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SOCIAL MEDIA IS A WAY OF COLLABORATING WITH HIM

Femi Onanuga is a youth pastor, minister-in-training and former London Baptists intern – and he has a passion to see people use their social media for evangelism

As part of his studies at Spurgeon's College, Femi wrote a paper about the need for creativity and contextualization in terms of evangelism in the church today, and focused predominantly on social media.

"Social media is more than just a tool," he explains. "It's a space where people interact with each other.

"And personal stories are an ideal space for Christians to share testimony and discuss what God is doing in their lives. This is in line with how the postmodern world appreciates and values personal stories over big stories.

"You already have the trust of those who have chosen to follow or friend you", Femi says. "Being authentic – documenting good and bad – is a helpful insight into the life of a Christian.

"Anyone who has a social media account, if we all share what Jesus is doing in our lives, just imagine the impact that will make around you? Everyone has their own individual story and purpose. A Bible verse you read today. How has God been good to you? What are your struggles and how is God working with you through them?

"Just doing that can make a massive difference.

"For many are open to listening. The world is a tough place and people, particularly his generation, are searching for something deeper.

"People are spiritually open more than ever before, because of

COVID, because of things that are happening in the world. People have lost a lot. If these things - jobs, money - can be lost so quickly, what is constant?

"My generation is seeking to want more. We are asking: what is out there, beyond me? But we know that God is constant. How do you show God is never changing, a constant, a rock?"

Femi is currently at Mill Hill East Church in London, where his role is split between youth and media work. This year the church has launched a creative arts worship event for young people called *Lifestyle*. As young people do not connect with sung worship in a way they did a generation or two ago, the church uses different mediums to encourage an exploration of God. The first event focused on photography and painting. A question was posed: if God was a musical artist, what would his album art look like?

“We hoped that having them create something would give an idea of who God is to them,” says Femi.

Drama and poetry featured in the second event, whose theme centred on purpose. “Through this we asked: what is your purpose? How do you find your purpose in life? We tried to wrestle with those questions.”

There is a three-pronged approach: a social media account (@LifestyleBarnet) gives information about the event and encourages interaction; in between the events the church is working with a group of about five young people aged 14 to 16, doing Bible studies and leadership development with them, and some of this is shared on social media; and then there are the events themselves.

“Our hope is that we can use that page to not only evangelise the youth around us, but put content on there that can help disciple them, encourage them and plug them into what we’re doing.”

Femi says most young adults spend a lot of time on social media, and we need to be there to reach them. He recognises many churches will not have the capacity to do more on social media, and there is a need for them to be better equipped. He believes one possible solution is to empower young adults in their midst to take more of an active role.

“I went to a church recently, and the majority of the congregation was over 50. So I don’t think it was realistic to ask them to go to new social media.

“But there was a young man there. What would happen if you encouraged him to help?

Ask him: how do you reach the people around you? And evangelise them?

“When you’re empowering young people, you don’t feel so overwhelmed at trying to figure it out. And it could result in someone using the gifts they might not even know they have, to serve in a way that they didn’t even know was possible.”

Femi acknowledges there is vulnerability needed in what he advocates, and sharing in this way is something he himself can struggle with. Nevertheless, he wants to encourage us to get back to the heart of our faith. Who are we doing this for, and who is alongside us as we go about it?

“I know there’s so much more I can do as well, and I know part of it is being fearful of putting ourselves out there,” he says.

“But what is there to say when you’re preaching the truth that changes lives? Jesus is Jesus! And he’s going to build his Church at the end of the day. This is a way of collaborating with him.”



Femi Onanuga is the youth pastor at Mill Hill East Church in London

