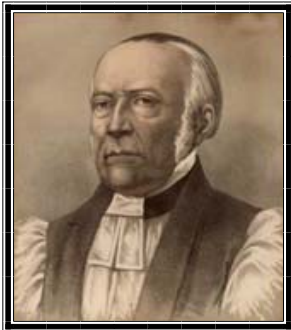


1979 - 2004
Celebrating 25 Years
of the Koinonia Movement
Chapter 1: A Grass Roots Movement

An amazing phenomenon began in the USA and Canada in the 1970's. In his introduction to The Philosophy of Christ in School Education, Paul Kienel wrote in the late 1970's, "*Perhaps the most visible thing the Holy Spirit is doing in the Body of Christ today is the rapid proliferation of Christian schools...Evangelical Bible-believing Christians are establishing Christian schools, pre-school through high school, at a rate of two new schools a days in the United States.*" (p. 1)

The Koinonia movement is one local expression of this larger Christian school movement. However, the Koinonia movement has developed in a unique way within the broader Christian school movement, so it deserves a closer study.

To understand the Koinonia movement, we need to understand what was happening in public education at that time. Public schools were set up about a hundred years earlier as Christian schools. In Alberta, the public schools were called Protestant schools.



Rev. John Strachan

Shortly before public education was influenced in Canada, Rev. John Strachan, the first Bishop of the Anglican Church of Toronto made the following statement, which reflects the thinking behind the establishment of public Christian schools:

"Information without religion is a positive evil."

The early public schools differed from the existing schools in their non-denominational flavour. For most of Christendom's history, education was the domain of the church. But as immigrants from various church backgrounds settled in Canada and the USA, it just was not practical for each church to operate its own little school. As a result, informal arrangements were made in many communities whereby families from various churches cooperated to start "public" Christian schools, which were open to families of all denominational backgrounds. Like the recent Christian school movement, this was a grass roots movement.

It made sense, certain politicians began to argue, to fund these "public" schools out of the "public" purse. Protestant churches also joined the campaign for these publicly funded Christian schools. Business leaders joined the campaign because they needed skilled and literate workers. The broadening of democracy also required a more educated citizenry. The result was a national consensus for publicly funded, non-denominational Christian schools.

After World War I (1914-1918), church attendance began to decline and immigration was broadened to include a much wider range of religious backgrounds in both Canada and the USA. Both secularism and multiculturalism began to undermine the commitment to public Christian schools.

In 1963, Madeline Murray O'Hare led the secular humanists to victory in a milestone court case that removed prayer from public schools. At the same time, the SAT (Standard Achievement Test) scores began to plummet as schools experimented with new methods of education. Discipline became an issue, and drugs became common around schools. Promiscuity increased significantly.

By the 1970's, it was evident to many Christian families that public education was no longer Christian. In fact, in some cases, the public schools had even become antagonistic to Christian values. Christian families yearned for the schools they had lost.

The Christian school movement must be understood within this cultural context. Most of the new Christian schools attempt to "turn back the clock" to recreate the public Christian schools of earlier generations.

1979 - 2004
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Chapter 2: The First Koinonia School

Conversations about education were happening throughout the evangelical communities of Canada and the USA, as chapter 1 described. They were also happening in central Alberta.

In 1978, two mothers, Ann Neufeld and Judy Hartzler, decided in one of these conversations, that it was time to see whether there was enough interest in the Carstairs area to start a Christian school. Ann was aware of Christian schools in B.C. and had attended some meetings sponsored by the A.C.E. (Accelerated Christian Education) organization.

The first meeting to explore the interest level in the Carstairs area took place on May 9, 1978 at the West Zion Mennonite Church. A speaker from a Calgary A.C.E. school encouraged the attendees to pursue establishing a Christian school and explained the A.C.E. program.

A second meeting took place in March of 1979. At this time, an ad hoc committee was formed to investigate possible facilities, curriculum and the extent of commitment from families who would enroll their children. This committee consisted of Harry Johnson, Irene Stauffer, and Jeanette Cox. The research committee discovered very quickly that it was hard to obtain support from churches. This had several implications for the nature of the first Koinonia school. First of all, the only available location was at the Bergen Missionary Church, more than a half hour west of Carstairs. It also meant that the school could not be an A.C.E. school, which required that the principal be a pastor of a church. A.C.E. also demanded school uniforms for students and the initial group of parents did not like that. After studying the options for curriculum, the research committee also preferred the A.O.P. (Alpha Omega Publications) because it provided more freedom for the teacher to actually teach the students.



