Albinism in Africa – a call to prayer

Janet Stafford, who recently spent a month in Malawi, where Torch has a base, shares her experiences meeting with people with albinism there and the issues they face...

Albinism, a congenital disorder where people lack pigment in their skin, hair and eyes (which causes vision problems), affects about one in every 20,000 people. It is more common, however, in sub-Saharan Africa. There are an estimated 10,000 people with albinism in Malawi – a country of 16.5 million people.

Over the past two years, at least 65 people with albinism have been attacked in Malawi. Some in southern and eastern Africa believe that body parts belonging to people with albinism have magical powers, leading to them allegedly being sold on a black market run by criminal gangs across southern and central African countries.

During my recent time in Malawi, it really struck me how much fear they have. I guess you could imagine it, but I could see it on their faces and hear it as they talked. People should not be living like this. It is completely wrong.

Albinos say they did not know who to trust. People with albinism usually do much better if their family can look after or protect them.

A woman, who gave birth to a girl with albinism, has her sister harassing her and asking “Why did you have this baby?” Another man I met had survived an attack but was so traumatised from the event that he can now barely speak.

There are others who say that having children with albinism means they cannot go to the farm because they have to protect them. As a result, they are struggling even more with poverty.

We have the privilege of knowing many of the albino children and young people, as they suffer with partial sight.

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We are able from time to time to supply body cream, sunglasses and hats or caps for them. Albinism does not cause blindness but low vision.

A year ago brothers Alfred and Yohanne, both in their twenties, whom we have helped for a number of years, were attacked in the middle of the night, while they were sleeping, by men who broke into their house. Both were slashed with a cutlass and left with deep trauma and physical wounds. Alfred was badly wounded and his left arm partially severed. The arm was saved but now a year later he is still suffering with little feeling in his arm. I spent time with him a few weeks ago. The arm affected is his writing hand so he is trying to learn to write with his other hand. Such a lovely lad, who loves Jesus. He needs our prayers.

We are planning to get him to hospital, where they may be able to help him, but it is obvious the tendons and nerves have been badly damaged.

We had an overnight prayer and praise time in Malawi for blind people early in April, where 550 blind people gathered together from one area in the southern part of Malawi. A number of albino children came to this and I was interested to see that mothers came with their children as they are afraid to let them go out on their own any more.

Please pray for our albino children and young people who are facing difficult days ahead of them. Thank God for those who have trusted Jesus, and pray that they will know strength and courage.
It is with great honour that I have been granted the privilege of leading Torch for the next year. I know that God has fabulous plans for Torch and by placing me here I can serve him through my work at Torch; for this I am enormously grateful. I will take up this ministry having the Torch Trust values at the very heart of what I do.

Christian – to seek Christ in all things, to ask his wisdom and guidance in planning and decision making, to ask for his grace, mercy and love in managing and leading people, to ask for his humility, love and patience in serving all those in the Torch community, clients, staff, volunteers, supporters, trustees, friends and partners.

Relational – to have at the heart of what we do the person, or people, whom we are serving. The person at the end of the phone, the members of the Torch group, people receiving our literature; however we are reaching out to people, our focus will be on them and how they experience Torch.

Openness – Torch is welcoming and hospitable, and our focus on building relationships with people is part of this. So too is our ability to build fruitful partnerships and relationships so that we can extend our reach to more people. I have already experienced in my first year here the consistently supportive and open nature of the Torch family, the willingness to answer questions and the openness to new ideas and trying things out.

Creative – I have already seen a real sense of creativity in so many ways here at Torch. The way that our telephone support services have developed and continue to be developed are a good example of having creative solutions to support our clients. We are constantly seeking to do better and at this time of transition from one CEO to another it gives us great opportunity to work together to do this.

I do of course have huge shoes to fill. Well I mean Gordon is a good 2 feet taller than me!

