

Journalist team initiative blends professional development with spiritual growth

The Newham Deanery & Partnerships Young Journalist Team (NDPYC) has emerged as a transformative initiative blending professional development with spiritual growth for 15+ talented young people across the borough. Overseen by Youth Coordinator Olivea Ohonmele and led by university student Josef Tan, this pioneering scheme handpicks participants demonstrating exceptional English skills, offering them their first taste of professional journalism while nurturing their Catholic faith.

Operating as field reporters and writers under Mr Tan's editorial guidance, participants gain practical experience in newsgathering, interviewing, and crafting polished articles. For many, this marks their inaugural employment opportunity, developing crucial workplace skills like deadline management, collaborative problem-solving, and ethical reporting practices. The programme's structure mirrors professional newsrooms, with trainees using industry-standard equipment and methodologies, ensuring a high-quality learning experience.

Teamwork forms the programme's backbone, reflecting St Paul's counsel to Timothy: "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers" (1 Timothy 4:12). Participants collaborate on projects like their notable coverage of the Ignite Catholic youth event, where they honed abilities to capture complex spiritual experiences through reportage. This mirrors the Newham Youth Partnership's emphasis on youth leadership through initiatives like Future Light, creating intergenerational bridges between young journalists and community stakeholders.

Spiritually, the programme embeds Catholic values through its service-oriented mission. By documenting parish activities and social outreach projects, young journalists deepen their understanding of Catholic social teaching. The Diocese of Brentwood's vision for youth participation comes alive as trainees learn to amplify community stories through a faith-based lens, recognising journalism as a vocation rather than mere profession. Olivea Ohonmele notes: "We're cultivating storytellers who see their work as an extension of Christ's ministry – truth-tellers building God's kingdom through ethical media."

Participants report enhanced confidence and clarified vocational paths, with many considering careers in faith-based media or community leadership. The scheme's prestige stems from its rigorous selection process and commitment to developing young talent. Josef Tan's leadership model – balancing professional standards with pastoral support – creates an environment where mentees flourish academically and spiritually, embodying the Vatican's call for "accompaniment" in youth ministry.

The programme offers invaluable benefits to the youth involved. It hones critical thinking skills as they analyse complex issues through a Catholic lens. Their writing abilities improve dramatically through regular practice and constructive feedback. Public speaking and interpersonal skills develop as they conduct interviews and present their findings. Time management and organisational skills are strengthened as they juggle multiple assignments and deadlines.

Moreover, the experience fosters a deeper connection to their faith community. By reporting on various Catholic events and initiatives, young journalists gain a broader understanding of the Church's work and their potential role within it. This exposure can inspire a lifelong commitment to faith-based service and leadership.

As the team prepares for future projects, including collaborations with Catholic charities, their work exemplifies Jeremiah 1:7's assurance: "Do not say, 'I am too young'. You must go to everyone I send you to." By equipping youth with technical skills and theological foundations, NDPYC demonstrates how Catholic communities can empower young people to become both skilled professionals and faithful disciples, shaping society through truth, integrity, and service.

The NDPYC Young Journalist Team stands as a testament to the power of combining professional development with spiritual formation. It not only prepares young Catholics for potential careers in media but also deepens their faith and commitment to living out Gospel values in their daily lives and future professions.