As a result, the first Koinonia school opened in Bergen as an interdenominational, parent operated school using the Alpha Omega curriculum in September of 1979. Mrs. Lorraine Roselle was the principal/teacher for grades 1-12. The plan had been to start with grades 2-8 to keep the first years simple, but due to desperate requests from parents, the other grades were added as well. The enrollment of 35 students was larger than expected, largely due to the addition of the extra grades. This larger enrollment required a number of parent monitors and an additional high school teacher, Mrs. Jean Dueck. A permanent board took over from the ad hoc research committee. The first board consisted of Merle Hartzler and Arnie Reimer from the West Zion Mennonite Church and Jack Dueck from the Bergen Missionary Church. Pastor Bob Cheesmur of the Bergen Missionary Church acted as chaplain to the school and was on the school board as a representative of the church because the school was using the church facility.

In 1981, the Bergen school moved to the Bethel Evangelical Church near Carstairs to become the Carstairs Koinonia Christian School. The name Koinonia Christian School was suggested by Merle Hartzler. The “pioneers” had a vision of fellowship between parents, teachers and students. As the Koinonia movement has grown, this name has remained very significant because it stands for the sense of community and accountability that became key values in the movement.



Bethel Evangelical Church

Of the first 35 students enrolled that first year at Koinonia Christian School in Bergen, 14 came from the Luyendyk family and that will form the basis for the next chapter in the history of the Koinonia movement.



1979 - 2004
Celebrating 25 Years
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Chapter 3: A Second Koinonia School

A number of the founders of the first Koinonia school did not envision their school becoming big. Rather, they envisioned many Christian schools with up to 50 students serving the area.

As mentioned in the last chapter, the Luyendyk family had their children in the Koinonia Christian School in Bergen in the first year. Their other 14 children stayed in the Cremona public school that first year. However, the Luyendyks were so blessed by the positive changes in their children at the Christian school that they decided to send all their children to the Christian school the following year.



Class at Luyendyk's

The Luyendyk family was not a typical family. They had five of their own children and another 22 adopted children. In addition, they took in foster children through their Cremona Valleyview Children's Home.

Transporting all of these children to and from school proved to be a major challenge, so the Luyendyk's approached the Board about the possibility of setting up a satellite campus in Cremona. The Koinonia Board agreed to do so.

Initially the Luyendyks converted the basement of their house into a school facility. They hired Mr. Andy VanGoor as their first teacher and began classes in September of 1980 with a total of 35 students.

During the three years that the school operated out of the Luyendyks basement, Roy Luyendyk built the school facility at the present River's Edge Camp property. The first part of the school was built with lumber from the land. The total cost of the project was only about \$60,000 because of volunteer labour and donations of materials.

The school building had no heat for the first year, and the school operated with two outdoor toilets. With the gymnasium facility, sports teams were able to compete, and drama and music productions could be performed for the larger community. This gymnasium remained the largest in the Koinonia system until 2003 when Olds and Cherry Coulee built their new gyms.

At one point, the school closed for a while and was resurrected by dedicated parents as Spruce Ridge Christian School, and it operated approximately another 7 years before closing in 2004.



Spruce Ridge Christian School



Brian Hazeltine

Brian Hazeltine, the principal at the Airdrie Koinonia Christian School for many years, took over as principal in Cremona in 1982.

The birth of a second school under the one school Board proved to be the beginning of something much bigger than the original vision. The birth of many Christian schools was a part of the original vision of the founders. The birth of the school system was part of God's bigger purpose for the Koinonia movement. Although the Cremona Christian School always remained small and struggling, its beginning changed the course of Christian education in Alberta. This school start also became the first of many schools starts where the Koinonia Board would help families who already wanted a Christian school, make it a reality.

1979 - 2004
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Chapter 4: The Flagship is Born

The Koinonia movement was much bigger than two small Christian schools. In its first year (1979), the Koinonia movement had spawned the first school in Bergen. With its second year (1980), the first satellite school was born in Cremona. In its third year, the Bergen school moved to larger facilities in Carstairs to become the Carstairs Koinonia Christian School. By 1982, the Koinonia movement was ready to start a new school without an existing core of committed families.

