitter and angry – in need of God’ in Eastern Europe**

**[Losing your sight has many challenges – yet support is available in many western countries at a level that can't**

**be imagined elsewhere in the world. Often in TORCH NEWS we feature the work of Torch International in Malawi, where blind people struggle to get enough to eat each day. International Leader Janet Stafford asks for prayer for them. Torch Trust has strong ties with outreach to blind people in several countries. Here we focus on the work of Tibor Miklos in Eastern Europe.**

**Tibor grew up in an orphanage in Romania in the 1960s. He began to lose his sight at the age of eight due to the inherited condition retinitis pigmentosa. By the time he finished blind school he was bitter and lonely. He moved to Hungary in 1991 and married Marta, newly blind herself. But life was still desperate.]**

**Meeting some Christians who showed him kindness and encouraged him to read John's Gospel changed everything. In 1993 he became a Christian and went**

**on to become the pastor of a church in Budapest. Now he works tirelessly for blind people there and in neighbouring countries through the Bartimeus Foundation which he founded in 2013, committed to sharing Christian resources and helping people encounter Jesus.**

**Tibor understands at first hand the loneliness and bitterness of people with sight loss, and their anger with God.**

## **Behind closed doors**

**In contrast to the UK, there are few ways for blind people to integrate, so many stay hidden behind closed doors. There is little government help, little from non-state quarters.**

**Tibor says he has learned ‘many great biblical principles through Torch Trust’,**

**which he has visited. Through the Bartimeus Foundation, Tibor has distributed over 2600 MegaVoice audio Bibles as well as other Christian materials in Eastern European countries.**

**Tibor is often drawn to the story in John's Gospel, chapter 9, of Jesus healing the man who was born blind.**

**'After this blind man was cast out of the synagogue, he had a wonderful conversation with Jesus,' recalls Tibor. 'I especially love verse 38: "he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him."'**

## **Please pray**

**Please pray that God will bless Tibor's ministry with much spiritual fruit and that he will have all the resources he needs. Pray for him and Marta as they reach out to blind people. And pray for**

**their sighted daughter Noémi, about to leave home to study at a Christian university in Illinois, US.**

## **‘Confidently Christian – and with a big heart’**

**[Torch Trust occupies a unique place in the field of sight loss care because it is ‘confidently Christian’. That’s the view of a new addition to the Torch trustees, Dr Philippa Simkiss, Head of Partnerships at RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People).]**

**‘Torch is small in terms of turnover but not in terms of reach. It has a big heart,’ says Philippa.**

**‘Some aspects of its ministry, such as the befriending telephone service, are also offered by other agencies – but only Torch brings Jesus transparently**

**into the conversation, and that's very attractive. Torch recognises that there is a God-shaped hole in each of us.'**

**Though not born into a Christian family, Philippa says, 'I can't remember a time when I wasn't a Christian. I started going to church in my teens and everything immediately made sense. Later I found out that my grandparents had been praying for me since my birth.'**

## **National role**

**Philippa worked as an engineer in the private sector after university. But after five years she spotted a job with RNIB, working to help people with sight loss being made redundant in factories because of new technology. She felt she knew the world of factories and enjoyed getting involved with retraining blind**

**people. She has worked with RNIB for 27 years, and now has a national role which is essentially about getting organisations to work together to improve things for people with sight loss. This ranges from getting them to take sight care seriously to helping them make their services fully accessible. Along the way she's encouraging sight agencies to avoid duplication and play to their strengths.**

**She's passionate about trying to maximise the capacity at eye clinics – a service dealing with over 7 million outpatient appointments a year.**

**'Currently delays because of over-capacity mean that some people are losing their sight while waiting for appointments,' she says.**

**'Another big deal for me is that local authorities working with austerity budgets don't realise the impact of cutting roles in vision rehabilitation –**

**which are key to keeping people with sight loss safe and well in their own homes.'**

**Philippa will be working closely with Torch's Chief Development Officer Julia Hyde, whose brief is to grow Torch's activities in communities across the UK.**

