



## Sight Loss Friendly Church and me: Rev Christopher Brown's experience



Reverend Christopher Brown recently became pastor at Market Harborough Baptist Church – one of the earliest members of Sight Loss Friendly Church. Here he talks about his experience of coming to a church with a rich heritage of sight loss friendliness and how they still strive to do more...

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There has certainly been a steep learning curve in this process, which Rev Christopher is very keen to emphasise: 'Coming into a church where there's already been a lot of work to make it sight loss friendly was a real eye opener, especially for my preaching. Up until coming to Harborough Baptist I would probably use quite a lot of visual components, whether that's through PowerPoint or physical props or whatever else. So the real learning curve there for me was to be really mindful of the fact that we have folks in the quite broad spectrum of sight loss. Trying to make sure that I'm not always saying "Look at this, look at that" but actually being very much more descriptive in my preaching. It's been wonderful because

you enter into somebody else's experience and that can only benefit you as a person.'

Rev Christopher has implemented one small change in particular: 'The simplest thing of just reading out the hymn number and what it is in the braille or the large print makes a difference. When I don't do that, it excludes quite a number of people but when I *do* do that everyone's included, everyone's on the same page and we can all sing or whatever it is we're doing together. And I'm very aware of it now, to the point where if I have forgotten, I will stop and say "Oh yep, the number is this!" Little things can make a huge difference.'

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When asked what the most important part of the learning process had been, the Reverend replied: 'I think the biggest thing is listening to people, not assuming anything about anyone. I think that's the same for any disability or any challenge that someone may have, we must listen, we must try to understand, and to do everything we can to ensure that they are included. I think one of the most important things about a Christian community who have Christ at their centre, is that everyone is able to participate, contribute and take part. We showed the Torch video in church and, it's not surprising coming from yourselves, but the brilliant thing was that it was led by people with sight loss. To hear their voices, to hear their perspectives. I think in the past it's been common to just assume and think: "Oh we know what we need to do", but actually we need to listen. It's something that means that people feel heard and valued. The changes that we then can make are very specific and very helpful.'

Reverend Christopher also acknowledged the fact that inclusion and accessibility needs don't just apply to people with sight loss: 'To be an inclusive church when it comes to all areas and types of disability is something that should be fundamental to who we are as followers of Jesus. Jesus was incredibly inclusive, especially with those folks who struggled in society or were in some way rejected or on the peripheries.'

'As a community of Christ, it's fundamental that we are inclusive. It's not just sight loss: it's hearing loss, it's physical ability, it's the mental health spectrum, it's special needs,

it's across the board. I think we as a church have a long way to go. The good thing is that people like Torch are helping make people aware of these areas where we can improve and that it's an ongoing thing, it's not: "oh well, we've done that, tick the box". It's actually something where you go so far, then you review. Hopefully it's an ongoing dialogue: all the time aiming to improve.'

'In terms of outward-looking mission, we as a Christian community must absolutely make it clear that we are inclusive, that we are doing things and providing ways in which everyone participates. Every single person has spiritual gifts and is called by God to contribute and to participate, so when you can help enable that to happen, that's a wonderful, wonderful thing.'

'I think one of the biggest mistakes is to make assumptions about any part of our society. Grouping people together by one common denominator reduces people and narrows who they are. In terms of myth-busting, especially with sight loss, sometimes people think that it's just people who are completely blind. But it's much more than that: yes there are people who are totally blind and each individual will have their needs, but there are also folks who are beginning to lose their sight, so as a community it's about journeying with them through that. It can be a very scary time, filled with fear and anxiety. Beginning to lose a key sense can have a tremendous impact on a person's confidence. If they're a part of a community that is aware, that is sensitive,



**We are here to serve the local church. We invite people to sign up as soon as they have an intention to be inclusive and are able to visit our website. Once that stage is complete, they will be on the map and we will journey with them, with resources, workshops, advice – whatever is needed!**

Paul Rhodes, SLFC Manager



that already has a collective communal wisdom and support framework, then that is a tremendous help. To be able to bring people together and to share communal wisdom, and draw alongside people, is a tremendous display of the Gospel and the love of Christ.'

'I think the second thing is to not wait until someone comes through the front door with a guide dog and then react. Even if you have no one currently within





# Being included brings meaning and pleasure: Joan's story

Joan attends Rev Christopher's church and she shares how their approach has supported her...



your community who has sight loss (and they may already be there!) that's not a reason not to start. If you can put things in place, if you can start to be a community who is inclusive, then that is attractive for people who are not yet a part of it. If they see what you're about and there's a way in which they can be included, where the barriers are removed, then that's a wonderful thing. Absolutely sign up for Sight Loss Friendly Church, go to the Torch Trust website, look at the video, look at the resources and get involved. Don't wait for someone to come, because they might come and find no provision and end up leaving. I think it's heartbreaking as a Christian community whenever that happens, regardless of who it is.'