One of the most visionary leaders of the early Koinonia Christian School's Board was Merle Hartzler. In order to gauge the interest in nearby Olds, he held an open meeting at the Olds' Provincial Building to discuss and promote Christian Schools. There was significant interest at this meeting to form a steering committee for the purpose of starting a Christian school in Olds. This steering committee included Mike Christensen, Bill Rempel, and Andrew VanDrooven, names that were to become well known in Koinonia over the years.

The steering committee, which later became a "local board", worked closely with the Koinonia Board in developing its place to start the school. In September 1982, the school opened in the Olds First Baptist Church under the name, Olds Koinonia Christian School. Richard and Alice Harder became the first principal and teacher.

Olds Koinonia Christian School started with 39 students in grades 1-12. As with the other Koinonia schools, the curriculum consisted of Alpha Omega Publications' Lifepacs, which allowed a small school to offer all grades.

OKCS decided to add an outreach component to its admissions policy by admitting some non-Christians. This outreach experiment did not work well, and outreach has not happened through admissions in Koinonia schools since that failed experiment.

Over the years, OKCS developed into the flagship of the Koinonia movement.



Olds Koinonia Christian School

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Chapter 5: An Existing School Joins Koinonia

In the same year (1982) that the Olds Koinonia Christian School was started by the Koinonia Board, an existing Christian school joined the growing Koinonia fellowship of schools.

Innisfail Christian Academy was started in 1980 by the Innisfail Baptist Church under the leadership of Rev. Elwood Hill and Allan Rand. The school operated with a separate school Board, which was accountable to the Baptist Church Board. Judy Nelson, the current Business Administrator for Koinonia Christian Schools, was a parent and volunteer from the very beginning of this school.

The Innisfail Christian Academy had a natural connection with the Koinonia Schools because it also used the Alpha Omega Curriculum. Even though the school was operated by the Baptist Church, it attracted families from various evangelical churches.

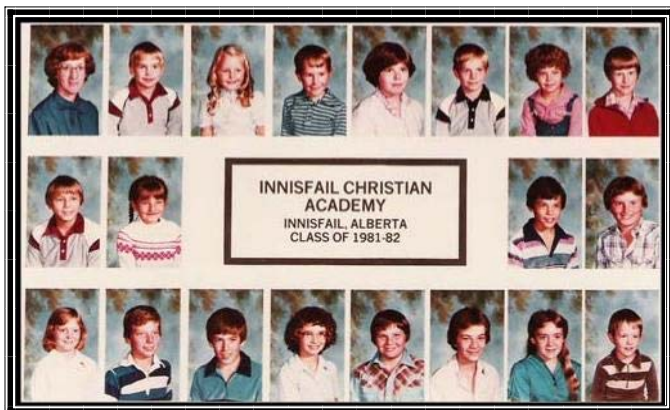
By 1982 the school had outgrown the Baptist Church and was split into two campuses, one in the Baptist Church and the other in the Pentecostal Church. Pat Pizarro was the first principal/teacher, and in 1982 Richard Beale was added as the second teacher.

Vern Rand, currently principal at Koinonia Christian School – Red Deer, was a Board member at Innisfail in 1982—1983.

The Innisfail Christian Academy was closed a few years later, and some of the families became part of the Koinonia school in Red Deer.

Many existing Christian schools have joined the Koinonia fellowship since Innisfail. In each case, these schools have recognized the strengths of support, accountability, and professionalism that may be lacking in a small, stand-alone Christian school.

This rapid expansion of Koinonia through the start of the new school in Olds and the addition of Innisfail necessitated a new organizational structure to support the Koinonia movement. We will look at the development of the school system in our next chapter.



KCS—Red Deer

1979 - 2004
Celebrating 25 Years
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Chapter 6: The First Superintendent

As the Koinonia movement gained momentum in those first three years, it became apparent to the Koinonia Board that a special kind of leader would need to be hired to guide and shape this growing fellowship of Christian schools. The Board located such a leader in Mr. Jake Penner.



Jake Penner

Jake Penner was already a recognized leader in the Alberta Christian school scene. In 1979, he became a founding Board member of the Grande Prairie Christian School. Jake was also partway through his Masters degree in the Christian school administration program at Grace Theological Seminary. Jake's older brother, Ken Penner, was the Vice President of the Grade 1-12 program at Prairie Bible Institute at that time. Several of the Koinonia leaders had attended Prairie High School and/or Prairie Bible Institute together with Jake, and had grown up with him in the Didsbury area.

