

# Determining the Success of Koinonia in Attracting University Students through the Use of Specific Genres

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## Introduction

Koinonia is a church established in UC Davis that caters to graduate and undergraduate students throughout the campus. The church continues to grow every year, gaining more and more members through active invitations made by the staff members and interactions with student members. The church does this through the use of different types of genres, genres defined as the “classification of communicative or rhetorical practices” (Osterlund, 2007, p. 83). The genres to be investigated in this study involve a large variety of literacies used within the church community. For this study, I will be classifying Koinonia as a discourse community, defined as “communities of writers and readers” (Freed & Broadhead, 1987, p.154). A discourse community has several defining features: a set of common goals to be pursued, participatory mechanisms to provide information and feedback, one or more genres to further its goals, a specific lexis, and threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and expertise within the community (Swales, 2011, p. 471-473). The study of this church is of interest to me, as I have been a part of this church since my freshman year. Although I have attended church for most of my life, it was only in Koinonia where I began to get involved with the church and consider it a big part of my daily life. I wanted to find out why the Koinonia church experience was more appealing to me as a university student as compared to my previous churches.

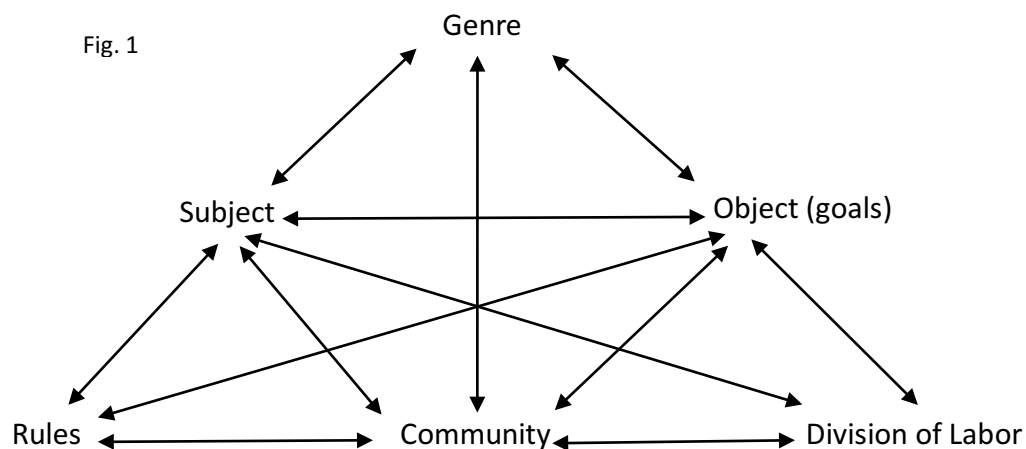
Per Orvis Jordan’s work, there are three different ways community churches can be classified. The first type of church is one that is quite independent of all ecclesiastical affiliations. The second type is the federated church, one where two congregations unite under a single pastor. The third type is the denominational community church, which requires its attendees to be immersed within the church community and activities to be eligible for membership (Jordan, 1926, p. 283). Based on his classifications, I consider Koinonia to fall within the third type of community church, as it holds many different activities to immerse members within its church experience and allow their Christian faith to grow, mainly through the establishment of home groups. This is important because it directs the different genres the church utilizes to connect with their members on a personal level. The church uses a diverse range of genre sets, defined as “collections of types of texts someone in a particular role is likely to produce”, within an all-encompassing genre system, which according to Charles Bazerman is “the several genre sets of people working together in an organized way, plus the patterned relations in the production, flow, and the use of these documents” (Bazerman, 2004, p. 318). In this investigation, I found that the main reason behind the popularity of the church stems from how identical the genres within the genres sets of home groups and sermons are to genres commonly used in university. The students’ familiarity with these genres make them more willing to join in and become more integrated and comfortable in the church community.

## Method:

I conducted a participant observation of the genres the church exposed me to in the span of a week. I began to take note of the different forms of communication and lexis the church utilizes in its inner workings. I also attended sermons held by the head pastor William Kang to determine the church goals. I separated these into different categories based on the purpose of the genres. By doing so, I would be able to determine what genres are the most effective in helping to build up the church community in fulfilling specific purposes. Because I myself am a university student, I would make an appropriate subject of this observation since I am familiar with the popular genres used in university.

Using the goals found in the observation, I constructed an activity system triangle to analyze the activity system of the Koinonia organization. An activity system is essential to studying activity theory, which analyzes the human behavior within the activity system. The activity system is where we determine the goals of the church, the genres used in the church, and other important aspects that altogether sustain the church community. The activity system triangle is shown in figure 1.1 below, based on the diagram detailed in Yrjo Engestrom's guide to activity theory (Engestrom, 2000, p. 960).