'So start the journey now. And it's a wonderful journey, it will be a challenge, there's no question. But the best things in life are always those things that are a challenge. Those things shape us and form us: we have to go deeper into the Gospel, deeper into Christ for understanding, but the fruit and the blessing is tremendous.'

**A**lthough I attended church when I was younger, for a number of years life's journey took me away from it.

I've enjoyed a good life, a happy marriage and together we raised our lovely son. Thirteen years ago, sadly my husband passed away. My life was no longer as I knew it. I became very low and lonely.

A good friend invited me often to her church. She never gave up, despite my reluctance to agree. One day however, she invited me and I just felt there was something different behind the invite. I felt compelled to go. I have not looked back from that day. I was welcomed into church and my life has got so much better. I started to volunteer for a Christian counselling organisation as a welcome and support worker and I especially enjoyed reading in church and I also host a home group.

A few years later I was diagnosed with a degenerative eye condition and my sight is now quite poor. Although I wear glasses, most people would have no idea how poor my sight is. I am determined not to let this stop me, never wishing to return to that low place.

My church has been brilliant, producing hymns and my Bible readings in large print, they are so inclusive and I don't know where I would be now without them being so sight loss friendly. My vision is difficult, but being able to read the Bible at the front of church, and being included in the service continues to bring meaning and pleasure to my life.



## GET INVOLVED



To start your journey with Sight Loss Friendly Church, visit [sightlossfriendlychurch.org.uk](https://sightlossfriendlychurch.org.uk) and begin using our specially developed resources to help your community offer the most inclusive welcome it can! If you've already signed up, make sure you book one of our fantastic workshops featuring practical guidance, tailored to your community, and take your next steps into sight loss friendliness together.

# A letter from our Chairperson, Marilyn Baker

'As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.' Joshua 1:5b.



**T**his wonderful promise was given to Joshua when he was facing a very big change in his life. His beloved mentor Moses had died. Would God work just as powerfully through him as He had through Moses?

God reassured him: 'As I was with Moses, so I will be with you.' He doesn't have favourites and wants to work through all His children. He was with Israel in this new season and is with us in Torch too.

This year we celebrated 60 years of the Lord's amazing work through Torch and we now need to lean on Him as we move into a new phase of partnering in His work.

Sight Loss Friendly Church is our key initiative where we long to see people with sight loss more connected than ever before to their local spiritual communities; truly becoming part of church life, valued, and using their gifts to enrich the body of Christ. Please pray for us that Torch can make strong relationships with churches, so they too can catch this vision.

Our Holiday and Retreat Centre will close at the end of December, and we thank God with all our hearts for the wonderful work that has been done there, and for the many lives changed. So many people have found faith and restoration in their lives and discovered the joy of belonging and acceptance. We

are actively seeking a new way forward for HRC. We pray that God's purpose for HRC will be fulfilled. We don't know what this will look like yet, so please pray that God will show us His perfect plans. Pray for the remaining holidays this year, including the Christmas and pre-Christmas holidays, that they will be full of joy, and for our wonderful staff and volunteers who have served us so faithfully that God will guide them into the new works He has for them and will look after their every need.

Thinking of Christmas, I am excited to share that I've just released a new Christmas album: Hallelujah Christmas, jazzing up some traditional carols and adding some of my own. Here are some words from my song Rescue Plan to give you an idea:



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**Hallelujah, Hallelujah, we can find this love again;**

**Hallelujah, Hallelujah, finding God as Father and Friend.**

**And He's here today with His arms outstretched**

**He can fill you with His love.**

**Open up your hearts to this mighty power from above.**

”





Drink in the hope of the Christmas story, knowing that Jesus loves us so much that He left Heaven's glory to be with us in all our struggles and frailty. He knows what it is to be poor and He willingly carries our sorrows and shame. Through Him we can truly know not just that God will be with us in our own lives but will guide and bless the work of Torch too.

The Lord has promised to lead us as we continually seek Him, and we so much value your love and prayers at this time. We look forward to seeing you in future fellowship events we will arrange, so do watch this space for news and keep in touch.

May you know the joy and peace of Emmanuel, God with us, this Christmas, Marilyn.

## A great break in Glenada

Earlier this year, the Northern Ireland Torch Groups went to the Glenada Holiday and Conference Centre in Newcastle, County Down, for their weekend away. The centre is in a lovely coastal location with sea views at the front and the spectacular Mourne Mountains at the back. One of the things that make the weekend special for all who attend is the inclusive family atmosphere, where everyone receives a warm welcome. People with sight loss are involved in planning for the weekend and also lead most of the worship sessions. Those attending look forward to the preaching, as well as making new friendships. Torch provides programmes in braille and large print so that everyone can follow the Bible readings and join in with the singing.

