

Introducing Sight Loss Sunday, September 21



from TORCH TRUST

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This document offers some background information relating to the Sunday, things you can do to observe it, and information about how you can continue to think about people with sight loss beyond Sight Loss Sunday.



Sight Loss Sunday

Equipping churches to enable blind and partially sighted people to contribute to church life.



Introducing Sight Loss Sunday

Thank you for your interest in Sight Loss Sunday. By observing this event in your church's calendar, you are making a tangible statement in recognition of the valuable part that people with sight loss can play in your congregation and community.

This document offers some background information relating to the Sunday, things you can do to observe it, and information about how you can continue to think about people with sight loss beyond Sight Loss Sunday.

Key Facts

Sight Loss Sunday takes place on 17 October 2021, and we hope that it will become an annual event.

The theme for 2021: Is Seeing Believing?

The following readings are offered:

- Old Testament: 2 Kings 6:8-22
- Psalm: 40
- New Testament (Epistle): 1 Corinthians 12:4-11
- Gospel: Mark 10:46-52

A package of resources related to the readings is available via:

www.sightlossfriendlychurch.org.uk/slsunday or by

contacting Torch Trust: 01858 438260 or info@torchtrust.org

Background Information

What is Sight Loss Sunday?

Sight Loss Sunday is a new initiative from Torch Trust. It has two main purposes:

- To raise awareness of the prevalence of sight loss in church and local community.
- To encourage Christians to nurture the unique gifts, talents and abilities that people with sight loss can bring to church life.

At Torch, we believe that all people with sight loss have a valuable part to play in churches and Christian communities, and Sight Loss Sunday is designed to equip you to live out these values in your own congregation.

Why 17 October?

Since 2000, the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness has designated the second Thursday in October as "World Sight Day". In 2021, this falls on 14 October and the theme is #LoveYourEyes. The purpose is to campaign for the eradication of preventable blindness, particularly in developing countries. In developed countries, the day is often used to raise awareness of issues facing people with sight loss.

In addition, since 1964, the United States has observed "White Cane Safety Day" annually on 15 October, and this has more recently been adopted as "International White Cane Safety Day" by the World Blind Union and other stakeholders. The purpose is to raise awareness of the importance of the white cane for people with





sight loss and, in 2021, it falls the day after World Sight Day.

Since 2013, Sight Scotland (formerly Royal Blind) has observed National Braille Week in the week of World Sight Day, in order to raise awareness of the continued value and significance of the braille reading and writing system.

With so much media attention on sight loss in the secular world in the week leading up to 17 October, we thought this was a particularly appropriate day in which to promote a Christian response to sight loss. You could use Sight Loss Sunday as an opportunity to reflect upon how secular messages about sight loss relate to Christianity, or as a starting point for greater inclusion and involvement of people with sight loss in church life.

Who are Torch Trust?

Founded in 1959 and based in purpose-built premises in Market Harborough, Leicestershire, Torch Trust offers Christian products and services to improve the lives of people with sight loss.

We offer Bibles, hymn books, devotionals, Bible reading notes, magazines, periodicals, theology books, study guides, biographies, autobiographies and Christian fiction in a range of accessible formats including braille, large print and audio. Our publications are available to purchase for no more than the recommended retail price of the print edition, or to borrow free of charge through a postal lending library.

We offer a range of bespoke Christian holidays for people with sight loss in carefully selected locations throughout the UK as part of our "Torch Together" programme, and support "Torch Fellowship Groups", many of which meet on a monthly basis in local churches or online.

Our "Sight Loss Friendly Church" initiative offers training, support and advice to churches of all denominations who wish to be more inclusive of people with sight loss – more details later – and we produce a variety of audio and video content in-house related to sight loss and Christianity,

most notably our "Reflections" radio programme which airs on a Sunday morning on RNIB Connect Radio.

There is no one with sight loss in the congregation – can we still observe Sight Loss Sunday?

Yes – Sight Loss Sunday is for all churches, irrespective of whether or not there are people with sight loss in the congregation.

However, as RNIB estimates that approximately 20% of any given community will experience sight loss in their lifetimes, it is extremely likely that at least one person in your church will have sight loss, although it may only be mild and the person may not have made you aware of it.

