



Celebrating 30 years with the Milton Keynes Group



This year, we were thrilled to find out that the Milton Keynes Torch fellowship group was celebrating its 30th birthday – what an achievement! As one of our longest running groups, we wanted to learn more about what kept them going strong so we chatted with Sue Richards who is married to John, the original group founder...

We asked Sue what had inspired John to start the group and she said: “Well, John had spoken to Torch founders Ron and Stella Heath about Torch Groups and felt that God was calling him to do this. John is blind himself, so he and a couple of friends got the group going. I was really only involved as a last minute volunteer driver once when they were short. Somehow that has now turned into me leading the group!”

Sadly John’s health has meant that he’s no longer able to attend the group himself, but his influence still shines through. Sue explains that

the aim of the group was always to be a friendly, welcoming place where anybody could be comfortable: “People say it’s like being part of a family. We have a Christian message every month: we have worship songs, a time of prayer, a Bible reading, and of course a delicious tea. We go on outings, we have a Christmas lunch, we’ve been on holidays in the past. And we try to do all that we can to make people feel loved and welcomed. Not everybody that comes is a Christian, and that’s fine. We just hope that they hear the gospel and that they are strengthened and encouraged.”

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Sue and John's own story has been going ten years longer than their group's: "John and I met through a mutual friend. We just sort of clicked really, he said he liked that I was so relaxed about his visual impairment – I sort of joked around while other people tended to treat him very carefully. We shared a strong faith and a strong sense of humour and that was that."



Sue and John

It hasn't all been smooth sailing for John and Sue: "My parents were worried when we got together, I think they wondered if his sight loss would be a problem. On top of that, 15 months after we married I had a serious accident and almost died, we later also found out we couldn't have children together. But we got on with life."

"John was very able then, he was a social worker and had a guide dog. He'd had to fight against people who didn't believe he could be a social worker, people who said a blind man could never do that job. But he proved them all wrong. So we got on with things: we adopted children from Romania, we've been on all sorts of holidays, he's been abseiling, he drove a car at Silverstone for his 50th birthday. He absolutely loved it – but I think the driving instructor was a bit terrified, really! So, we've tried to do the best we can and work around what he can't do. It's harder now because he is quite disabled, but we've done some wonderful things."

John and Sue clearly bring their love for life and determination to their group: "I think it all works because we talk to people, we don't just give them a cup of tea and then leave them. We're very much involved with their families, we want to know what's going on. We check if they have any prayer needs, if they miss a service we record it on a USB stick and send it to them. We send birthday cards out to everybody and we just get to know them. It's not perfect and we'd like to do more but I like the fact that people do think it's friendly and welcoming, and that they can talk to each other."

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PRAYER POINTS



- Give thanks for John and Sue and all their work and dedication over the years.
- Pray for more people to hear God's call to start a fellowship group in their local area.
- Give thanks for the people across the UK who give up their time to make groups possible.

A fond farewell

This December, our CEO Tim Jeffery will be moving on from his time at Torch...



“**W**hat! You're leaving already? You've only been with Torch for three years!” That's a sentiment that has been expressed to me regularly over the last few weeks. My response is something like “What! I've been here three years? How did that happen? It was only supposed to be a short-term assignment!”

Somewhat to my surprise I find myself turning 60 at the end of 2023 and towards the back end of my career – how time flies! Over the years I seem to have developed a speciality in helping Christian charities go through significant and often difficult changes. I've done this as a CEO and as a consultant and

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that's how I first came in to help Torch. Three months as a consultant became a year as an interim CEO – which will soon be three years.

And what an amazing time it has been! I have been so blessed by becoming part of the Torch team, meeting and working with so many fantastic people. I have learnt much, particularly from the many wonderful blind and partially sighted people it has been my privilege to meet.

Together we have been able to make some much-needed changes and breathe fresh life and focus into this wonderful ministry. Some of the things that stand out for me include the sending out of over 1,000 Pathway audio Bibles so that people can meet Jesus through Scripture either for the first time or after a period when sight loss has made that impossible. Joining with Compass Braille and being able to produce braille Bibles and send them out across the world will be the icing on the cake!