In 2020 we are looking forward to bringing 'Torch Together' in different locations around the UK. We are delighted to be working alongside existing Torch groups to welcome Torch friends old and new to come together for friendship, worship and fun. Each gathering will include optional workshops 'New to Sight Loss, Sight Loss Friendly Church, and Torch Update'.



Hosted and led by Torch, we appreciate and understand your sight loss journey.

Come along and spend time with us, with each other and most importantly with God!

### Torch Together...

**Mon 27th Apr – Fri 1st May 2020**  
Scarborough

**Mon 22nd Jun – Fri 26th Jun 2020**  
Dorset

**Mon 7th Sept – Fri 11th Sept 2020**  
Staffordshire

**Fri 18th Sept – Sun 20th Sept 2020**  
Northern Ireland

**Friday 11th – Monday 14th Dec 2020**  
Launde Abbey, Leicestershire

If you are interested in joining a Torch Together event please ring Client Services for more details.



# Books to read and awards received



Julia Hyde and David Shepherd, flanking Janet Wilson and her award.

Torch was pleased to attend the annual CRT product awards this year at the Retailers and Suppliers Retreat. These awards acknowledge the best in Christian publishing as voted by the Christian retail and supply trade.

**T**his year, for the first time, a Torch-sponsored Accessibility and Inclusion award was presented by our very own CEO, Julia Hyde. The very worthy recipient was Janet Wilson of Dernier Publishing, which publishes a small range of fictional books for young teens. Janet has enabled Torch to make all of Dernier's books available in accessible media and has recorded the audio for most of them herself. She has worked with a person with sight loss to make

her books available commercially and has promoted the accessible versions in her newsletter and on her website.

## Read the winners

This year at Torch we have worked very hard in partnership with CRT to make sure that we will have all of the winning and shortlisted books available for purchase in braille, large print (font sizes 17pt, 20pt, 25pt and 30pt) and on DAISY

CD. Please call Client Services on **01858 438260** for more details or to place an order. Read on to learn a bit more about some of our favourites.

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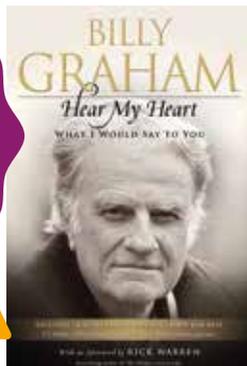
## At the heart of Torch are two things that motivate me – Jamie's Story

We are very pleased to introduce Jamie Dormandy as the newest member of our board of Trustees. Read on to learn more about what called him to Torch...

At the heart of Torch are two things that motivate me to get out of bed each morning and try to make a difference to the world. Firstly, sharing and enjoying the richness of Christian life, and secondly building a world that works for everyone. I love the way that Torch's mission contributes to both of these and our staff and volunteers achieve it with grace and creativity. After five years of managing services at RNIB, I thought getting involved at Torch as a Trustee might be a useful way to serve.

In serving people with sight loss, listening is key! Everyone is different and has different needs and experiences. There's a lot of support out there but it's not always straightforward to access and it can be helpful for someone to navigate you through it. But as well

**WINNER OF BIOGRAPHY BOOK OF THE YEAR**

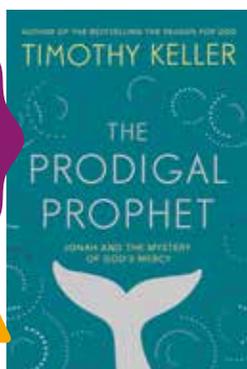


## Hear My Heart: What I Would Say to You

By Billy Graham. Authentic Media. 9171, £9.99. Millions around the world have heard Billy Graham's evangelistic messages. Now hear his heart. Billy Graham has gone home. He preached to more people in live audiences than anyone else in history. But his lifelong message, his passion for the gospel, and his compassion for people still echo in *Hear My Heart*.

These are Billy's final words to us all, as if we were sitting with him on the front porch of his mountain cabin having a cup of coffee. This is his legacy: the personal exhortations he left our generation and the next as the most-needed reminders for our time.

**WINNER OF BIBLICAL STUDIES BOOK OF THE YEAR**



## The Prodigal Prophet: Jonah and the Mystery of God's Mercy

By Timothy Keller. Hodder and Stoughton Ltd. 9162, £12.99. Most people, even those who are nonreligious, are familiar with the book of Jonah: a rebellious prophet defies God and is

swallowed by a whale. Less familiar to most people is the second half of this Biblical story – what happens after Jonah is released from the belly of the fish. Yet it is in this second half of the story that one of the most powerful and important lessons of the Bible is hidden.

