Finding my new beginning

‘I did not realise that in rejecting close contact with people, I was also rejecting close contact with God, for it is through them that God’s love and concern is shown to us.’

Three years ago, Claire Horrix, at the age of 88, lost the central vision in both of her eyes – a massive shock. Some years previously Claire had had to deal with the loss of most of the vision in her right eye and half of the vision in her left eye. She described the day that happened as follows: ‘On this special Friday I woke to find my eyes full of blood. I took myself to my optician who immediately sent me to hospital. It seems wet macular disease had affected both my eyes. As it was Friday I would have to wait until Monday to see a specialist.’ Claire was later told that the damage to her vision would be considerable. Laser treatment was suggested but sadly wasn’t available on the NHS. Claire had to make the heart-breaking decision that she could not afford it. ‘One can still see enough with half an eye’s vision to get by,’ she explained, ‘I did register with Social Services and had a wonderful helpmate who arranged things so I could cope – such as help with magnifiers, lighting, and she even got me on a braille course. Of course I “cheated” because I had enough sight left to read the dots! It was then, lo and behold, that Torch appeared.’

Two of Claire’s friends had been on a Torch holiday and had also met up with a Torch Fellowship Group. Claire asked if she could visit Torch’s headquarters in Market Harborough, happily less than half an hour away from her home in Kettering. ‘I was just amazed by the wonder of it all and the great welcome you gave us. I joined the Northampton Fellowship Group – they came with their minibus right out to Kettering to collect a few of us.’ Claire made friends at the group and even started a new Fellowship Group in Kettering with a friend. ‘I became devoted to God’s cause. But then three years ago my left eye was once again full of blood one day and I lost the last bit of my central vision. Now I could see outlines of objects but no detail. I could not see to read or write, which meant I had lost my main means of contact with other people.’

Other issues began to trouble Claire as well, such as preparing meals for herself: ‘I ate some strange things! So I decided to move to sheltered housing where I could obtain meals – oh boy the food is good now!’
Claire's new flat was modern and comfortable, and she felt well looked after. ‘But what a shock to be moved from home and friends to a flat I cannot see. All my books, writings, family treasures – and worst of all my friends – left behind me. For a year I was in deep shock. I was surrounded by other residents in the flats, friendly staff and even a merry band of carers but I could not see any of them – it was just a mass of outlines coming and going – at least I didn’t bump into those outlines but I could not see their faces. Instead of being grateful for enough peripheral sight to guide myself out of trouble I just sulked in my room.’

Claire continued to explain: ‘I did have plenty to occupy me in my room however.’ Claire means the CDs and USBs of books and national papers supplied by the RNIB, as well as the support she receives from Torch: ‘Torch keeps me well supplied with news, library CDs and I even have my visitors from Torch, one of whom took me out – I don’t get out much – by train to Nottingham and again to the grounds of the university where I was a student in the 1940s. I was indeed grateful. My flat is in fact just down the road from Torch headquarters – praise the Lord – and I do need them just as I did when the disease first attacked my eyes.’

Claire describes her struggle to have a relationship with God during this time, ‘I felt really cut off from God even though attending church. What I did not realise was that in rejecting close contact with people, I was also rejecting close contact with God, for it is through them that God’s love and concern is shown to us.’

Claire also joined the local Torch Fellowship Group in Market Harborough. ‘I had bewildering results to begin with and then great triumph in the end – which I suppose is my new beginning. I was first informed that the group was in two parts – a knitting group and a group that met in a café. It wasn’t until a year later that I discovered two other parts of the group – a book study group and a walk and talk group which just answered my needs! In the book group we get a CD to listen to over a month and to discuss at the next meeting. In the walking group a route over country lanes was marked out. We were partnered if we needed help and covered some 2 or 3 miles – even more for the brave. We always ended at a café or pub for refreshments – my main reasons for going!’

Meeting with the other blind people in these groups was an interesting experience for Claire: ‘They had been blind all their lives and what a humbling experience that was for me. Some of them had grown up with Torch throughout their lives. They were confident, outgoing and enjoying their lives – as well as being absolutely confident in their faith in our Lord.’ Claire says it was difficult at first to integrate as a newcomer. ‘It is hard to make your presence known – they can’t see me and unless I make a noise of some sort they don’t know where I am. But their kindness to me really sank through to my soul. They arranged for me to be picked up and brought to meetings or walks. I began to feel part of their fellowship, sharing in their love and friendship and feeling a return for myself to our Lord’s presence.’

Last year Claire enjoyed another new experience – modelling for a photoshoot with Torch! She features on the print versions of our Journeying book and new brochure, ‘I never expected to be a model – not at my age!’