## **Please pray**

**Pray for Philippa and our other Torch trustees: Marilyn Baker (chair), Jeff Bonser, Tony Brown, Carol Eddon, Rona Gibb, Roger Morriss and Mike Townsend. Ask God to bless and guide them as they prayerfully carry out their responsibilities in giving oversight to the activities and strategic direction of Torch.**

# **Committed to community – and changing lives!**

**[Gordon Temple, Torch CEO, gives an update on an unfolding vision that's clear, bold and distinctively Christian.]**

**Torch's passion is to get alongside people with sight loss, to be with them at their times of greatest need, and to reach many more of them with more people, in more places. We want to follow the example of Jesus, who was always drawn to be with people who were disadvantaged. That's our continuing commitment as, 18 months in, we see our current 5-year strategic plan (2016–2020) becoming more real and mapping the way ahead.**

**Being with more people with sight loss . . . Reaching them earlier . . . Befriending more . . . Befriending them for longer . . . Our term for all of this is**

**‘Presence’. It’s about getting alongside people for their wellbeing and blessing.**

**That vision, prayerfully developed, is how we see God’s will for Torch in the coming years – and we are excited to see it taking shape!**

**It’s our experience, backed up by national research, that the greatest challenge facing people with sight loss is a descent into desperate loneliness. Our aim is to be alongside, enabling people to make strong links with the local community, especially the local church, in ways that will secure their wellbeing into the longer term. Our longing is that people with sight loss will experience the love of God, be drawn to Jesus and find personal fulfilment in the community of the local church.**

# **How will we see this vision come to reality?**

**Torch is an expression of the life of the Church. So, we're seeking to help local churches up and down the country rise to the challenge presented by the growing number of people losing their sight, so that they can reach out to their community and include people living with sight loss in their mission and ministry.**

**We're recruiting more staff to work from their homes around the country, building relationships with churches and with health and social care networks, and we're stepping up the training of local volunteers.**

**Only by working in partnership with local churches and by mobilising Christian people can our vision for people with sight loss become a reality.**

**Our vision will also be achieved by more ‘joined up’ thinking: by linking together what we already do to better support people on the sight loss journey; by building on our established networks of around a hundred local groups; by using the effectiveness of our pioneering JOURNEYING WITH befriending schemes.**

**The production of accessible Christian resources will continue to play its part. Our aim is to provide the right reading material at the right time and in the right format. By using the latest technology, as you will read on the next page, we are able to be more responsive to the needs of those we want to support. In particular, we want to prioritise resources that will enable people to be fully involved in community activity.**

# **Please pray**

**Enclosed with this TORCH NEWS is a leaflet summarising the key themes of our plans. Please pray for us, especially in the recruitment of the Area Development staff who will play a key part in delivering our strategy. We need to discern God's calling on their lives. Pray, too, for the additional finance that will encourage us to confidently proceed in faith to make these appointments. We want to respond with an urgency that's appropriate to the immediacy of the need.**

**Newer and better books  
now on request for Torch  
readers**

**[New technology has meant dramatic changes in the provision of reading**

**material for people with sight loss in recent years – and Torch is very much in the vanguard of that revolution.]**

**In the past, titles were selected in-house for transcription. But now there is a growing list of titles available, which can be produced on request from clients wanting to buy books.**

**‘This is more cost effective for us, and also gives more choice to our readers,’ says David Shepherd, Resources Leader at Torch House, explaining how Torch works with publishers to provide the very latest and best in Christian books.**

**‘The largest Christian supplier Eden Books lets us know month by month which of their list of 98,000 titles are in the top 400 to 500 current best sellers. Torch can then request physical copies and electronic files from publishers, but accessible copies are only made when asked for.**

**‘Meanwhile, Torch is able to cover the entire portfolio of some of the smaller independent publishers such as Malcolm Down Publishing or Dernier Publishing (for children’s books).**

## **New technologies**

**‘With the arrival of new technologies, we can convert a book for our use into braille or large print in hours and days rather than months or years, as it took in the past,’ says David. ‘But we need a particular kind of structured electronic file and publishers haven’t always understood how to provide for us in the best ways.**

**‘Several years of building personal relationships at different levels with publishers have worked well, and so our processes are much improved. And**

