

ST. MICHAEL'S CELEBRATES WORD OF GOD SUNDAY WITH INAUGURAL LECTORS' COMMISSIONING

EAST HAM PARISH MARKS POPE FRANCIS' INITIATIVE WITH SOLEMN CEREMONY AND JOYFUL PROCESSION



In a momentous celebration of faith and ministry, St. Michael's Catholic Church in East Ham witnessed its first-ever Lectors' Commissioning ceremony on Sunday, 26 January 2025. The event, which coincided with the Word of God Sunday—the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time—brought together a diverse group of lectors to honour their vital role in proclaiming the Word of the Lord.

The commissioning ceremony, a testament to the parish's commitment to Pope Francis' 2019 Apostolic Letter "Aperuit illis", underscored the importance of Scripture in the life of the Church. As the Holy Father declared, "The relationship between the Risen Lord, the community of believers and sacred Scripture is essential to our identity as Christians".

The origins of this special day can be traced back to 30 September 2019, when Pope Francis established that the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time should be devoted to the celebration, study, and dissemination of the Word of God. The timing of this declaration was particularly sig-

nificant, falling on the Feast of Saint Jerome, the renowned translator of the Bible into Latin, who famously stated, "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ".

At St. Michael's, the journey towards this inaugural commissioning began in 2022, when two dedicated lectors, Liz Barba and Joan Hamilton-Clarey, under the guidance of the then-Assistant Priest, Reverend Dr. Francis Ward, took the initiative to organise the lay ministry of lectors. Their efforts involved arranging monthly meetings to coordinate rotas and providing guidance sessions on the art of proclaiming God's Word effectively.

This collaborative effort brought together experienced and newer lectors, including younger members who had recently joined the ministry. The organisers also encouraged participation in deanery-run lector formations, fostering a sense of fellowship with lectors from other parishes in the deanery. This commitment to growth and unity echoes the words of



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St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians: "And he gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-12).

The Word of God Sunday Mass at St. Michael's was a beautiful tapestry of solemnity and joy. The celebration began with a lector carrying the Book of the Gospels in a solemn entry procession, accompanied by altar servers. The sacred text was then reverently placed on the altar, symbolising its central role in the liturgy. A particularly moving moment occurred just before the Gospel reading. As the Alleluia rang out, Fr Saji Thomas, the current Assistant Priest, led a procession to the sanctuary. He was joined by Liza and Joan as acolytes, bearing the Book of the Gospels, which had been previously moved to the back of the church. This Gospel procession was further enhanced by a dance led by Sr Helena and three young parishioners, adding an element of joyful celebration to the proceedings.

The Book of the Gospels was then placed on a specially prepared table of recognition, positioned on the sanctuary step in front of the lectern. This visual reminder of the Word's importance in the life of the Church brought to mind the Psalmist's words: **"Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path" (Psalm 119:105)**. Following Fr Saji's homily, the lectors were called forward for the commissioning ceremony. Responding to special words spoken by Fr Saji, each lector was presented with a certificate of commissioning, a specially-made prayer card, and a Bible. The inclusion of young lectors, who had participated in both online and in-person sessions of the Deanery Lector Programme, was particularly heartening, reflecting the parish's commitment to nurturing the next generation of ministers. The commissioning of lectors serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of Scripture in the life of the Church. As Pope Francis stated in "Aperuit illis", "The Bible is the book of the Lord's people, who, in listening to it, move from dispersion and division towards unity. The word of God unites believers and makes them one people".

ST. MICHAEL'S LECTORS ANSWER DIVINE CALL ON WORD OF GOD SUNDAY

EAST HAM PARISH EMBRACES PAPAL VISION WITH INAUGURAL COMMISSIONING CEREMONY



Happy Parishioners in the Gospel procession!

The event was a testament to the collaborative spirit within St. Michael's parish. Special recognition was given to Joan and Liza for their continued efforts in organising the Saturday Vigil and Sunday Mass lectors, as well as for arranging this special occasion. Fr Saji was commended for his role in coordinating with a former parishioner who generously donated the Bibles. Sr Helena's support and contribution were also acknowledged, along with the valuable input from the Deanery Youth Lectors' Programme.

As the Mass concluded, the newly commissioned lectors gathered for photographs, capturing the joy and significance of the moment. The sense of community and shared purpose was palpable, bringing to life the words of St. Paul: **"For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another"** (Romans 12:4-5).

Looking to the future, St. Michael's expressed its eagerness to welcome more lectors in the coming years, with plans to include additional ministers in next year's commissioning ceremony. This forward-thinking approach aligns with Pope Francis' vision of a Church that continually renews its commitment to the Word of God.

The celebration at St. Michael's serves as an inspiring example for parishes across the UK and beyond. It demonstrates how local communities can respond to papal initiatives in meaningful ways, enriching their liturgical life and deepening their engagement with Scripture.

As Catholics reflect on the significance of Word of God Sunday and the role of lectors in the Church, they are reminded of the transformative power of Scripture. In the words of the Letter to the Hebrews, **"Indeed, the word of God is living and effective, shar-**



The Youth in the procession

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-per than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

The inaugural Lectors' Commissioning at St. Michael's East Ham stands as a testament to the parish's vibrant faith and commitment to the proclamation of God's Word. As these dedicated lectors continue their ministry, they carry with them not only the responsibility of reading Scripture but also the privilege of bringing God's living word to the hearts of the faithful. May their service inspire all Catholics to deepen their relationship with Scripture and, in doing so, draw closer to Christ himself.

Heavenly Father,

We thank You for Your living Word that guides and nourishes us. Bless our lectors as they proclaim Your truth with clarity and conviction.

May their service inspire all who hear to open their hearts to Your message.

Grant them wisdom, courage, and grace as they fulfill this sacred duty.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