Gordon Temple, Torch’s CEO, shares his memories of meeting with Claire for the first time:

I well remember Claire’s first visit to Torch House. After a tour to see all that was on offer from Torch she came to my desk and wagged her finger at me: ‘Why wasn’t I told?’ I listened to her story then. She had started to lose her sight two or three years earlier. She had been a Methodist lay preacher but with her deteriorating sight had felt she just had to give it up. Perhaps if she had known of the accessible Christian resources Torch had then she could have continued.

This encounter challenged me and has remained with me. We want to see Christian people with sight loss living fulfilling lives, being able to serve their churches as well as be served – and as Claire discovered we have much to offer in support of this vision. But, for it to work, we need to get the message out and reach people earlier. Maybe as a reader of Torch News you can make a connection that will bring help and encouragement to someone in your church. Please be alert to those who face challenges with their sight and link them with Torch.

Torch News

‘Finding a lifeline’ continued from front page
Each year Torch prayerfully adopts a Bible text and an overarching theme that engenders a sense of purpose to our activities. For 2017 there’s an emphasis on togetherness as we build for the future …

‘From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.’
Ephesians 4:16

Everything in this verse flows from one source: our Lord Jesus Christ. It is from him that growth comes, from him that the body ‘builds itself up in love’.

We enter the second year of Torch’s current 5-year Strategic Plan which runs, significantly, to 2020! Resulting from an exercise in discerning God’s guidance, it is our blueprint for building Torch Trust’s future ministry. It bears the title ‘Committed to Community’.

Our verse comes from a passage that likens the Christian community to a body. A body has many parts. And in this ‘whole’ body, each one has a part to play, and every link (‘ligament’) is vital. In this togetherness there is both strength and resilience.

In 2017 we are aiming to make our various activities and services better joined up so that for each person we serve we are always able to answer the questions ‘what else?’ and ‘what next?’ People live life stories in which their needs change and this is even more true for someone in the process of losing their sight. This is beautifully illustrated by Claire’s story on the front page of this Torch News.

Building, in the physical sense, requires many trades to cooperate, contribute their skills and coordinate their activities. Without this togetherness the progress is slow and the quality poor. If we are to build Torch’s work well and strong then we need to do it together: staff and volunteers, churches and agencies, prayer partners and supporters and, of course, the people with sight loss that we are here to serve.

If you want to know more about Torch and where it is headed then do request a copy of our new leaflet Torch in focus, available in print, large print, braille and audio or download from the Torch website, in the ‘Downloads’ section.

www.torchtrust.org
J uly 2000 saw the commencement of the braille production unit in Malawi. Since then braille Bible volumes have been produced in nine different African languages. It is always so encouraging to receive letters from those who have been blessed through reading God’s Word. The following are extracts from six letters we have recently received.

‘I am thanking Torch Trust for the Bibles I have been receiving and they have changed my spiritual life. I am now a born-again because of Torch’s Bibles.’

‘I write this letter praising and worshipping God for what you have done for me Madam Janet and the whole Torch Trust. The Bibles are doing me good and I am able to know the Word and teach other people.’

‘Since I started using braille books, I have grown in spirit and, as a blind pastor, am able to manage a church in Malawi. The Word has made me to reach out to sighted and blind people and they are able to receive Jesus Christ through me who uses the braille Bible. When I am in stress, I go to my braille Bible and read the word of God and through that I become relieved or comforted, unlike telling someone to read to me using a print Bible. I am extremely happy with the braille Bibles and this is my tool for serving God.’

‘As a blind man, I am very happy to serve the Lord in my capacity as a Church elder using the Bibles in braille that I receive from Torch Trust. I received Jesus through braille literature and now am in the fore-front helping others receive Jesus through braille. Had it been that Torch Trust was not producing braille Bibles, it would be so difficult for me to carry out my church duties.’

‘I am pleased to have been blessed by Torch Trust for the Blind since its introduction in Malawi. I, my family and the entire fellowship group I attend have benefited a lot spiritually. For instance, we are able to participate in Church activities through reading or preaching using braille Bibles. I was elected a church elder in my church. I honour God for that. All in all my family’s spiritual life has greatly improved as we all fear God and have faith in the Lord.’

Isn’t this wonderful.

May you be encouraged, whether you pray or give, to know God is transforming the lives of blind people as they read the braille Bible volumes going out from Torch House in Malawi.

Torch produces braille bibles in Malawi in nine African languages and Easy English. If you would like to support our Braille Bibles for Africa fund, £4 covers the cost of a single Bible volume; £50 pays for a complete braille New Testament (14 volumes).
With thankfulness

Torch CEO Gordon Temple says ‘Thank you’ for your support

In the last Torch News I explained how the growth of the newer aspects of Torch’s work – our TorchTalk telephone friendship groups, for example - is adding to Torch’s costs and doing so at a time when our income has been drifting downwards. I also wrote to many of those who support Torch in prayer and through donations before Christmas and in that letter I explained more about our financial challenges and our desire to mobilise a chorus of prayer.

