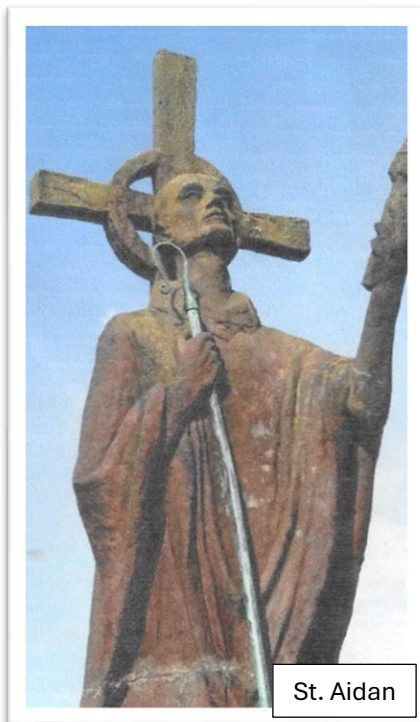




## Religious of the Assumption Community of St. Aidan NEWCASTLE 1993-2024

### *I just went and said 'Hello'*



St. Aidan

Thank you for joining us today for this Mass of Thanksgiving, celebrated by Fr. Jonathan Bowes, in our parish church of St. Anthony of Padua. Like the castaways on Desert Island Discs who share their favourite music, we want to share with you some of the special memories of the past 31 years as we record this history. Memories are also shared by the De La Salle Brothers, who were with us during the years 1988-2018.

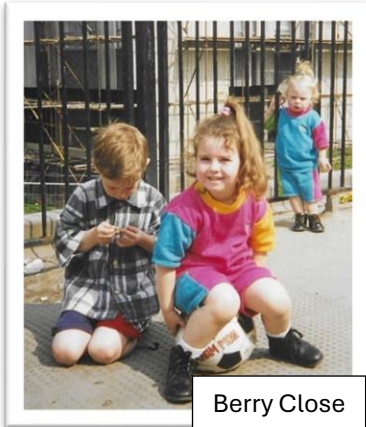
**Welcome.** When, in 1993, the sisters were looking for somewhere to live in Newcastle, a housing officer advised: "We think we understand why you want to come but urge you to find an area where there is a community spirit". So, it had to be Walker didn't it! It was an era of change for Northeast England that impacted heavily on Walker. The last mine had closed

in Ashington and Swan Hunter's last ship was about to be launched, but there was no 'last' to the community spirit which welcomed us.

We rented a maisonette in Berry Close, above the shopping centre. Marc, who was eight and lived next door, told his friends: "I was the first person to meet the sisters. **I just went and said 'Hello'**". A few weeks later, seven-year-old Caroline, helping to carry our shopping up the landing, said: "I love your house." "But Caroline, it's just the same as yours." "No", she answered, "your house is about Jesus." Food for thought.



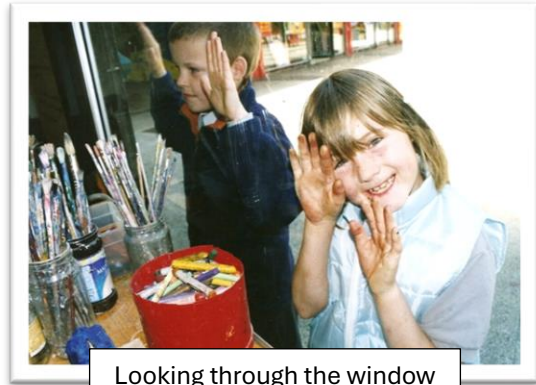
Berry Close



Berry Close

On Hexham Avenue, where we moved in 2000, there was the same neighbourliness, the sharing in celebrating birth and achievement, supporting in bereavement and tragedy – recalling occasions when a knock on the door brought the request for a candle and a cross – living the day to day in laughing, grumbling, helping and just carrying on. A friendly bus driver said: “If you’s gang to live in Walker you’ll need to talk differently.” It might be that we never mastered Geordie, but it doesn’t seem to have mattered very much.

**Taking Shape.** The interest of Marc and Caroline, and their many friends, came with an expectation, gleaned from the film *Sister Act*. Our response to their clamouring was the beginning of Kids Kabin. This led to the widening of our circle, not only to the children’s families but to others whose help and support we needed and received, like that of our local Councillors, the Walker Community Co-ordinator and the brilliant workforce of students and graduates from Newcastle University.



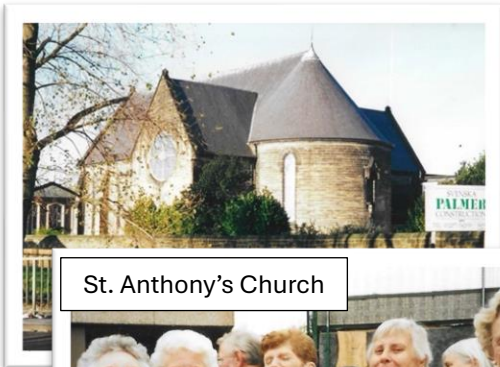
Looking through the window

**Christian Community.** On our first Sunday in Walker, we went to evensong in Walker Parish Church, a first step towards the easy relationships with the other church communities. We recall projects that are ‘better together’: an ecumenical retreat, Good



Church action on poverty

Friday Processions of Witness and Church Action on Poverty. Conscious that we breathed the same air as the Northern saints – Aidan, Cuthbert, Bede – we named our community after St. Aidan and tried, whenever time and tide allowed, to take our visitors to Holy Island.