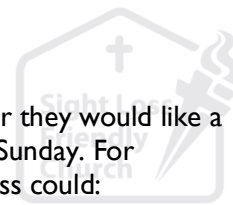
We would encourage you to use Sight Loss Sunday as an opportunity to think about how your church would respond if someone with sight loss came to visit or started to attend regularly. See the "Raise Awareness of Sight Loss" section below for some ideas of how to do this.

Things You Can Do

Raise awareness of sight loss

"Sight Loss" is an all-encompassing term used to describe people whose vision is impaired and cannot be corrected through the use of spectacles or contact lenses. In the most extreme cases, this refers to people who are completely blind and require any or all of a long cane, guide dog, braille and audio material. However, it also refers to people who are losing their sight gradually, or who only have a mild visual impairment and can read print which has been enlarged (or, in the case of tunnel vision, made smaller). People do not need to register as "Sight Impaired" or "Severely Sight Impaired/Blind" in order for the term to apply to them and, indeed, as the biggest cause of sight loss is ageing, many people may have sight loss but do not realise it or identify with the term.





Many people with sight loss are able to adapt over time, often with the help of specialist support. Others may require more support from the community.

We have created a video which demonstrates this and offers real world examples of people with sight loss playing their part in the lives of their local churches. We would encourage you to make use of this during your Sight Loss Sunday service, and/or to encourage your congregation to watch it in their own time afterwards.

We have also produced a reflection from a person with sight loss, and notes to complement this to enable you to prepare a sermon about sight loss in sympathy with the readings.

We are offering some suggested activities for children's groups to introduce them to the idea of sight loss and some of the core adaptations that a person with sight loss might need (e.g. braille and large print).

You are encouraged to use these resources irrespective of whether you believe that a person with sight loss currently worships at your church. It is hoped that this will help you to foster an inclusive attitude towards people with sight loss.

Involve people with sight loss in the planning and leadership of your Sight Loss Sunday service

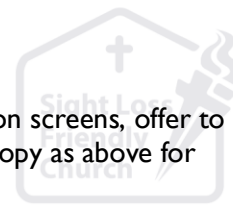
When talking about people with sight loss, it is always best to draw upon the knowledge and experiences of people in the congregation who experience it for themselves – "Nothing about us without us". At the very least, if someone with sight loss regularly worships at your church, you should talk to them about your plans for Sight Loss Sunday and ask for feedback. Some people with sight loss may have their own ideas which they might like to share with you – please listen to them and consider them with an open mind.

If you know or suspect that a person with sight loss may have a story to share or a gift or talent which is not usually employed, be proactive;

approach them and ask whether they would like a role in a service for Sight Loss Sunday. For example, a person with sight loss could:

- Read aloud a passage from the Bible: if you are using the readings set for Sight Loss Sunday, you can order copies in braille or large print in various Bible translations, thus enabling people with sight loss to read where they might otherwise not be able to do so. Please call Torch on 01858 438260 for more information.
- Lead prayers: some suggested prayer points are offered alongside some pre-written prayers to help to facilitate this, and this document is also available in accessible formats from Torch Trust – please call as above.
- Lead music: many people with sight loss have good singing voices and/or can play a musical instrument to a high standard. They could be encouraged to join the church choir or worship band. Alternatively, they could perform a solo song as part of a devotion or in place of one of the regular hymns/songs, or deputise for the choir or worship band for some or all of the service.
- Be interviewed about their experiences of sight loss in your church: you could ask them questions such as how long have you had sight loss, how has your sight loss affected you in daily life, how has sight loss affected your faith, how well does church support you with your sight loss, and what can we do better?
- Preach the sermon: sight loss need not be a barrier to theological understanding, and in some cases may enhance it. If you have had interesting theological conversations with people with sight loss in the past, consider asking them to preach on Sight Loss Sunday. You may find that by doing so you sow the seed for the person pursuing further opportunities to exercise a preaching and teaching ministry in the future.
- Give testimony: people with sight loss can sometimes tell very powerful stories relating to how sight loss has strengthened or deepened their faith. Indeed, some people





with sight loss come to faith as a direct result of losing their sight. These stories may have a profound impact on the entire congregation and Sight Loss Sunday is a fantastic opportunity for them to be told.