The political climate made it increasingly important to develop stronger relationships with Alberta Education. Some government funding was available for schools that met certain government requirements. If the schools were to raise donations for facilities and operations they would also need to develop a legal society that could issue income tax receipts for donations.

The four Koinonia schools, Carstairs, Cremona, Olds and Innisfail agreed to share the cost of hiring Jake Penner to help them form a common school system. Through a levy of \$12.00 per student per month, the "General Board" was able to hire Jake Penner beginning in the 1982-1983 school year. The agenda for the General Board's August 23, 1982 meeting lists the name of the associations as Parkland Koinonia Christian Schools. One of the main points on the agenda was to clarify relationships of the local boards to the society.

Jake sought guidance from Dr. Harold Wengert, the President of Alpha Omega Publications to help clarify the relationship between local boards and the society as well as to more clearly derive the nature of the whole school system and his own role. Dr. Wengert advised Jake Penner in a letter dated October 29, 1982 to be "the catalyst, the innovator, the creator and the coverer" for the Koinonia ministry. In this same letter, Dr. Wengert suggested that Koinonia was developing a model that might be worth passing on to other Christian schools.

"The model that you develop in the Koinonia Ministry could be functional in many other parts of Canada and the U.S. Once you get down the road a little further you may want to publish or present the aspects of your ministry so that others could use it to carry out their own vision of starting Christian schools."

Jake Penner did pour his heart and soul into guiding the Koinonia Board in developing a school system that now is a model to the world of Christian schools.

The title "Superintendent" was chosen to make the roles more understandable to Alberta Education. In meetings that Jake Penner and the General Board had with Alberta Education, certain roles of the central society were clarified. From the government's point of view, the general board was to be the only legally responsible body and therefore the only Board. The Superintendent, under the authority of the General Board, was to be responsible for curriculum, faculty and facilities as well as for how grants were spent, for meeting government requirements and any other activities or decisions made in the schools.

In a letter to Alberta Education, dated January 23, 1984, Jake Penner invited government representatives to discuss the issue of local parental input. Jake writes, "We hope that the discussion can be directed to the practical and that conclusions can be reached that preserve the sensitive area of parental control and input."

Jake Penner served as superintendent of the Koinonia schools for 10 years.

1979 - 2004
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Chapter 7: The Koinonia Christian Education Society

One of Jake Penner's first responsibilities as superintendent was to help create the legal society that would operate the system of Koinonia Christian Schools. As already mentioned, the first name to appear on General Board meeting materials is "Parkland Koinonia Christian Schools". By the time the society was registered in 1983, the name had changed to "Central Alberta Christian Education Society", CACES for short. Over time the name changed to the current Koinonia Christian Education Society, or KCES. The acronym for this new name sounds the same as the original.

The 1983 bylaws of CACES give us insight into the passions of the early Koinonia leaders. The objectives of CACES were stated as follows:

1. *To bring glory to God.*
2. *To compliment the ministry of the Christian family.*
3. *To strengthen the ministry of the local Christian church.*
4. *To establish a system of Christian education.*
5. *To develop related ministries.*
6. *To promote personal spiritual development.*
7. *To pursue academic excellence.*
8. *To acquire lands, by purchase or otherwise, erect or otherwise provide buildings for education – ministry purposes.*
9. *To provide a meeting place for the consideration and discussion of questions affecting education and related ministries.*
10. *To provide necessary equipment and furniture for carrying on its various objectives.*
11. *To encourage, foster and develop among its members and society in general, a recognition of the absolute importance of a Bible-based education and its related ministries.*
12. *To buy, sell, manage, lease, dispose of, or otherwise deal with the property of the Society without going into interest-bearing debt.*

The establishment of a central society proved to be very useful in advancing Christian schooling. First of all, it permitted a new school to gain instant government recognition and funding. It also allowed for immediate receipting of donations. When parent groups requested help with starting a Christian school in their community, the superintendent was free of school responsibilities and could travel to help start the school. New schools could also begin with a readymade set of policies and a clear philosophy of education. Principals and teachers in new schools had access to training and networking. There was also a system of accountability that kept schools from straying too far in their decision making.

During the first five years of the central society, the Koinonia movement grew from 161 students to 254 students and two new schools, Red Deer and Airdrie, had been started.

During this time, Carstairs merged into Olds and Innisfail closed and many of the students moved to Red Deer. As a result, there were still only four schools in the system after four years. The addition of Red Deer and Airdrie expanded Koinonia outside of the original base of rural towns into small cities, which have a significant impact on the structure of the Koinonia school system.