We have been hugely encouraged by the many gifts made over the last few weeks and moved by the supportive letters that have often accompanied them. God has heard our prayers and yours. Through your generosity God has provided in a way that has enormously helped us cope with the short term situation. We are thankful to you as Torch’s supporters and to God.

Some have reviewed and increased their regular giving (by standing order or direct debit). This helps with the longer-term challenge. With no reserves in hand we are still vulnerable. But for the faith we have in God that he will provide as we do his will, we would need to be cutting rather than planning for growth of our activities. Leading Torch is often about navigating the tension between faith and prudence. We have serious obligations, such as those to staff and suppliers, yet we need to be faithful in following God’s leading. Please pray for the longer-term stability and sustainability of Torch, for clarity in understanding God’s direction, and for God’s timely provision for the growth areas of our work.

Introducing the NIV Bible accessible edition

Catherine McKinley from Biblica Europe writes about the accessible Bible that Torch has helped to create...

For people with disabilities, life can present a variety of challenges – and engaging with the Bible is no exception.

Most Bibles use a small font, are laid out in columns, with a confusing layout and referencing, and are printed on thin paper with no illustrations. Often the translation used requires a relatively high level of literacy. For many of us, reading the Bible may be a simple, daily activity. But for millions of individuals with sight loss, learning disabilities or lower levels of literacy – accessing God’s Word can be a struggle.

Biblica’s Becky Miles shares how the Accessible Bible project came about: ‘The Bible plays a central role in discovering and deepening our relationship with God, so it should be accessible for everyone. But three years ago, when attending a conference – I discovered this was not the case and I knew that we as an organisation needed to do something to address that need.’

Working with three key partners - Prospects (part of the Livability group), The Torch Trust and Urban Saints - Biblica set out to develop and produce a Bible designed to overcome many of these barriers.

Features of this unique edition include:
• Shorter sentences and simpler language
• A specially designed (16pt) font
• More white space
• Single column setting
• Simpler navigation
• Accompanying ebook and audio versions

Becky says: ‘This is a chance for the Church to demonstrate that God’s message is for everyone. It is about the Church actively reaching out to those with disabilities. At Biblica, we believe God uses His Word to give people the opportunity to be transformed by Christ. So, it is our hope and prayer that through this project, many lives will be transformed.’

Torch Trust are delighted to be partnering with Biblica on this project that will benefit people with sight loss. The full New Testament will be published and available in May 2017. You can purchase copies of Matthew’s Gospel and find out more at www.bibliaeurope.com You can also pre-order copies of the New Testament by emailing accessiblebible@biblica.com
A publishing first for Torch

In January 2017 Torch offered blind and partially sighted people the opportunity to read Premier Christianity in a choice of accessible formats: audio, braille and large print.

A year ago Torch introduced a monthly audio edition of Premier Christianity, the UK’s leading non-denominational Christian magazine. The entire content (omitting advertising) is now included, with a play time of three and half hours. Very quickly over 200 people had chosen to have this magazine from Torch every month.

Torch has established a supportive working relationship with the editorial team at Premier Christian Media, the publishers of Premier Christianity. Due to practical reasons, the large print and braille editions are restricted to two volumes. To this end, reviews, adverts, panels and the letters page are removed from the magazine. If further shortening proves necessary, Premier offer guidance on one or two articles to be removed with a view to maintaining the overall editorial balance. Sam Hailes, assistant editor at Premier, commented, ‘We’re delighted that Torch Trust have taken on the important task of making Premier Christianity magazine accessible to the whole Church. ‘We’re so pleased to now have the magazine available in large print, braille and audio formats.’

The opportunity has been created by a prolonged commitment by Torch to develop automated transcription systems for braille and large print. Now that these are in routine use at Torch House, new publishing approaches become possible.

These accessible editions are the realisation of a long-held dream: to offer Christian reading to people with sight loss on an equivalent basis to sighted people, widening access to Christian thought and comment. Hitherto the prevailing model for magazine reading in the world of blind and partially sighted people has been that of ‘digests’. These are selections made – usually by sighted people who can read the print magazines – to suit a particular audience interest. Now our blind and partially sighted readers can choose their own reading from the entire magazine, just as sighted readers do.