- Lead the entire service: some people with sight loss may already lead services regularly. Others who have lost their sight later in life may have led services regularly when they could see and might appreciate the opportunity to do so on Sight Loss Sunday. Still others may be discerning whether they are being called to a leadership ministry in their church, and leading on Sight Loss Sunday may be a valuable part of this process. If your denomination usually requires a licensed or ordained minister to preside at your particular form of service, consider following an alternative form of service which does not have this requirement. For example, Anglican churches may substitute a Service of the Word or a service of morning prayer for a service of Holy Communion.

Make your Sight Loss Sunday service accessible

Even if people with sight loss aren't involved in the service directly, they will still want to participate as a member of the congregation. There are a few things you can do to make this as smooth an experience as possible:

- Designate one or two volunteers as sighted guides, to show people with sight loss to a seat and make them feel comfortable before and after the service.
- If you prepare an order of service and/or notice sheet and the person with sight loss can read large print, enlarge it for them. Remember to ask what size of print they need before doing so, and take account of any other special requirements such as choice of font, bold text or coloured paper. Alternatively, you could offer to send the order of service and/or notice sheet by email.

- If you project information on screens, offer to produce a paper or email copy as above for people with sight loss.
- If you sing from a hymn book, obtain a large print or braille copy. We have made some hymn/worship song suggestions available for download on our website, and information about obtaining braille and large print books is included at the end of that document.
- If your service involves actions such as sitting, standing or coming forward for communion, ask someone to offer to sit alongside people with sight loss and tell them when these actions are taking place.
- If there is a social time or refreshments after the service, ensure people with sight loss are included and introduced to others.

Pray for people with sight loss

As stated above, prayer points and pre-written prayers are available for download. You may freely use these or adapt them to better suit your local circumstances.

We would be grateful if you would remember the work of Torch in your prayers on Sight Loss Sunday. We would also encourage you to refrain from making assumptions when praying for people with sight loss, especially in respect of healing; whilst many people with sight loss yearn for healing, many have come to value their sight loss as a core part of their identity and do not see healing as necessary or even desirable. It is more appropriate to pray that people with sight loss will be treated equally.

Being Sight Loss Friendly After Sight Loss Sunday

In 2019, Torch launched "Sight Loss Friendly Church", an ongoing initiative offering training, advice and support to churches which either have people with sight loss in their congregations, or who wish to welcome and include people with sight loss in the future. Any church can become a Sight Loss Friendly Church – there are no charges



and no minimum standards of support for people with sight loss; we just ask that you make a commitment to improving or upholding accessibility for people with sight loss. We welcome Sight Loss Friendly Churches at all stages, whether you're just starting out or you're including people with sight loss every week.

To sign up, visit

www.sightlossfriendlychurch.org.uk/sign-up

If you'd like more information, we offer free Taster sessions on Zoom lasting approximately 30 minutes. These sessions take place at least twice a month and involve a short presentation about the benefits of becoming a Sight Loss Friendly Church, followed by an opportunity to ask questions. For dates and registration details, visit

www.sightlossfriendlychurch.org.uk/taster

Support Torch

We would not be able to sustain our ministry without the generous prayer, volunteer and financial support of individuals and organisations. With this in mind, we would be immensely grateful for your prayers for the work of Torch during your Sight Loss Sunday service.

If you feel able to make a financial donation to the work of Torch Trust on Sight Loss Sunday, such as by donating the proceeds of your church collection, please make payment via www.sightlossfriendlychurch.org.uk/donate or to the bank account below:

- The Torch Trust for the Blind
- Sort Code: 40-52-40 (CAF Bank)
- Account Number: 00017072

If you would like to make a donation by cheque, please make it payable to "The Torch Trust for the Blind Ltd" and post to: Torch House, Torch Way, Market Harborough, Leicestershire, LE16 9HL.

Finally, if you feel that you are able to offer practical support for the work of Torch, such as by hosting a local Torch Fellowship Group or offering volunteer support in transcription, production, Sight Loss Friendly Church or Torch Together, please call Torch House on 01858 438260 or email info@torchtrust.org and we will be delighted to provide more information.

Send Us Your Stories!

We hope you will find Sight Loss Sunday beneficial. If you intend to observe it, we would be very grateful if you would complete the online form below and allow us to contact you afterwards for your feedback and stories. We will use these to improve and promote Sight Loss Sunday in 2022 and beyond.

The online form can be found here:

<https://forms.gle/oYmzMN6Y6GUHksXYA>

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