The Koinonia Christian Schools' and the Society's head office was initially located in Jake Penner's basement with Jake's wife, Marie as secretary. Later it was located at the Mountain View Bible College and several store front locations in downtown Didsbury. Since 2002 it has been located in a modern business and professional office building called Alfred Place on the east side of Didsbury.



Marie Penner



**Present Koinonia office in Didsbury
at "Alfred Place"**

1979 - 2004
Celebrating 25 Years
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Chapter 8: Local Koinonia Societies

When Airdrie Koinonia Christian School began in September 1987, a new trend began in the Koinonia Schools. Unlike the other Koinonia schools, Airdrie began with its own society rather than with a local board operating under the legal authority of the central Koinonia board.

A healthy tension between a strong central system and strong local parent management and control had already been part of Koinonia's history. The creation of the central society, the creation of the final general board, and the hiring of the superintendent had moved Koinonia in the direction of a strong central system. The development of local school societies moved Koinonia in the direction of strong local parent input and control.

Of course this meant that the roles of the central board had to be reworked. The focus of the central board and superintendent shifted to more of a service role. As local boards took on more responsibility for their schools with the help of KCES, significant growth resulted. Three schools, Cherry Coulee, Newell and High Level, were added to the system. Total enrollment climbed from 254 in September 1987 to 611 in September 1992.



High Level



Cherry Coulee

All three of the new schools were outside of central Alberta. This eventually promoted the name change from Central Alberta Christian Education Society to Koinonia Christian Education Society. It also significantly increased the travel time for the superintendent and for general board members. While the two Southern schools could be served to some extent with day trips, High Level required extensive traveling. We will look at this new reality in the next chapter.

1979 - 2004
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Chapter 9: A Far-Flung System

In Jake Penner's final years as superintendent, he had traveled extensively to Southern and Northern Alberta to bring new schools into Koinonia. This had begun to significantly tax the KCES resources. As the schools became more independent with local societies, they also become increasingly reluctant to channel resources into the larger Koinonia school system. These challenges created the context for Koinonia's second superintendent: Dr. Dennis Punter. It was his task to lead Koinonia Christian Schools into effectively operating a far-flung school system.

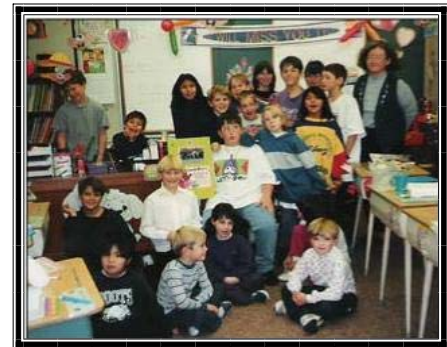


Dennis Punter

The first school to join Koinonia from outside the central region of the province was High Level Christian Academy which began in September 1992. At the same time the Koinonia Board set an ambitious mandate to add one new school to Koinonia every year for five years. High Level was shortly joined by Slave Lake in 1993, Yellowknife in 1996, Edson in 1997, and Lloydminster and Fox Creek in 1998. Lloydminster and Fox Creek operated under the Koinonia banner for just one year. Both schools closed their doors in 1999. Yellowknife closed in 2000. Cremona Koinonia Christian School which had closed in June 1996 reopened under a new structure and name as Spruce Ridge Christian School in 1997. Spruce Ridge Christian School operated for a period of 7 years, closing for good in 2004. Cornerstone Christian School in Medicine Hat took out exploratory membership in KCES during the 2002-03 school year. They joined the Koinonia family in 2003.



Slave Lake



Yellowknife

By September 1998, Koinonia had grown from its original four schools and 161 students to ten schools with an enrollment of about 940 students. While it was thrilling to see the growth in Christian education across the province, the task of assisting these schools had become quite daunting. The total distance from the Koinonia head office to all of the schools had increased from about 180 km to about 4900 km! Koinonia had become the largest school district in Canada, geographically speaking. The growth in the system was stretching resources to the breaking point. Even with the assistance of Mrs. Sharon Quantz in the role of education consultant, the task of overseeing the schools was becoming difficult.



Sharon Quantz

Dr. Punter resigned in 1998, partly due to health reasons, and Sharon Quantz, a long time Koinonia teacher, vice principal, and education consultant was hired for one year as superintendent while Koinonia re-evaluated its vision and strategies.