Over and above everything is the renewed sense of harmony in the Torch community, having Jesus at the centre and the clarity of what Torch is called to be and do in the coming years. That's the kind of legacy I'm so thankful to be leaving.

So, if it's all so wonderful, why am I leaving? Very simply it's because, just as I sensed God call me into this, I now sense Him calling me on. Running an organisation is very consuming and I feel a strong sense of God calling me into a time of greater stillness where I have more time and 'head-space' to focus on Him. I will miss the daily interactions with people, doing something that is so worthwhile, but I suspect I'll find myself coming back as a volunteer and staying in touch with such a wonderful group of people.

PRAYER POINTS



- Give thanks for Tim's time with us, all his achievements and his unerring passion for the ministry.
- Pray for Tim as he heads to pastures new, continuing his journey with the Lord.
- Pray for the trustees as they seek to appoint the right person to take up the mantle.



Getting together at Torch House

Suzie James reports on our Central Regional Day event which took place this June...



Just two days after the Day of Prayer we were delighted to welcome guests to our Central Regional Day. This was the first time we'd held an event exactly like this one and we were very excited to welcome friends new and old to Torch House. Over fifty people gathered together on the day.

A large contingent travelled from Milton Keynes Fellowship Group (turn back to the start of this



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issue of Torch News for their story) and Sue, their leader, was able to share a bit about the group which recently celebrated its 30th anniversary. Sue said: "Being at Torch House today has been absolutely fantastic. I have been here before but not for several years so it's changed quite a bit – but I always love it. I'm blown away by the scale of it all: the way it's all moved with the times. It's great how computers are used now to do the printing and everything. And today we've been made so welcome, the worship time we had this morning was absolutely phenomenal. It's really great to be here and we're all thoroughly enjoying it."

We were pleased to welcome some former staff members and their families, as well as friends of Torch from as far away as Norfolk!

The visitors enjoyed tours of Torch House including demonstrations of a braille reader by trustee Sheila Armstrong, smart speakers by Tom Burditt (our Technical Support Officer), and the Pathway audio Bible players in the Client Services area. Our team of staff and volunteers worked very hard to make this joyful event happen and we're extremely grateful for all their efforts. Let us give thanks for the extended Torch family and this chance to gather together to encourage one another.

PRAYER POINTS



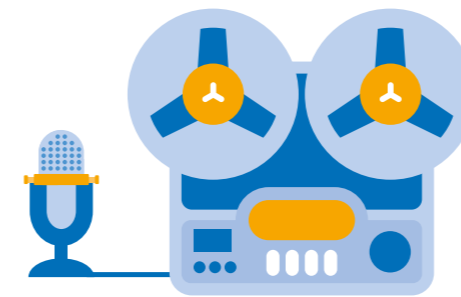
- Give thanks that the Central Regional Day was a success.
- Give thanks for everyone who was involved in planning and running the event.
- Pray that we will be able to hold more regional events across the UK in the future.

A lifetime touched by Torch

It's truly wonderful that Torch has been, and continues to be, blessed with many dedicated staff and volunteers over the years. Many, once their hearts have been touched by our mission, return to the work over and over in a multitude of ways. Alan Vogt is one such person and we're pleased to share his testimony below...



It all started with Wally Temple (former CEO Gordon's father) coming as a patient to my dental practice in South London. I happened to mention that I'd been doing some recording for a blind friend. Wally suggested I contact Torch to volunteer to record books for their library. Over the next 20 years, I recorded 50 books on my reel to reel tape recorder.



Over the years, I was invited to speak at several Torch Fellowship group meetings. Sometimes I took with me a shepherd's crook which I could pass around; something tangible to feel while I spoke about the Good Shepherd. I also spoke about the life of Fanny Crosby, the blind hymn writer. She wrote many hymns, including "Blessed Assurance" and "To God be the glory". I encouraged people to realise how God can use us however and whoever we may be.