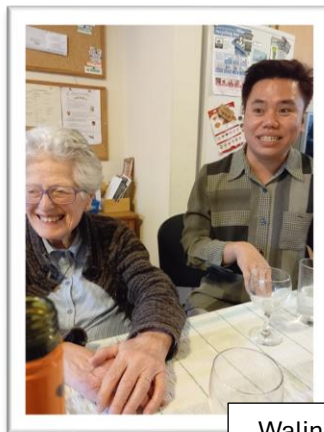


St. Anthony's Church



We have lived through changes for our parish communities. Since the days of the legendary Fr. Conaty, pastoral ministry to our parish now extends to three others. It is awesome to share the journey of faith with others, as we have been privileged to do, in Lent and Advent groups, preparing for the sacraments, in praying together. Craft clubs and partying have not been absent! Our local parishes are now enriched by the ministries of Frs. Jude from Nigeria and JoJo from Kerala, so now we can participate in Mass in the Syro-Malabar rite.

**Walking With.** Our years here have seen the arrival of many asylum seekers from different countries. The agency Walking With, as did Common Ground before it, offers services to help and guide refugees and asylum seekers to integrate, and to feel welcome and safe. Over these years we have been happy to have helped with befriending, advocacy, translating and English lessons and have, as always happens, received much ourselves in the process.



Waling With

**Kids Kabin.** Mention has been made of how Kids Kabin was the response to the clamour of children who needed some creative outlet to their play. It has progressed from a front room to an empty shop to its present home in a purpose-built centre to become a well-managed registered charity under the governance of a board of committed and capable trustees and run by an equally committed and capable team of staff and volunteers, here and in Middlesbrough. All creative and useful activities happen in Kids Kabin. From the first simple slogan "Let's make not break," to the latest, hot from the press describing the *Kids Kabin Way*, states: "It inspires and delivers skills, development, teamwork, social action and happiness."



Kids Kabin



**The Value of Volunteers.** Woven into the fabric has been the presence of the Assumption Volunteers living at first with, and now alongside, the sisters. Most of them come from abroad – Philippines, Nigeria, Russia, Hungary, Gambia, Spain, America – to live in community and give service.

While their activity is mainly in Kids Kabin, they integrate with our neighbours and friends too. During the loneliness of Covid lockdowns, weekly messages of encouragement were dropped through letter boxes along the street. If one week one simply said “smile”, the following week’s message might be: “On this rainy day remember that without the rain there would be no green grass or a rainbow”. What would be next week’s? This internationality is of great value for the area and for Kids Kabin. Nahoko from Japan had difficulty with English, but every child around learned to write their name in Japanese! Several months after she had left a child, looking up from his painting, asked: “And when’s Nahoko coming back, then?”



Volunteers

**Legacies.** Brian, the housing officer in Walker once remarked: “We were pleased when you came, but we never thought that you’d stay”. We have been able to stay for 31 years, thanks to the welcome of Walker. We are pleased to leave Kids Kabin and the Assumption Volunteers with you, a visible legacy, and we will have from you the indelible legacy of all that came after Marc’s **“I just said ‘Hello’”**.

It is not possible to tell of every event here, let alone record every name because there are so, so many – neighbours, friends, colleagues, pastors and parishioners, partners, helpers – everyone who for us leaves this indelible legacy in the memory and the heart. Never were the words “thank you” more sincerely spoken, or the prayer “may God bless you and keep you, may His face shine on you” more fervently prayed.

### **Some Heart Warmers**

“Thank you for being here for us, [...] thank you for your love and sharing [...] your involvement in community activities, for supporting so many residents and families, and those most in need [...]. We wish you the very best in your future projects” – *Lynda Hellens, our neighbour and chairperson of WOR Hoose Community Project*

“The sisters have provided a spiritual as well as a practical presence to the Walker community [...] and a stable and welcoming presence to the volunteers.” – *John Smees, Kids Kabin trustee*

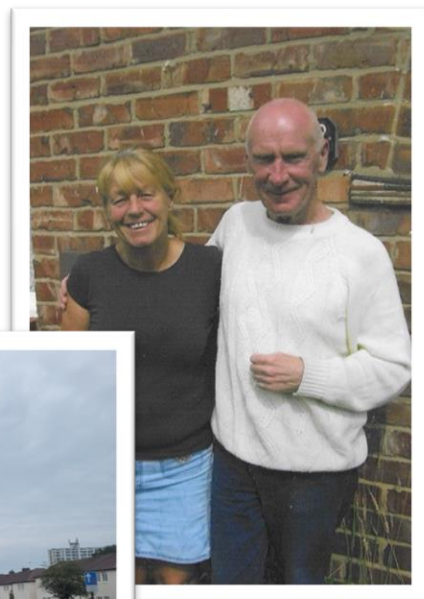
“Me, I’d never nick from the nuns.” – *Marc, aged 10*

“I prefer Kids Kabin to chocolate.” – *Name unrecorded*

**“It had to be Walker, didn’t it!”**



Hexham Avenue



WOR Hoose