In addition to the observation, I interviewed a member of the church who had been with the church for an extended period. She is currently a junior and was a regular of the church since her freshman year. The main objective of the interview was to inquire of the main genres that the interviewee was exposed to during her interactions with the church, what forms of communication the church uses to communicate with her and whether they were effective in furthering the goals of the church. I asked questions to determine what genres were most effective in integrating her into the Koinonia community and which genres were the most appealing to her.



## Results and Analysis

## Activity System

To better understand the reasoning behind the genres used by the church, it is vital to first build the activity triangle to understand the main goals of the church. Through the interview, sermons and the Koinonia Davis website, I identified the main goals of the Koinonia community. The main goals of the church are to expand church membership by inviting people to join, build closer bonds and relationships between members of the church, and to introduce the Christian faith to any students interested. Even the church name is the Greek translation of the word 'fellowship', signifying the building of relationships within the community as one of the most important goals of the church. According to the head pastor, the church was built with the main purpose of catering to university students within UC Davis. Church staff members are indispensable to church functions. Besides handling jobs such as setting up the stage and playing music, the staff are the primary form of interaction between the church and students. Their primary job is to invite more students into the church and to lead their respective home groups.

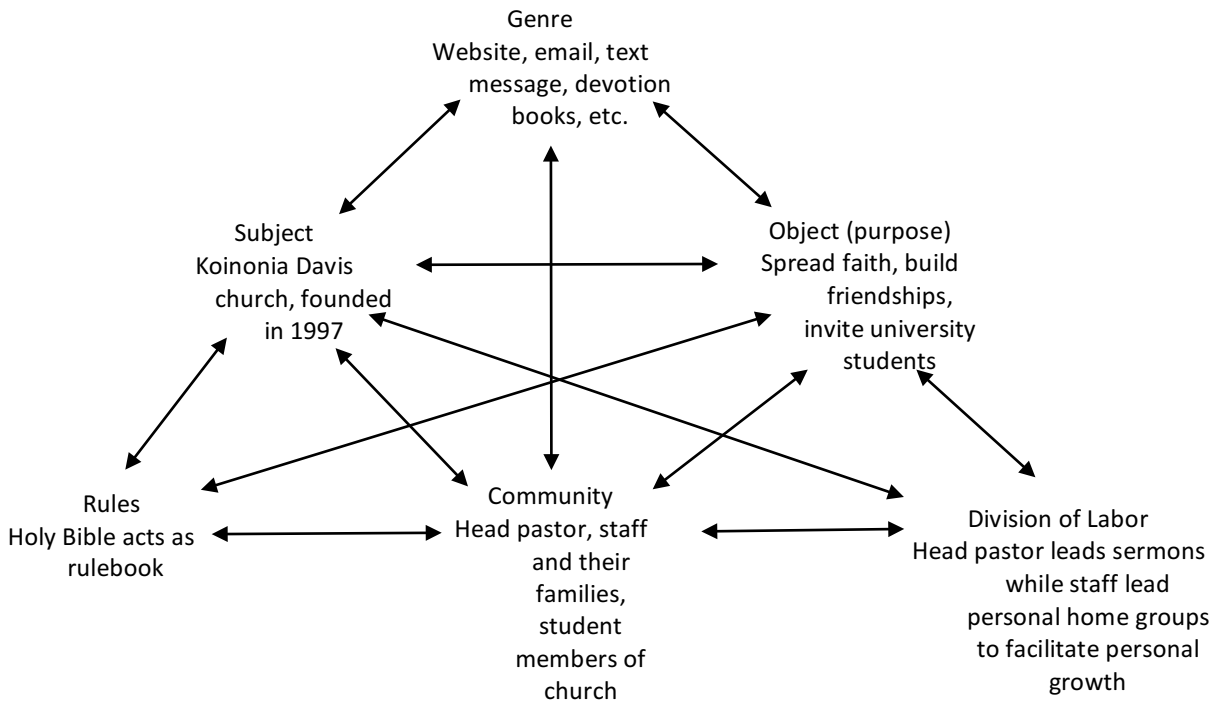


Fig. 2.1

Home groups are one of the most vital aspects of the Koinonia church community. A home group is composed of around 6-8 people and its main purpose is to bring its members closer together through weekly bible study and hangout sessions. The small size is important because it allows for closer and more personal relationships between members and staff. They are each led by a staff member of the church and tackle such activities as devotions and reflection papers. These home groups also act as support hubs for members in need. They had a specific lexis made

with the purpose of building a family-type interaction, an example being calling its members brothers (for boys) or sisters (for girls).

