Seeking God's Will: The Nature of Christian Spiritual Discernment and the Role it Plays in Christian School Board Decision Making

Paul Ian Arthur Campey

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree:

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

School of Arts and Business, Avondale University

Principal Supervisor: Associate Professor Seedwell T.M. Sithole

Associate Supervisor: Dr Warrick Long

Associate Supervisor: Associate Professor Lisa Barnes

July 2026

Statement of Original Authorship

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted previously for a degree or diploma at this institution, an Australian or overseas university or any other institution of higher education. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signed __

Date _____ 9 April 2026_____

Copyright Statement

I grant to Avondale University the rights to archive in Avondale's library, and to make available my thesis in whole or in part for study now and in the future. I retain all proprietary rights. I also retain the right to use in future works all or part of this thesis.

Signed _[redacted]

Date _____ 9 April 2026_____

Copyright © 2026. This manuscript version is made available under the CC-BY-NC 4.0 license http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank several people for the encouragement, support and contribution to this research journey:

My Supervising Team. To Associate Professor Seedwell T.M. Sithole, Dr Warrick Long, Associate Professor Lisa Barnes and Professor Kevin Petrie (who supervised the study during its early stages): Thank you for your encouragement and advice along the journey and for persevering with someone who is not an academic! Thank you also for the complete change in direction of my research that has resulted in, I believe, a far richer and more impactful work for the cause of Christian education than the research I initially started with.

Dr Peter Morey for his assistance not only with the statistical side of the study, but also for his advice and input that helped shape the direction of this research.

David Bartlett, my fellow co-founder of Resolve Consulting Group, who encouraged me in this research and, for over 21 years, has always challenged my thinking on the integration of Christian faith in all we do, as we have sought to provide authentic governance, leadership and financial solutions to Christian organisations around the world. Thanks also for being a great mate for over 30 years!

Mike Epp, Dr David Wilcox and the Global Council of the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), who explored the use of group Christian Spiritual Discernment early in my research journey and showed just what impact it can have in the decision-making process and the outcomes for a Christian organisation.

Meredith Harmer, for her creative and design assistance in the development of the Discernment Tree and as someone who holds deeply to the importance of intentional spiritual discernment.

Tanya Pampuch, for her excellent work in professionally editing and polishing this dissertation to better communicate the results of the research and its findings.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the following people who have helped shape the person I am today:

To my wife Lynne, whose love, patience, encouragement and support over many years has allowed me to undertake not only this PhD but has also enabled me to be available to support and learn from so many Christian schools and organisations across Australia and all around the world. I couldn't have done all of this without you!

Second, my two daughters, Eleanor and Rachael, who missed out on having Dad at home for many, many nights while they were growing up, as I travelled the world working with Christian schools. Now that they are grown and pursuing their own lives, vital ministries and growing their own families; I am blessed beyond measure to see the next chapter of our family following God's will.

Finally, this research is dedicated to the many amazing men and women in Australia, New Zealand and beyond who commit themselves daily to serve God tirelessly in the ministry of Christian schooling. Whether they be members of school boards, Principals, leaders in schools, classroom teachers or people working in a range of support roles. The inspiration I have drawn from you as you seek God's will in your work is what has motivated me to examine more closely the important area of decision making in Christian school governance and the discerning of God's will in the making of those decisions.

I pray that this research and its findings are a blessing to those who seek God's kingdom first in the leadership and governance of Christian schools.

Acknowledgement of Funding Source

Funding for the research project reported in this thesis was received from Avondale University in the form of a fee-waiver scholarship for the entirety of the study from 2020 to 2026.

Abstract

Christian schools have grown rapidly over the past 50 years, in terms of the number of schools and their student population, yet there has been very limited research on Christian school boards and no research could be found on the integration of faith or the use of Christian spiritual discernment in the decision making of those boards.

The importance of integrating Christian faith in all aspects of the operation of a Christian school was a cornerstone in the foundation of the modern Christian schooling movement in Australia and New Zealand from the 1960s and 1970s onwards. In an environment of rapid change and ever-increasing compliance requirements for school boards, it is easy for boards to become focused on compliance and regulatory issues as they seek to meet the requirements of regulators. The pressure from this professionalisation can lead to matters of faith, and Christian spiritual discernment practices specifically, being pushed to the edges of the agenda of a board meeting rather than being central to their decision making.

This mixed methods study found that the implementation of Christian spiritual discernment by boards was positively correlated with the higher the enrolment of a school, the numeric size of the school's board and also where the board stops and prays in the midst of decision making. The study demonstrated that the activities in an actual board meeting are critical; specifically as they relate to the use of prayer and Scripture, enabling the implementation of Christian spiritual discernment. The findings indicated that an important element for decision making was the board member's character, skills and experience, as well as the individual preparation they undertook prior to a board meeting. The research also showed that a positive impact arose for boards utilising Christian spiritual discernment in decision making, and in its absence, board decisions deteriorate in quality.