At one of the annual Torch meetings, Mr and Mrs Heath mentioned the need for volunteers to help at Torch House Hallaton. My wife Mary and I independently felt this was the Lord's call to us. I had recently retired and was looking for opportunities for Christian service. We thoroughly enjoyed the fellowship at Torch and were kept busy with painting and decorating, helping in the tape library and doing some recording. Also, I had the privilege to give the Bible ministry at one of the annual Torch staff weekends. Hallaton was rather cut off in the countryside, so the move to Market Harborough made Torch more accessible and the purpose built premises are very attractive.

We moved home to Cranleigh in 1999 and were pleased to find the Torch house parties only 40 minutes' drive away at Hurstpierpoint. We enjoyed many times of fellowship, helping blind folk at meal times and on walks together. I also wrote for Torch's audio thought for the week, Journey, for many years.

Over the years, it has been thrilling to see how the work of

Torch has spread. The Lord called Mary home over a year ago. So I am learning to live alone with great support from church and family. I am so grateful to the Lord for so many blessed opportunities for service in Torch.

Partner in Prayer

Alan has recently begun supporting Torch in a new way, as a Partner in Prayer. This initiative is for anyone who wants to be informed about what is happening behind the scenes and to be praying into specific areas of the ministry. Updates are available via email or audio CD. To become a Partner please email info@torchtrust.org or call on **01858 438260**.



A jolly holiday!

Becky Davies shares all about this year's Torch holiday adventures...



In June we enjoyed another gloriously sunny five days at the Greenhouse Christian Centre in Poole. After visiting for the first time last year, we were again blown away by the welcome and hospitality we received from the staff and volunteers at the Centre. Everyone was struck by how helpful and accommodating they were and one of the guests summed it up perfectly:

'We were looked after so well, and made to feel so welcome, it was an amazing few days.'
Rosemary Mawson

We enjoyed listening to Tim Jeffery lead our morning devotions on the theme of Encountering Jesus. Our prayer time was also very popular with many guests and volunteers joining together in prayer at the start of each day.

The trip to Bournemouth included relaxing in the gardens while listening to a brass band and exploring the pier and promenade. On the free day guests enjoyed visits to Poole, a boat trip around Poole harbour and a walk around Compton Acres gardens.

Our visit to Durley Chine beach included the highlight of seeing Bunty the guide dog enjoy her first paddle in the sea. Paulette, one of the holiday guests, wrote:

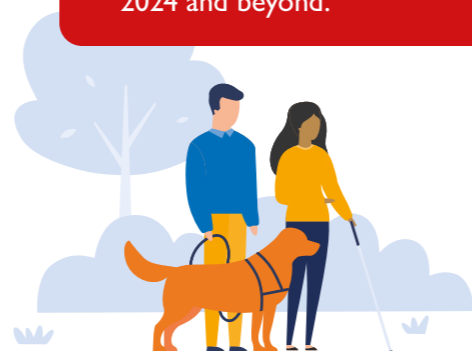
'The holiday was better than I anticipated. All the helpers were friendly and consistently willing to ensure that the right assistance was given when necessary. Bunty and I were both made to feel part of the group.'

As another guest commented, it was the people who made the holiday so special. Everyone got on so well and God's presence among us shone through the week. Thank you to everyone who makes Torch Together holidays possible.

PRAYER POINTS



- Give thanks for everyone involved in the organisation and running of Torch Together holidays.
- Pray for Torch to be able to offer even more holidays in 2024 and beyond.



Prayer for Compass Braille



This Autumn, Compass Braille will be merging with Torch, which will include their machinery moving to Torch House. We're honoured to take up the mantle of Compass Braille's work, continuing this amazing project enabling blind and partially sighted people worldwide to experience reading the Bible in a format and language which is accessible for them. Please pray for the merger and a smooth transition period.

An update from Sight Loss Friendly Church



We are so happy to be able to say that we now have 400 churches in our Sight Loss Friendly Church network.

Churches who have joined the network can access a wide variety of resources including practical guiding tips, training videos and best practice guidelines via our website. On top of this, Linn Davies and Matthew Horspool continue to host our *Insights* podcast answering questions people may have about sight loss and how best to support churchgoers who are blind or partially sighted, for example 'how can all-age worship be made accessible?'