### Genres Found from the Observation and Interview

As shown in the figure above, the church uses a variety of genres within its activity system. Each one fit within a category, a few of them fitting into multiple categories. Upon closer inspection of the list, we can see several genres that are not considered part of old fashioned church communities. Many of these genres are commonly used by university students in their daily lives.

No.	Expand size of community	Provide information on church and events	Improve internal relations between members	To study the teachings of the church
1	Flyers	Website	Text messages	Devotion books
2	Billboard	Emails	Emails	PowerPoint slides
3	Website	Text messages	Confession papers	Commitment cards
4	Text messages	Facebook	Phone calls	Reflection papers
5	Facebook	Powerpoint slides	Skype	Writing prayers
6				Christian books

Figure 2.2

Interviewing the church member revealed that one of the reasons behind the church's success in attracting and interacting with students is due to the use of genres frequently used by the students themselves. There are many different forms of genre sets within the Koinonia genre system catering to the different activities within the church, fulfilling many different purposes and helping members to become more immersed within the Koinonia Davis community.

### Home groups

Home groups come with their own specific genre set essential to its activities. In each home group, the staff and members communicate with one another through text messages and emails. Studying the Bible is one of the main activities of the home group so the church creates its own devotional books to help guide the students in their study of the bible. These books are composed of short-answer questions in the same format as that of either an analytical or reflective written assignment in humanities classes. This allows students to become more engrossed within the devotional books and study the Bible in a manner similar to how they would study in a university course. While I was filling in questions, I felt that the format of the questions was very accommodating and accessible since I commonly come across that question format in university schoolwork. This is especially important with new members because many are new to the Christian religion, and so these more recognizable question formats help new members ease into church teachings. All the staff communicate with their home group members using forms of communication common in everyday university life, namely text messaging, facebook, and

emails. The interviewee reported that the ease of using these forms of communication was highly preferable with the advent of the smartphone, and that it constituted a less disruptive way of communication as compared to phone calls, especially during classes (K. Juwono, personal communication, October 17, 2016). These forms of communication allow the staff to interact more easily with their group members and become more approachable through a genre the students are more comfortable using.

## **Sermons**

The sermons made by the pastor are also geared mainly towards university students, being carried out in a style reminiscent of university course lectures. A common staple of the sermons is the use of PowerPoints to help us analyze the text from the Bible. He uses laser pointers and passes out reflection worksheets after each sermon to help students meditate on the sermon. All these genres foster the development of a learning environment almost identical to a university course lecture. In contrast, the church in my hometown just featured the head pastor preaching onstage with no other accompaniments. The visual and written cues featured heavily in the sermons helped me understand the sermons on a deeper level because it teaches the content in a format that I, as a university student, am used to. Thus, I feel a greater understanding and appreciation of the Bible text in Koinonia sermons compared to other churches, a notion that my interviewee agreed with. The lecture-formatted sermons allowed students to more easily keep up with the new ideas being taught to them in a more recognizable fashion.

## **Final Thoughts**

The investigation revealed that the main reason behind the success of the Koinonia Davis church in attracting university students is attributed to their success in integrating common university genres in their activities. Forms of communication like text messaging and emails allow the staff and students to interact in more meaningful personal conversations, building up the friendship between them and allowing the staff to be more approachable in their everyday lives. The lecture style of sermons and university style question formats in reflection papers are beneficial to students, as it allows them to more easily understand the complex teachings of the Bible and respond to them. All these genres are integral parts of the church discourse community and create a more accommodating environment for students to enjoy, leading to the fulfillment of the church's main goals. The genres used by the church play an important part in the buildup of the Koinonia community, as without it, university students would not be as inclined to take part. Due to time constraints, the research was not as detailed as I hoped. The research could be improved by conducting a survey and interviewing a church staff member to see their perspectives as well.

This study is important because it shows the importance of genres in the interaction between communities and the individuals around them. The genres my church used helped me feel more integrated within its community and thus, made it more enjoyable. The results of this investigation can be used by other organizations targeting university students to figure out what genres can be used to attract more students and strengthen their community bonds. By studying

this, I believe that we can find the most effective means of communicating with university students to build up communities and fulfill goals we could be aiming for. This church is a prime example of how genres play a huge role in the building of a community inclusive of their target audience.

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