I have been so fortunate to have had the best of introductions to this role, as I have had the privilege of working so closely with Gordon over the last year. Gordon has been my mentor, boss, colleague and I’m glad to say friend, and as I take up the role of Acting CEO it will be with enormous respect and admiration for Gordon, for all he has done to move Torch forward and for the amazing example of our values that he has set every day.

As you can imagine I have had a lot of opportunity to pray and seek God’s guidance relating to the role of Acting CEO at Torch Trust. I have been blessed by Matthew’s gospel revealing Jesus’ words and in particular when Jesus said “But first seek his Kingdom” – or the hymn I know as Seek ye first the Kingdom of God. I hold this as real instruction and guidance for my new role, that before all else, I seek him and through that I know that God will bless my work. Finally I just want to be very open myself in expressing my personal excitement for this new chapter, for me, for Torch, for you and for us together.
Sight Loss Friendly Church is ready for you

If you received the last edition of Torch News, you’ll know about our new project: Sight Loss Friendly Church. It’s an initiative designed to help churches all over to become more aware of how they can support people with sight loss to fully participate in church life, using their personal God-given gifts.

We’re pleased to announce that our Sight Loss Friendly Church website is now up and running, ready to start supporting your church today!

Just go online at torchtrust.org/slfc and you’ll be able to explore ideas for getting your church started, plenty of resources with ideas that your church or group could use to get people thinking about the importance of accessibility and simple changes that can be made. This map will contain details of every Sight Loss Friendly Church across the nation and will be a great resource to help people find a church that fits them. Most importantly, our website is where to find our sign-up form; this is what you need to fill out to register as a Sight Loss Friendly Church.

Once registered you’ll get access to further resources, telephone support from Torch and special training sessions. You’ll also be added to our map as an official SLFC. We believe this project is vital to assist people who may otherwise be feeling that church is simply not somewhere they can go – perhaps due to lack of accessible materials, lack of communication or just not feeling sure who to talk to about their needs. So please help us change this situation and show this article and our site to your church leadership group and ask if they will agree to become a Sight Loss Friendly Church.

A huge THANK YOU!

Torch Trust would not exist without our wonderful volunteers. It’s a simple fact and one that’s true of many charities across the world. Volunteers are the people who keep us all going, who tirelessly give their time, turn up and pitch in! Torch has volunteers who work in a wide range of areas at Torch and we want to start shining a light on the different ways in which our volunteers support us.

In this edition we’d like to give thanks for our production volunteers. They’re the people who, when we’re sending out a magazine or publication (including the one you’re reading right now!), do all of the physical work of packing, sorting and addressing. Everything we do is published in multiple formats, all of which need to be put together and mailed out in the right way.

Taking Torch News as an example, we have nearly 5000 print copies, about 300 braille copies, over 1000 audio copies, and almost 500 large print copies all coming through our busy production department! It takes roughly seven people working for two days to get through all of this work! So as you read your copy today, please spare a moment to give a prayer of thanks for those wonderful people who have made sure it has reached you!
Another Godly moment

Torch Chief Operating Officer Rev Michael Heaney reflects on the latest Trustee Annual General Meeting...

As Chief Operating Officer one of my responsibilities is the oversight of the day to day finances, and so God always has my attention in that regard. In recent weeks I shared with the staff and trustee team particular challenges which appeared to be ahead of us in respect of our cash position. So we needed to respond, and we do that here at Torch by praying. Our daily Chapel Time began each morning in a concert of prayer seeking God and amazingly, day by day, there came signs of encouragement. Each day was another Godly Moment. Of the many encouragements we heard was from a supporter who wrote “I can’t claim to be close to the Lord these days but I felt I very clearly heard his voice today that Torch was in need” – another Godly Moment.

We will always treat our supporters’ and clients’ precious gifts of support as Godly Moments, and your prayers along with ours bring us such encouragement. We have total confidence in our God and look forward to so many more Godly Moments!

The Annual Report and Accounts to 30 September 2017 are available from Torch’s website or on request from Torch House.