**whereas in the past we had to buy several copies of each new title that we were considering transcribing, these days publishers are usually willing to supply us with free copies.'**

**Changes have also taken place in the recording studios at Torch House. 'More authors are willing to read their own books these days,' says David. 'An author can read with real meaning, with the right intonation. Since most Christian books don't get into audio because of the expense, many authors are very happy to work with us. We train them in how to record and self-edit at home – and we get a quality product.'**

## **Giving at Christmas**

**Once again this year Torch is one of a number of charities benefitting from the sale of Gospel Cards. Twenty per**

cent of their Christmas card sales and five per cent of sales of other cards, books and gifts will be given to 22 Christian organisations, including Torch. Full details are on the website: [GOSPELCARDS.ETC.COM](http://GOSPELCARDS.ETC.COM). For a copy of the catalogue, call 01656 647551.

## **MegaVoice brought Bible alive for Steve**

‘Even though my flesh is crumbling /my spirit is singing because I know He is near’ – two lines from the poem Steve Prowse wrote shortly before his death in June this year, aged 48.

Steve became a Christian about 10 years ago, during a serious illness. Within a couple of weeks he was completely well and returned to work – convinced that God was working in his life. He began attending Riverside Church in

**Exeter and became a Street Pastor, patrolling the streets at night to help the vulnerable.**

**Steve's sight and mobility seriously deteriorated following a diagnosis of aggressive multiple sclerosis. Becoming unable to read the Bible was a huge loss to him – but he loved the MEGA VOICE AUDIO BIBLE supplied by Torch. 'The Bible comes alive when I listen to it,' he said. 'When you read the Bible you are concentrating on reading, but listening to it, you are taking it all in. It's brilliant!'**

**Steve's faith and positive attitude towards the end of his life was a blessing to many. Steve was married to Joan from 1999. She says that while he always prayed for healing they both knew there were different kinds of healing – and in the end there was the complete and final healing of going to heaven.**

# **Large print calendar 2018**

**Next year's large print calendar will be available soon at £3.50. Following feedback, we'll be returning to the wire-bound version as before.**

## **Looking ahead**

**Saturday September 16<sup>th</sup> – Annual Torch Open Day and Thanksgiving Celebration at Torch House, Market Harborough, 2pm to 5pm**

**October 16<sup>th</sup> – Scottish Torch Fellowship Groups Thanksgiving, Glasgow**

**November 11<sup>th</sup> – Northern Ireland Torch Fellowship Groups Thanksgiving, Lisburn**

**December 13<sup>th</sup> – Carol Service, Torch House**

**For more details of any of these events,  
please call Torch House.**

## **Stay in touch**

**We love to hear from you. We're on  
FACEBOOK and TWITTER. Or you can  
phone us on 01858 438260 or email us at  
INFO@TORCHTRUST.ORG**

## **Reflections**

**Don't forget you can listen to Torch's  
weekly radio show Reflections in  
different ways:**

## **RNIB Connect**

**Sunday mornings just after the 9 a.m.  
news – at rnibconnect.org or  
Freeview 730**

# **Premier Christian Radio**

**Sunday afternoons at 4 p.m. –  
PREMIERRADIO.ORG or FREEVIEW 725. And  
with Premier’s listen-again facility, you  
can hear a show for up to a month after  
broadcast. Go to TORCHTRUST.ORG/RADIO  
for the link to the show of your choice.**

## **SoundCloud and iTunes**

**Just search for Reflections from Torch  
Trust for the monthly podcast.**

## **Omnibus CD**

**If you have sight loss you can sign up  
for our free monthly CD.**

# **Information**

## **Here to help you**

**Client Services: 01858 438260**

**Library: 01858 438266**

**Holidays: 01273 832282**

**Prayer Line: 01858 438277**

**Reflections: For responses to our radio broadcasts: 0333 123 1255. Go to [www.torchtrust.org/reflections](http://www.torchtrust.org/reflections) for details of how to listen to REFLECTIONS.**

**TORCH NEWS Is available in audio CD, braille, email, standard print and large print (17-, 20-, 25- and 30-point) and can be viewed on the Torch website.**

# **Torch Trust**

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

# **The Torch Trust for the Blind**

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