

Georgia-Based ‘Prophetic Poets’ Use Creative Writing as Evangelism Tool

The Voices of Christ Prophetic Poetry Team shares the gospel at poetry slams, literary cafés and open-mic events

An Atlanta-area ministry has embraced poetry as its unlikely evangelism tool.

Theresa Harvard Johnson, founder of the Voices of Christ Prophetic Poetry Team, says she and her team of “prophetic poets” have been commissioned to take the gospel to the world.

A journalist and creative writing instructor, Johnson, 32, has been writing poetry all her life. But when she accepted Christ in 2001, she says both her life and her poetry changed.

“But there was no forum, no foundation to express this gift in ministry,” she told Charisma.

That changed when Johnson launched Voices of Christ (VOC) in McDonough, Ga., in 2001. The team is comprised of poets from all walks of life, ages and church backgrounds. Johnson says their commitment to spread the gospel through poetry is their common bond.

The team travels to secular poetry slams, cafés and clubs, but Johnson said VOC is all about ministry, not performance. “What the Lord has created with this team is so much more than people who present poetry, prose or spoken word. We present

the Word of God and expressly represent Jesus Christ," she said.

Johnson believes poetry falls within the prophetic office listed among the fivefold ministry gifts in Ephesians 4. "I am always inspired while I am asleep," Johnson said. "That's no different than how the Spirit of the Lord inspired Joseph or Daniel in their dreams.

"Also, there is something to be said about 'speaking' God's Word. Just as the prophets of old, the Holy Spirit is still inspiring men and women to be mouthpieces ... to speak to a dying world."

Johnson and her team travel locally and nationally to participate in poetry slams and open-mic events. "One of the things that I stress to our team is that although we go to secular venues, we are not there for the purpose of entertainment," she said. "We are there for the purpose of evangelism."

To underscore her position, she requires team members to undergo training before they share their poems publicly—not necessarily to hone their literary gifts, but their spiritual gifts.

"We memorize the Word of God as a team, and when we minister, our poems should be traceable to the Word of God," Johnson said. "Not ... every poem has to ... directly say 'Jesus,' but the heart ... of the poem should clearly say 'Jesus.'"

Johnson said the response at secular venues has been overwhelmingly positive, though their reception has been cool

at many churches and Christian functions. Still, she is undaunted. She believes acceptance will grow as the church understands that Christian poetry is a move of the Holy Spirit.

"This is why the Lord is raising up prophetic voices such as our team and others like the hip-hop poets," Johnson said. "The medium of spreading the gospel is changing, but the gospel itself will never change. As long as we hold true to the gospel, people will see that Christian poetry teams are no different than the ministries of praise and worship teams, interpretive dance ministries or Christian drama ministries."

Apostle John A. Davis Sr., founding pastor of Harvest Faith International Ministries, where Johnson is a member, embraced Johnson's vision more than three years ago when he saw VOC in action. "I was absolutely blown away," said Davis, whose church hosts a teen poetry night. "There is no question once you hear the prophetic poetry team, that they are inspired by the Holy Spirit."

He believes Johnson and her team meet a need in the body of Christ and in the secular world. "Jesus commissions us to 'go into the world and preach [the] gospel to every creature,' and that is what the prophetic poetry team is doing."

Heddie Simmons joined VOC recently after a friend encouraged her to check out the group's Web site, . "I started writing poetry during the time of September 11, and I had been searching for a group that I could express myself, but also a place that stood for Christ," Simmons said. "It had to be a place where poetry came from God, from the heart, had to mean something and had to change lives."

"When I went to the Web site and saw 'prophetic,' I knew ... this is where the Holy Spirit wanted me to be."

Like others doing nontraditional ministry, Johnson has seen her gifts make room for her. "The bottom line is that God is calling for all of us—no matter what gifts and talents He has given us—to operate out of our spirit and not our flesh."

L. Pat Williams

For more information on Voices of Christ Prophetic Poetry Team, contact Theresa Harvard Johnson at 770-898-0455, or e-mail information@.