

Koinonia

What is koinonia?

The early Christians "continuously devoted themselves to fellowship." (Acts 2:42) The word for "fellowship" is koinonia, which means "to have in common" or "to share." As those who are united with Christ, we are to share the life of Christ with one another in a way that results in individual and corporate spiritual growth. This is accomplished through the exchange of God's love and truth, which is called "ministry" (which simply means "service").

Koinonia is viewed by the New Testament as a non-optional environment for spiritual growth.

Clearly such koinonia is not just a matter of attending one or two meetings a week. It is much more than that. This is why the verse so often used to stress the importance of attending church (Hebrews 10:25 ". . . not forsaking the assembling together as is the habit of some. . ."), is frequently misunderstood today. This verse is often taken to mean that only our presence at church meetings is necessary. Instead, we find that according to 1 Corinthians 12:21 (" . . . the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you' . . ."), it is not just the presence of the other members that we need, but also their function.

Christians are viewed as the body of Christ because we are spiritually united with Christ and with each other. Since we are members of one another, we need to relate to each other in a mutually interdependent way. The important point, therefore, is not just that we attend meetings (although this is a necessary aspect), but that we authentically share the life of Christ with one another. Thus, ". . . speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the Head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." (Ephesians 4:15,16).

How can we practice koinonia?

The New Testament defines normative involvement in Christian koinonia in two major ways. One way is by serving other Christians with our spiritual gifts and receiving others' service through their spiritual gifts. The sphere in which we use our gifts is our ministry, or service.

Another, and perhaps more basic way to practice koinonia is through loving one another in various practical ways. In Jn. 13:34,35, Jesus told his disciples that they were to "love one another as I have loved you." Since they had been with Jesus for several years, they knew how he expressed love to them. Since other Christians would not have this opportunity, the apostles carefully described what this love looks like. Through what are sometimes called the "one another" imperatives of the epistles, we are given a profile of the ways that we can love one another. Below are examples:

- Encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:13; 10:25)
- Admonish one another (Colossians 3:16; Romans 15:14)
- Confess your sins to one another (James 5:16)
- Forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13)
- Accept one another (Romans 14:1; 15:7)
- Serve one another (Galatians 5:13; Romans 12:10)

- Build up one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
- Be hospitable to one another (1 Peter 4:9)

As we practice giving love to other Christians in these ways, and as we allow them to express love to us in these ways, we are practicing koinonia and expressing mutual interdependence as members of Christ and one another.

Christian meetings are important in this regard because they enable us to experience koinonia during the meeting in varying degrees. They also facilitate the meeting of other Christians with whom we can build koinonia-based friendships. New Testament churches commonly met in homes as well as in large groups (see Acts 2:46; 20:20; Romans 16:5).

The reason for this was probably so that the Christians could more easily practice this kind of koinonia. Xenos has always emphasized the importance of home groups for this reason. In the context of a home group and the relationships which develop between members, a level of koinonia can occur which is impossible by attending only larger meetings.