As we adopt this new approach we have embarked upon a rationalisation of our magazine line-up. EN Lite – our selection from the Evangelicals Now - comes to an end. Torch Times, our digest of Christian reading, will end after the current edition. This has a largely international audience which strongly overlaps with the readership of The Torch magazine. As our international house magazine, from which the Torch Trust got its name, The Torch will receive special attention. It is the ‘glue’ that links the international Torch family together. We plan a whole new editorial approach to this unique international Christian publication that is to be developed over the coming year. The magazine will also now be longer.

Reading for All, the magazine that keeps us in touch with blind and partially sighted readers across the UK, will also take on a new format with the aim of helping our readers make informed reading choices. Christian Today Digest continues as it is. The editorial staff behind the Christian Today news website already select and provide the content for this magazine ready for transcription and production.

Our client services team are always ready to offer guidance on the accessible reading choices available from Torch, so do contact them on 01858 438260 or info@torchtrust.org
Torch Holiday & Retreat Centre is just entering a new and exciting year of holidays and breaks! There are plenty of great opportunities for people to enjoy our holidays this year with new themed weeks as well as plenty of time to come and relax at our beautiful centre.

One of our new holidays is the Disability Sports Week running from the 22nd to the 26th May, which will be a fun-filled week of exploring sports for people with sight loss. From the 17th to the 21st of July we will also be celebrating our new World Food Week which is going to be a great opportunity to explore food and activities from cultures around the world. Another great new holiday we are running in the latter half of 2017 is the Hurstpierpoint Festival Week which runs from the 25th to the 29th of September. This is an opportunity to attend plenty of the events happening during our village Festival including events by musicians, poets, writers, artists and more.

As well as these great new holidays, we will be running some of our regular favourites such as the Easter Blessings and Spring into Life holidays in April, Summer Moments holiday in June, and the Work of Heart Creative Week in October.

An incredibly important part of our yearly programme are the Moving Forward breaks which are short residential breaks for people who are new to sight loss or are experiencing a change in their sight. These breaks give time for people to be equipped, encouraged and supported during this challenging time of change.

As well as all of these fantastic holidays, Torch HRC will be host to plenty of great church and charity events such as Alpha days, Freedom in Christ courses, PCC away days and leadership and trustee retreats.

If you know of anyone who would benefit from these fantastic and varied holidays or would be interested in hiring the Centre for a group booking please contact Torch Holiday & Retreat Centre on 01273 832282 or on holidays@torchtrust.org

Please see our new Facebook page www.facebook.com/torchhrc for regular updates on what is happening at Torch HRC.

A perfect location for conferences, away days and more

Did you know that Torch Holiday and Retreat Centre is also available for group bookings? It can be booked for day or evening events, and for residential stays. The Centre is available for exclusive and non-exclusive bookings. Up to 60 people can be accommodated for day bookings and 28 for overnight. For more information please visit torchcentre.org or call 01273 832282.
Welcome to Torch

We are very pleased to welcome two new members of staff to Torch. Julia Hyde has joined us as Chief Development Officer and will be taking on responsibility for the leadership and development of all our Presence activities across the UK. Julia has previously worked as the head teacher of a Catholic Primary School.

Rev Jonathan Edwards is already well-known to Torch. Since stepping down from the role of General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, Jonathan has taken a great interest in Christian ministry with disabled people, becoming involved with the Churches for All network. Jonathan is now taking on the new role of Special Advisor to Torch Trust, advising leadership and trustees over the development of Torch relationships with local churches and church networks.

Torch in Focus

That’s the name of our new brochure which features all you need to know about the services offered by Torch. The brochure is available in standard print, large print, braille and audio. Perhaps you know someone who would like a copy? Contact Client Services to request free copies now.

Torch Scripture calendars still available

There’s still time to get hold of a Torch Scripture calendar for 2017, available in braille and large print. They cost just £2.50 and feature a Bible verse for every day. Just contact Client Services to buy yours today.

Volunteer with Torch

We are currently looking for people to become part of our gardening and maintenance team to make Torch House, in Market Harborough, Leicestershire, a safe and inviting place for people to work in and to visit. This requires a minimum commitment of about half a day a week, depending on the time of year. If you think this might be the role for you then please contact Suzanne at volunteers@torchtrust.org

Dates for your diary

Torch’s Annual Day of Prayer will take place on Wednesday 7th June. We hope that you can join us wherever you are in praying for Torch.

Our Annual Thanksgiving Celebration will be taking place at our Holiday and Retreat Centre in West Sussex on Saturday 16th September this year. Come along and find out more about our work, celebrate with us at our afternoon service, and enjoy some delicious refreshments!

Keep in touch

You can stay up to date with Torch information by following us on Facebook and Twitter – all you need to do is search for ‘Torch Trust’. We love receiving your comments and questions – and you can also contact us by ringing 01858 438260 or emailing info@torchtrust.org