1979 - 2004
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Chapter 10: A Renewed Vision

By the Spring of 2000, the core leadership of the Koinonia movement was ready to move ahead with a renewed vision and commitment. The KCES Board invited Dr. Ken Penner as a consultant to help it revise the mission and ministry of KCES. In his report to the Board, he challenged them to not only look at what KCES was doing, but what it could be doing. He also challenged KCES to clarify the relationship between the KCES Board and the local school boards, which in turn would help clarify the role and authority of the superintendent. In addition he challenged the Board to identify the unique needs of the larger schools which were developing in Koinonia.



Vic Wiens

Next, the KCES Board recruited an experienced Christian school principal, Mr. Vic Wiens, to become the Koinonia superintendent. Over the next four years, the KCES Board worked with Vic Wiens to address the issues identified by Dr. Penner. In particular the relationship between the local boards and the KCES Board was being reworked through the development of Koinonia Core Policies. The creation of the Annual General Assembly has also provided a meaningful forum where the far-flung schools can provide meaningful input into decisions and policies.

Ultimately, the health of the Koinonia movement will depend on the hundreds of parents and teachers across Koinonia catching a new sense of the Koinonia vision. This new goal of the Koinonia vision is beginning to happen, and we trust that this 25th year celebration will encourage it.

So what is the Koinonia vision? The two specific objectives in the KCES Bylaws articulate it well:

“To encourage, foster and develop among its members and society in general, recognition of the absolute importance of a Bible-based education...”

and,

To complement the ministry of the Christian family and to strengthen the ministry of the local Christian church by establishing a system of Christian schools and related ministries.”

Are you sold on this vision?

Addendum to:
**Celebrating 25 Years
of the Koinonia Movement**

2004-2005

After the resignation of Vic Wiens as superintendent in the spring of 2004, the need for a superintendent was addressed by the formation of the “SuperTeam” which consisted of 3 experienced Koinonia principals whose time was contracted from their schools by KCES. Vern Rand (KCSR) was the acting superintendent and worked 30% time. Brian Hazeltine (AKCS) and Dave Thomas (GPCS) each worked 15% time. This provided KCES with 60% superintendent time which improved the budget bottom line while also giving the schools in every region of the province a superintendent presence thereby reducing travel time drastically. The SuperTeam concept is also valuable when there are difficult issues to deal with because the members are able to consult with one another before making far-reaching decisions.

2005-2006

After leaving the Koinonia system for a few years, Newell Christian School rejoined in 2005 under the leadership of Ron Cousins.

Also in 2005, Olds Koinonia Christian School made the decision to become an alternate Christian school within the Chinooks Edge School Division. This was a difficult decision for them since it involved ending their membership in KCES. It was difficult for KCES because Olds was the largest school in the system.

2006-2007

With the resignation of Dave Thomas from GPCS and the SuperTeam, Vern Rand and Brian Hazeltine continued as the SuperTeam members overseeing the northern and southern schools.

The Exploratory Membership provision that KCES offers has not been used often over the years. However, during the 2006-2007 school year, Cornerstone Christian School from Kingman, AB made use of it in order to give membership in KCES a trial run. In the end, they decided not to join KCES but became an alternate program within the public school division instead.

At the end of the 2007 school year and after 20 years at Airdrie, Brian Hazeltine resigned as principal at AKCS and as a part of the SuperTeam.

2007-2008

In the fall of 2007, the SuperTeam was restructured with Vern Rand as Koinonia Superintendent (25% time) and Garry Anderson as Associate Superintendent (40% time). Vern oversaw the northern schools while Garry oversaw the south.

It was becoming evident that NorthStar Academy was having more and more difficulty in balancing its budget. Charging tuition is impossible because of the fact that there are several fully funded on-line programs already available. Golden Hills School Division approached KCES about taking over NSA as an alternate on-line school while allowing KCES to maintain complete control over the courses and the Christian content. This arrangement began in September, 2007.

Another of our schools became an alternate program in 2007 – Grande Prairie Christian School took the same route as Olds Koinonia and left the Koinonia system.

2008-2009

Throughout the 2008-09 school year, KCES worked diligently with a parent group attempting to start a school at Killam.

2009-2010

Living Truth Christian School at Killam opened their doors in September 2009 as the newest Koinonia school with 30 students. Justin Amthor was hired as principal.