

Leo Clarey pictured

LEO CLAREY: AN INTERVIEW WITH A CHURCH VOLUNTEER CELEBRATING 44 YEARS OF VOLUNTEERING



Leo Clarey, (circled) far left, with the Newham Deanery Youth Council: April 2022

In a world where time is often considered the ultimate luxury, dedicating four decades to volunteer service is truly exceptional. We recently spoke with Leo Clarey, a dedicated volunteer from St. Michael's Parish, who shared profound insights into his remarkable 44-year journey. His steadfast commitment and unshakeable faith have made him a cornerstone of the parish community, influencing countless lives and shaping the spiritual landscape of his local area.

Leo's journey began in an era when volunteering was more about community duty than personal choice. He started serving at the altar 44 years ago as a junior school student, motivated by a profound sense of calling rather than a deliberate decision to volunteer. At certain times, professional and personal commitments overshadowed his ability to serve, yet the inexorable pull of faith brought him back into fu-

-ll involvement. As he assumed a variety of roles within the church, his perception evolved, recognizing these acts as genuine volunteering, driven by a desire to give back as much as he gained spiritually. Among Leo's fondest memories is the 2005 centenary celebration of the Brentwood Guild of St. Stephen at Ingatestone Hall, where he led a group of altar servers in a significant ecclesiastical event, marking a century of continuous service. Another pillar of his volunteering career has been his participation in the National Altar Servers' Mass at Westminster Cathedral, which he has attended since 2013. The 2015 event was particularly memorable when Bishop Alan Williams officiated the mass, and Leo's group had the honor of being photographed with him, a mo-

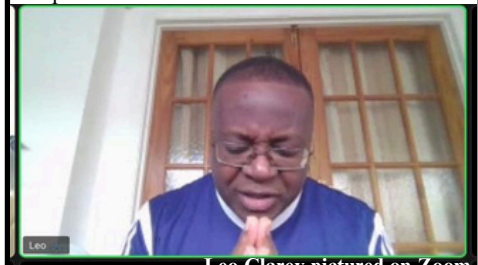
-ment later immortalized in the centenary booklet of the Diocese of Brentwood in 2017.

St. Michael's Parish has seen dramatic demographic shifts over the decades. Originally a congregation primarily of English and Irish families, it has transformed since the mid-90s to include a diverse tapestry of members from the Philippines, various African countries, and other parts of the globe. Despite these changes, Leo's role as the parish MC for altar servers has remained a constant. The ministry's popularity has soared under his guidance, with participation numbers peaking at 130, reflecting the vibrant and evolving community spirit.

Leo counsels new volunteers to approach their work with patience and to pace themselves according to their personal limits. He emphasizes the importance of finding joy and satisfaction in volunteer work, which he believes is infectious and inspires others within the community to contribute. His philosophy centres on the power of positive influence and the ripple effects of small, consistent acts of kindness and dedication.

Looking to the future, Leo is optimistic about the continued growth and development of St. Michael's Parish. He is particularly passionate about his roles within the altar serving ministry and as secretary for the Brentwood Guild of St. Stephen. Leo hopes that his continued involvement, coupled with his efforts in the Parish Partnership & Vision group, will inspire a new generation of volunteers. His dream is to see the parish not only maintain its vibrancy but also expand to include a new parish centre, serving as a hub for community and spiritual growth.

Reflecting on his extensive volunteer experience, Leo has learned that the virtues of patience and diplomacy are indispensable. Achievements in volunteer service do not come overnight; they require perseverance and a steadfast commitment to the community's long-term well-being. Leo believes that the true rewards of volunteering are often intangible, manifesting a deep sense of personal and communal fulfilment.



Leo Clarey pictured on Zoom