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Fostering love for almost 50 years

IT WAS a wonderful moment for long-term foster carers Theresa and Bob Jewitt, their family and parishioners at English Martyrs, Sts Peter and Paul, Stockton, when Fr Mark Millward presented them with a Benemerenti medal from Pope Francis recently.

The couple's remarkable story stretches back to 1960, when Theresa was admitted to hospital with a serious condition, aged eight. Her parents Winnie and Bill Allinson were told to prepare for the worst, and she received the sacrament of the sick. Miraculously, she returned home four months later.

Back home, Winnie and Bill saw a local newspaper notice seeking a family to look after twin babies whose parents were unable to give them the care they needed. Wanting to give thanks to God that Theresa had survived, they responded – and the twins became a part of the family.

Some years later, the twins' social worker contacted them to ask if they could look after a two-year-old for a week. He stayed with the family until he got married!

A boy called Thomas, who had been living in a children's home, followed.

The couple had eight children of their own, so raised 12 children, as well as fostering other little ones for short periods.

Theresa grew up and trained at the RVI, qualifying as a nurse, where she met Bob Jewitt. The couple married in 1975.

They were approved to be foster carers with the diocesan Rescue Society, then Stockton local authority, and went on to foster babies who would return to their own family or go on to be adopted by another family.

The two generations devoted much of their lives to fostering.

Theresa and Bob took their responsibility very seriously, only retiring last year, aged 72 and 79.

Over the years they have given love and care to many babies and their families – as well as their four children – often going above and beyond to do so.

When babies needed hospital treatment, Theresa would stay overnight with them and Bob would hold the family fort. Son

Sean, who lives with them, has played a special part too.

The couple is still in touch with many of the children's families they helped.

Whilst fostering, the couple cared for Winnie, who became ill with Alzheimer's. No longer able to communicate, they ensured she was still comforted by a loving family atmosphere.

During this time, Bob suddenly had a stroke, so Theresa cared for him too. Even while recovering Bob was able to sit and give babies a bottle feed and a cuddle.

After the medal presentation in church on November 16 there was a warm round of applause.

Parishioners are trying to get used to seeing Theresa and Bob at Mass without a pram and a baby.

Theresa and Bob say they don't feel proud of what they've done, and believe God gave them all the tools needed – they just used them.

But we know they are an inspiration. And just in case, they haven't put the cot in the loft just yet!



An MBE for Elspeth!

KUMI Community Foundation founder and St Augustine's, Darlington, parishioner Elspeth Robinson was delighted to discover King Charles had granted her an MBE in the new year's honours list to recognise her services overseas.

Elspeth almost missed the good news as the December email informing her about it landed in a 'junk' folder.

Luckily there was a follow up – and she was overjoyed – but is looking forward to receiving a special letter in the post detailing the presentation.

Elspeth is best known to Northern Cross readers for her work helping children with disabilities in rural Uganda.

The foundation was founded in 2019 and its mission is ongoing, with Elspeth visiting three times last year, including in late autumn to oversee the transportation of a container with 140 wheelchairs. She also recently organised

a fundraising ceilidh at home.

"I had no idea I was going to receive this, and I don't consider I deserve it," said Elspeth. "We are a team. Of course I'm delighted to have been honoured with an MBE, but I'm also humbled."

"It all began in 2002 after I retired as a physiotherapist. I read an article about an old leprosy centre in eastern Uganda, now a general hospital, asking for volunteers so I replied and not long afterwards arrived in an unknown world... Gradually we developed a programme based in the rural community for families living in extreme poverty and with disabilities and/or malnourishment.

"Our mission is to 'help other to help themselves' and to give the extremely poor who are living with a disability in the bush a chance in life."

You can find out more about the foundation at www.kumicommunityfoundation.co.uk

Opening doors for the jubilee

HOLY doors at St Mary's Cathedral and St Joseph's Church, Hartlepool, were ceremoniously opened by Bishop Stephen Wright on December 29, heralding the year of jubilee in our diocese.

At 11.30am the faithful gathered at the Cathedral for the first ritual, which was followed by Mass.

In his homily, Bishop Stephen said: "A holy year is a time of joy, forgiveness and hope. So, let's put into practice our diocesan vision in light of Christ's joy, forgiveness and hope..."

Both churches now become jubilee hubs – places of special pilgrimage.

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Called to serve – for 78 years!

by Grete Jokubaityte

THE Guild of St Stephen for Altar Servers has presented Francis Walker with a gold award certificate recognising his 78 years as an altar server.

Back in 1946, aged just five, Francis began his training with his great friend, Vincent Burgess.

Early morning, after their mothers had got their husbands and children sorted for the day, the boys would accompany them to Mass at St Robert's, Morpeth. In those days the parish was in the care of the Benedictines, and Fr James Donovan OSB – known locally as the eternal curate – trained them to serve at Mass and benediction, with Latin responses. Their regular serving and dedication also equipped them to do well at school.

This wonderful partnership of serving came to an end when they left school.

Vincent took up an apprenticeship as an underground electrician at the Ashington Mining Group, so shift working patterns

made it impossible to continue. Sadly, he died relatively young.

Francis vowed to honour Vincent's memory by continuing to serve the Church in whichever capacity he was called to do so.

He became a senior server and master of ceremonies, and also acted as a sacristan, extraordinary minister of holy communion and reader over the years.

He is most grateful for the blessing of being able to serve in Rome, Lourdes, Fatima, the Holy Land, Poland and many more places.

At the guild's Annual General Meeting in London in November, president Mr Paul Briers KCHS presented the award and spoke of Francis' depth of commitment.

Andy Doyle, the guild's diocesan director, said: "I congratulate Francis on his sterling service over many years – he is an inspiration to us all. The Guild of St Stephen exists to train, recognise and reward our many servers across the country and internationally."



Francis Walker with the gold award certificate for his many years of service as an altar server. Photo: Andy Doyle.

Visit guildofststephen.org or email Andy at guildofststephen@diocesehn.org.uk to find out more about the guild.

DIocese of Hexham & Newcastle
VICARIATE FOR FAITH & MISSION
**Celebration of
Marriage and Family Life**
Faith, Hope and Love



Saturday 8 February 2025
12:00pm Mass

Cathedral Church of St Mary, Newcastle, NE1 6HH
Principal Celebrant: Bishop Stephen Wright

Everyone is welcome to join us
No booking required

If you are celebrating a special anniversary and would like a certificate, please scan the QR code or visit:
<https://bit.ly/CHMMarriageMass>