GM’s are essential for charities; they’re a time to reflect on the year gone by and a formal setting in which to agree and adopt the report and accounts of the previous financial year. In many ways this is a formality, you certainly cannot change what has happened previously, although it is important to ensure it is correctly reported and appropriately checked. And so in early May the Torch board of trustees met to hold their AGM and adopted the Annual Report and Accounts for year ending 30 September 2017. It was, as you would expect, a clean audit, following an independent examination, and affirmed Torch as a ‘going concern’.

But for all who gathered it was so much more than that. It was testimony to another year of God’s faithful provision, guidance and graciousness. It affirmed so many lives of people with sight loss being enriched, enabled and encouraged in their Christian life. It was a precious time; it was in the life of Torch another Godly Moment!

Our financial provision is always a matter of faith for Torch, yes it’s vital we account for matters appropriately and comply with Charity Commission and other regulatory requirements, but first and foremost we acknowledge in faith that God is good!

Did you know about Torch’s very own radio programme? It’s called Reflections and it focuses on faith and disability in today’s world. Upcoming shows include features about American ministry Clearer Vision, an update on Blind Tennis, and an exploration of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity.

And that’s not all. For RNIB Connect listeners, we have some exciting news: we plan to start airing a longer thirty minute show each Sunday, that’s twice the length of the current broadcast and means we’ll be able to fit in lots more praise, fellowship and fascinating people stories. We’re hoping that this will be ready later this year so stay tuned. If you’re a Premier listener, don’t worry: our usual 15 minute show will continue to be available every Sunday at 4 pm.

In another piece of exciting news, our podcast, which has previously been available as a monthly omnibus, will now be available to download every week! You can listen to it online on SoundCloud, iTunes and on our website. Just search for Reflections from Torch Trust. It’s also available as a monthly CD to people registered, or eligible to be registered, as blind or partially sighted. To sign up for this freebie from Torch just call 01858 438260.

www.torchtrust.org
It’s not too late for a holiday!

It’s the middle of summer and you may well have holidays on your mind! Well if you haven’t booked one yet, it’s not too late to do so with our range of bespoke holidays at the Torch Holiday and Retreat Centre in rural West Sussex.

The centre is tailored to the needs of people with sight loss and has a team of warm and welcoming staff who are trained in supporting and enabling our guests to get the most out of their break. And we have holidays to suit every taste!

Fancy enjoying the fabulous Hurst Festival? Then why not come to our festival holiday, taking place during this brilliant local festival (from 24th to 28th September) with events from musicians, poets, writers, artists and more. More of an arts and crafts fan? Come to our Creative Arts and Crafts Week, from 15th to 19th October, which will give you the opportunity to try your hand at pottery, painting, mosaics and more! And a bit further ahead on the calendar, we have our wonderfully techy Gadget Week, from 19th to 23rd November. This holiday is designed to help people with sight loss explore and access a wide variety of handy gadgets and technology. All of our holidays also give you the opportunity to take time to think about spiritual wellbeing and welfare as well as being refreshed physically and mentally. The centre welcomes blind and partially sighted people of all faiths and none; it is a place of peace, prayer, personal retreat and renewal. You are also very welcome to bring friends and family with you, whether or not they themselves have sight loss.

Each holiday is inclusive of all meals and activities – you just pay once! All of our bedrooms are en suite and decorated to a high standard. The centre features a beautiful 100 year old chapel and is nestled at the base of Wolstonbury Hill in the South Downs National Park. To book a holiday or find out more, give us a call on 01858 438260. You can also find our list of holidays online at torchtrust.org/holidays.

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Goodbye and thank you Gordon!

‘Torch exists to serve God among people with sight loss, and in each and every person we detect the imprint of the image of God. Grand job titles and status mean nothing against this universal and incontrovertible truth: that in every person, however broken they are – and we all are, there is God’s image.