The famous story shows how, if we would understand the mercy of God, it will always take us in directions we would rather not go, toward people we would rather not care about, and ultimately into the deepest counsels of God. In a time of growing division, *The Prodigal Prophet* shows us God's love among people, and how Christians must listen to God's call even when it takes them to uncomfortable places.

**WINNER OF BOOK OF THE YEAR**



## Journey With Me: 365 Daily Devotions

By Catherine Campbell. Inter-Varsity Press. 9172, £12.99. Catherine Campbell invites you to journey with her through the year as she shares 365 Bible meditations that have touched her heart and changed her life.

## DON'T FORGET

We have over 1,000 other accessible books for you to buy – whether for yourself, your church, groups, or as gifts – and these are all listed on our online resources catalogue at [torchtrust.org](http://torchtrust.org). If you need any assistance, our Client Services team are always ready to help you find what you want.



as the help provided by charities and public services, I'd also recommend taking some time out to consider how you might respond to a time of change. Christian faith and community can help through any significant change as we anchor ourselves in the truth of God's love and it might be a time you rely on those closest to you.

It is also a time when lots of people may start giving advice and telling you what to do – sometimes without understanding what you are feeling or thinking! Your perspective on everything that's going on matters hugely and being able to articulate it to those around you, including friends and family, can help you to organise your life going forward. This can take time, and speaking to others who have travelled a similar path, or have lived with sight loss for some time can really help practically and enable people to gain new perspectives on what they are going through too.



## The year in Malawi

2019 heralded dramatic news from our brothers and sisters in Malawi. Throughout the year they suffered rains and flooding so severe that lives were lost, homes destroyed, bridges and roads washed away.

The faithful and sacrificial giving by Torch supporters, and Torch's own missional giving, enabled nearly £20,000 to be sent to those in severe need. These gifts provided essential food and practical support. The latest report from Torch Malawi as the year ends, sends news of a well-attended conference in Nyakamba, several fellowship meetings and the continuing distribution of braille Bibles and white canes, meeting a strong need.

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May we be encouraged to keep Torch Malawi in our prayers and, through faithful service and generous giving, see lives touched and transformed.  
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# 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.

## How your gift is changing lives:

**£6** covers the cost of a USB stick and packaging used for our audio library books.

**£60** enables Torch to provide accessible Bible reading notes to someone with sight loss for a year.

**£600** is the cost of our monthly supply of braille paper used for braille copies of accessible Christian literature.

## 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](http://cafdonate.cafonline.org/1187)

### Donate by phone

Call Client Services on 01858 438260 between 10.00am and 4.00pm 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, a form will be sent out to you to complete and return.

### Leave a legacy and transform lives

Torch Trust has been able to help thousands of people with sight loss in their journey of faith, due to those who write Torch into their wills. After providing for your family and friends, leaving a bequest to Torch can transform other people's lives.

## A warm welcome to...

### Rev Marcus Bennet

is married with two children. Marcus lives with dyslexia, he has served in Church ministry for over 20 years. He is a confident teacher and evangelist and he has been privileged to walk with many on their journey of faith. He joins the SLFC team to focus on the North of England.



### Mandy Blow joins Torch as Relationship Manager.

Mandy is married with two children. She has experience for many years as a bank manager, senior manager with Citizens Advice, set up and runs church youth groups and has helped lead Messy Church for 7 years. Mandy joins Torch Trust to focus on sustainability and financial support for the ministry.



## Torch Scripture Calendar – a great gift!

We are once again selling our popular giant print and braille scripture calendar.

Available for just £4.50, the calendars are printed in A4 size. Every day features a different piece of scripture. The calendars are great for inspiring daily prayers or Bible readings and discussions and would be a lovely Christmas gift. To buy yours just contact Client Services.



# TORCH

**Torch Trust** Torch House, Torch Way,  
Market Harborough, Leicestershire LE16 9HL

 01858 438260

 [facebook.com/torchtrust](https://www.facebook.com/torchtrust)

 [info@torchtrust.org](mailto:info@torchtrust.org)

 @torchtrust

 [torchtrust.org](http://torchtrust.org)

**Chair:** Marilyn Baker **Chief Executive:** Julia Hyde

### 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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## USEFUL INFORMATION



**Client Services**  
01858 438260



**Prayer Line**  
01858 438277

**Sight Loss Friendly Church**  
[sightlossfriendlychurch.org.uk](http://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](http://torchtrust.org/reflections)

### TORCH NEWS

is also available in audio CD, braille, email and large print (17-, 20-, 25- and 30-point) and can be viewed online at:  
[torchtrust.org/downloads](http://torchtrust.org/downloads)