A client who attends an SLFC spoke of how included he feels within the life of the church. He said the attention and thoughtfulness given to ensuring he has the accessible format he needs for the service, and for the small groups he both attends and ministers within, makes him feel very cared for. He said 'all bases are covered, I'm not left floundering with the feeling I can't get involved'. As we know this is still not everyone's experience within church, so this important work of helping churches become more sight loss friendly continues. We want to enable more and more churches across the UK to welcome, support and include people with sight loss.

One way that your church can get involved is by joining in with Sight Loss Sunday, an annual event which this year will be on Sunday 15th October.

We have a wealth of resources available online to help your church put together a Sunday service which is truly inclusive and highlights the gifting that people with sight loss in your church community have. To explore our resources and start planning your Sight Loss Sunday just visit torchtrust.org/sight-loss-friendly-church and don't forget, you can hold your own Sight Loss Sunday service on any Sunday that suits your church. If you do get involved, we'd love to hear what you're doing so send us a message via email or phone, or online using the hashtag **#SightLossSunday2023**

PRAYER POINTS



- Pray for even more churches across the UK to become Sight Loss Friendly Churches.
- Give thanks for everyone who is involved in making any church more sight loss friendly.
- Pray for Sight Loss Sunday to inspire many church leaders to reassess how sight loss friendly their church is.



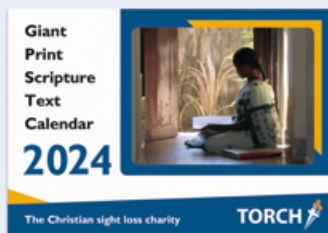
Torch Thanksgiving 2023 – Thursday September 21st

Torch's Thanksgiving Day is a special annual event held at Torch House when, centred around an act of worship, we are able to showcase another year of Torch's ministry. This year we're hoping that many people will be able to visit us at Torch House to renew friendships and make new ones. Staff will be on hand from all departments to share their latest work and ministries. A Thanksgiving Service will take place at 2pm. This will also be broadcast on Zoom and YouTube, for those unable to attend in person.

Those coming to Torch House are also invited to bring a bring and share lunch so we can eat together at 1pm. Light refreshments will also be available after the service. Please contact Client Services for the Zoom details. To access via YouTube go onto our 'Torch Trust on Video' channel.

Torch Calendars for sale

We are once again producing our popular large print and braille Scripture calendars for 2024. Available for just £5, 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. Available soon from Client Services.



Christmas Carol Service

We would love to ask you to save the date for our annual carol service. The service will take place at Torch House on Thursday 14th December at 2pm. The service is open to all and will also be livestreamed on Zoom and YouTube. Please contact Client Services for the Zoom information. To access via YouTube go onto our 'Torch Trust on Video' channel.



Christmas Cards that assist our ministry

Once again this year we shall benefit from the sale of Christmas cards produced by Gospel Cards, etc. 5% of their Christmas card sales will be given to 16 Christian missions including Torch Trust.



The cards are produced to a very high standard and are perfect for sending to Christian and non-Christian family and friends. Full details are on their website: **GospelCardsEtc.com**, or you can ask them for a catalogue by calling **01656 647551** (Monday to Thursday, 10:00am to 1:00pm), or write to: GOSPEL CARDS, 15 Brackla Street Centre, Bridgend, CF31 1DD.



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Torch Trust on Video

Chair: Dr Mike Townsend

CEO: Tim Jeffery

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.

The Torch Trust for the Blind. A company limited by Guarantee
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USEFUL INFORMATION

Client Services
01858 438260

Prayer Line
01858 438277

Donations

Please send donations through to our bank account
The Torch Trust for the Blind
SORT CODE: 40-52-40
Account Number: 00017072

Sight Loss Friendly Church

torchtrust.org/sight-loss-friendly-church

Reflections

For more information or to hear the show visit:
torchtrust.org/radio

Torch News

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