Each and every one of us is loved by him and valued more than words can ever say… Every way in which we have helped someone move one millimetre closer to Jesus, who is in the centre of all that is Torch, that has been our joy and our privilege’… with these words, Dr Gordon Temple closed a truly wondrous chapter of his life, at a farewell event held at Torch’s Holiday and Retreat Centre. These words are nothing if not typical of Gordon: stirring, thought-provoking, and radiating God’s love.

For sixteen years Gordon has served tirelessly as Torch’s CEO, following on from his earlier involvement with Torch in its days at Hallaton. Gordon has taken Torch from strength to strength in that time; expanding its reach, updating its approach, but most importantly ensuring its focus has always been squarely on serving people with sight loss and sharing the love of God.

The event at Torch HRC was the perfect opportunity to celebrate this work, and the work of Gordon’s wife Pat, whose involvement with Torch stretches back even further. Pat has been for many years now a faithful volunteer, a friendly face to Torch visitors, and someone who will truly pitch in wherever a need arises.

The legacy of Gordon was best summed up in the warm, effusive words of the event’s speakers. These included Julia Hyde, the recently appointed Acting CEO, to whom Gordon passes the baton of Torch. Julia spoke of the wide-ranging gifts of her colleague, mentor and friend: ‘Gordon has a gift for drawing people in, for connecting at every level from the CEOs of big organisations to the individual client. This is in part due to his immense intelligence, his vast knowledge and experience, and his ability to see beyond. His ideas and imagination to create a new vision. However, this isn’t what has made Gordon so successful. This is down to his enormous capacity for empathy and kindness. This is what makes him special.’

Finally, Chief Operating Officer Reverend Michael Heaney’s closing speech expressed the gratitude felt by many for the legacy Gordon has built in Torch: ‘You brought to me an example of faithful discipleship which was real – that drew me in, that I wanted to be associated with and a part of. I came into an environment which had Christ confidently at its heart within a culture created, sustained and nurtured by you, yes it’s Christ’s Kingdom and we are a small part of it, but it takes people to build and maintain an earthly environment within which His Spirit can reign and rule – and you have done that Gordon.’

A word from Marilyn Baker, Torch’s Chair of Trustees...

It has been such a privilege working alongside Gordon, and despite the many changes we have seen over the years, both he and Pat have done so much towards helping us keep that very special sense of family we all experience in Torch. Gordon has broadened our vision so that now we have new resources and opportunities to reach out to even more people. He has been a real inspiration to us. Gordon will be continuing to work tirelessly amongst people with sight loss, and we will look forward to hearing about some of his new adventures in the future. We pray the next part of his and Pat’s journey, though different, will be greatly blessed and our prayers and love go with them both.
In Your Pocket

Torch is pleased to announce our collaboration with In Your Pocket – a mobile device designed for people with sight loss. In Your Pocket, created by RNIB, Real Thing and O2, aims to make accessing talking books and newspapers easy, and soon Torch's library will be available on it too!

In Your Pocket functions as a speech-enabled smart phone and can 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. 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, or order online at inyourpocket.net.

An audible call for help!

We would like to say a huge thank you to all those who responded to our call for more audio editing, recording and proofreading volunteers! It’s great to have you on board. However, our journey isn’t over yet as we need even more audio volunteers. If you love books and have an interest in audiobook narration or editing then this could be the opportunity for you!

All of the work can be done from home or at our headquarters in Market Harborough, Leicestershire. To learn more and apply please visit torchtrust.org/smartweb/volunteer-roles or call 01858 438260.

Annual Day of Thanksgiving

This year Torch’s Annual Day of Thanksgiving will be held at Torch House, Leicestershire on Saturday 15th September from 2pm to 5pm. More details to follow in our autumn edition!

Welcome back

We often welcome new staff members in Torch News, but this edition is a bit unusual: we’re welcoming back two members of staff who have re-joined our team. Grace Davis returns to Torch as our Information Services Coordinator, and Aga Siewniak re-joins the hospitality team at the Holiday and Retreat Centre. We’re thrilled to have them both back with us!