

The Conflict Between Community and Territory in Christian Schools

My school. My children. My classroom. My subject area. My specialization.

Our school. Our children. Our mission. Our common life in Christ.

The conflict between community and territory.

Κοινωνία – koinonia – fellowship – community. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2: 42). It sounds great and it is great when our school is a community. It is also easy to make the word less than it is.

The fellowship (Κοινωνία) of Acts 2 was deliberate being together, devotedly doing so in order to nurture their growth as the earliest Christian community. When is there time for us to deliberately be together as a school community where we are not stressed by the approaching bell, the duty that calls?

And the contribution (Κοινωνία) in 2 Corinthians 9:13 says that community is a place where we generously contribute. It is being together and it is more. It is contributing of our own free will and desire in response to God’s giving of himself to us. Community is a place that we certainly are members of, come together in, pray together and encourage each other. It is also a place where we give ourselves to each other. In our schools, is our Christian Professional Learning Community demonstrating the eight characteristics showing that commitment to each other?

- a. Follow the example of Jesus (John 13:15)
- b. Committed to excellence (Philippians 4:8)
- c. Devoted to doing good for each child (Titus 3:8)
- d. Engaging and interesting from the student’s point of view (Mark 4:2, Luke 23:5)
- e. Always hopeful (Romans 5: 4-5)
- f. Committed to learning (Luke 2:40, 52; Romans 15:14)
- g. Humble, even as an expert (Romans 12:3)
- h. Committed to colleagues’ success (1 Corinthians 12:27)

And the partnership (Κοινωνία) in 1 John 1:3 says that community is where we share something of inestimable value – we partner with each other and we are partners with God Himself. Most translations use the word fellowship here as well but the Greek word is the feminine form of koinos and has close affinity with partner (cf. Luke 5:10). Thus we are not just in the same space together, doing the same thing to a common goal, we are doing it literally with each other even as we have individual responsibilities.

Thus we are ‘together’, we ‘share’ with each other, and we are ‘partners’ in the work – all part of the same word koinonia – fellowship – community. It is a powerful picture.

There is another picture in our schools. It is one of territory. It is not intentionally ugly. It is not intended to be opposed to koinonia. It often has that effect. Let's explore it as well.

Territory in schools is a long-standing tradition. It was a 20th century phenomenon where the phrase "closing the door to my classroom" meant closing out all the intrusive demands of administrators, curriculum demands, handbook rules, mandates, standards, and immersing myself in the independence of teaching in the way I thought best and developing personal/professional relationships with the students in my care. It has a history going back to the one room schoolhouse where the teacher was responsible for the instruction of all the students, the maintenance of the building, keeping the stove going and bringing in the wood, and cleaning the floors after the scholars left for the day – everything that happened within the four walls of the classroom.

The system worked well. Children were sorted; some went to university as the privileged leaders; most went into some form of blue-collar and white-collar work requiring high levels of conformity and repetition. Teaching, mitigated by many individuals who wanted more, was limited, discipline was absolute, conformity emphasized.

Breaking that tradition in favor of koinonia is essential. But why? Let's look at two reasons:

- a. Each and every child must succeed (cf. Luke 15:4). There is little future opportunity for our children if they do not have a base of skills and attitudes that they can use in the 4th/5th industrial revolutions and amidst the significant social change they find themselves in. "I" am not capable enough to accomplish that. Maybe I am good enough to help the majority of the students – that was enough in the 20th century. Not today. I need 'we', I need koinonia in order to effectively support each child.
- b. We are learning about concepts such as human capital spillover and emotional contagion understanding that "I" am not immune from "we". Whether I like it or not, the autonomous castle of my classroom was always a myth. My success is actually dependent on your success and vice versa. Literally. Only in koinonia (cf. John 17:11) can I fully live out my promise – only in koinonia can we fully serve the children in our care. The faculty culture in a school is a true culture – it can be healthy or toxic. Territory always makes culture toxic.

Territory is connected to power, of course. We can't ignore how power is embedded in the workings of our schools. Who has more time? Better facilities? More access to the hierarchy? More longevity / seniority? More money in their budgets? Their own classrooms versus a trolley? A 'core' subject rather than a 'special'? Full-time rather than part-time? Where these things become important, are stressed and used to curry influence and decision-making, territory leverages toxicity (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:8).

Koinonia is connected to sharing, to organic growth, to common goals, to giving of myself to you. Territory doesn't have to be antithetical to koinonia / community. The power of the individual to make a difference is a reality. We participate in groups – we follow individuals. Nonetheless, the ability of community to serve children is far greater than the ability of territory. Let's choose being together, sharing all things in common, partnering in the great enterprise of educating the young.

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Website: christianschoolmanagement.org

Email: christianschoolmanagement@gmail.com

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[Acts 2:42](#) And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship [*koinonia*], and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

[Romans 15:26](#) For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution [*koinonia*] for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.

[1 Corinthians 1:9](#) God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship [*koinonia*] of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

[1 Corinthians 10:16](#) The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion [*koinonia*] of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

[2 Corinthians 6:14](#) Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion [*koinonia*] hath light with darkness?

[2 Corinthians 8:4](#) Praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and *take upon us* the fellowship [*koinonia*] of the ministering to the saints.

[2 Corinthians 9:13](#) Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for *your* liberal distribution [*koinonia*] unto them, and unto all *men*;

[2 Corinthians 13:14](#) The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion [*koinonia*] of the Holy Ghost, *be* with you all. Amen.

[Galatians 2:9](#) And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship [*koinonia*]; that we *should go* unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

[Ephesians 3:9](#) And to make all *men* see what *is* the fellowship [*koinonia*] of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

[Philippians 1:5](#) For your fellowship [*koinonia*] in the gospel from the first day until now;

[Philippians 2:1](#) If *there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship [*koinonia*] of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,

[Philippians 3:10](#) That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship [*koinonia*] of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

[Philemon 1:6](#) That the communication [*koinonia*] of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.

[Hebrews 13:16](#) But to do good and to communicate [*koinonia*] forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

[1 John 1:3](#) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship [*koinonia*] with us: and truly our fellowship [*koinonia*] *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

[1 John 1:6](#) If we say that we have fellowship [*koinonia*] with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

[1 John 1:7](#) But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship [*koinonia*] one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin.