Table of Contents

Statement of Original Authorship ii

Copyright Statement iii

Acknowledgements iv

Dedication v

Acknowledgement of Funding Source vi

Abstract vii

Table of Contents viii

List of Tables xvi

List of Figures xix

List of Appendices xx

Abbreviations xxi

Chapter 1 Introduction 22

1.1 Research Problem 22

1.2 The Research Questions 24

1.3 The Study and Its Context 25

1.3.1 Context: Schooling 25

1.3.2 Context: Christian School Governance 32

1.3.3 Christian Spiritual Discernment 33

1.4 Purpose 34

1.5 Thesis Outline 35

1.6 Summary 36

Chapter 2 Literature Review 37

2.1 Introduction 37

2.2 Christian Spiritual Discernment 37

2.2.1 Defining Discernment 37
2.2.2 Defining Christian Spiritual Discernment 38
2.2.3 Group Christian Spiritual Discernment 42
2.3 Board Governance 48
2.3.1 Governance and Organisational Effectiveness 51
2.4 School Governance 53
2.5 Christian Organisation Governance 54
2.6 Christian School Governance 57
2.6.1 Mission Directed Governance Model 58
2.6.2 Effective Practices of Christian School Boards 60
2.7 Governance Principles 62
2.8 Theoretical Frameworks for Research on Governance 65
2.8.1 Agency Theory 65
2.8.2 Group/Decision Process Theory 66
2.8.3 Institutional Theory 66
2.8.4 Resource Dependency Theory 67
2.8.5 Stakeholder Theory 68
2.8.6 Stewardship Theory 69
2.8.7 Justice Stewardship Theory 70
2.8.8 Summary of Research Theories of Governance 71
2.9 Summary 73
Chapter 3 Methodology 75
3.1 Introduction 75
3.2 Methodology: The Conceptual Framework 76
3.3 Philosophical Orientation 76

3.3.1 Positivism 77
3.3.2 Critical Realism 77
3.3.3 Interpretivism 78
3.3.4 Postmodernism 79
3.3.5 Pragmatism 80
3.4 Research Design 82
3.4.1 Mixed-Method Research Design 84
3.4.2 Ethical Considerations 87
3.4.3 Administration 89
3.5 Participants 92
3.5.1 Participant Selection in Phase One (Quantitative) 92
3.5.2 Participant Selection in Phase Two (Qualitative) 94
3.6 Data Collection 97
3.6.1 Phase One: Online Survey 98
3.6.2 Phase Two: Interviews 101
3.7 Summary 105
Chapter 4 Research Phase One: Quantitative Survey Results and Analysis 106
4.1 Introduction 106
4.2 The Survey Instrument 107
4.3 Data Collection 108
4.4 Survey Analysis: Demographic Data 109
4.4.1 Position Currently Held (Question 21) 110
4.4.2 Time in Current Position (Question 22) 111
4.4.3 Age of School (Question 23) 112
4.4.4 Size of School (Question 24) 113

4.4.5 Country in Which the School is Located (Question 25) 115
4.4.6 Location of the School (Question 26) 115
4.4.7 Affiliation of the School (Question 27) 117
4.5 Survey Analysis: Board Structure and Processes 118
4.5.1 Board Size (Question 16) 119
4.5.2 Maximum Board Size (Question 17) 121
4.5.3 Comparison of Current Board Size with Maximum Board Size 122
4.5.4 Board Mean Vacancy by Enrolment Numbers 124
4.5.5 Board Meeting Frequency (Question 18) 125
4.5.6 Board Meeting Frequency by Enrolments 126
4.5.7 Board Meeting Duration (Question 19) 127
4.5.8 Board Meeting Duration by Enrolments 128
4.5.9 Average Total Time in Board Meetings 129
4.5.10 Average Total Time in Board Meetings Per Annum by Enrolments 130
4.5.11 Orientation Policy for New Board Members (Question 3) 131
4.5.12 Board Policies (Question 4) 132
4.5.13 Individual Time Spent Preparing for Board Meetings (Question 2) 134
4.5.14 Board Holds a Regular or Annual Board Retreat (Question 10) 140
4.5.15 Activities at a Board Retreat (Question 11) 141
4.5.16 Time Spent on Individual General Spiritual Activities (Question 1) 142
4.6 Survey Analysis: Board Decision Making 147
4.6.1 Process in Reaching Board Decisions (Question 5) 148
4.6.2 Nature of Votes on Board Decisions (Question 6) 149
4.6.3 Rushed in Making Board Decisions (Question 13) 150

4.6.4 Pre-disposition Towards Board Decisions at a Board Meeting (Question 12) 151

4.6.5 During Discussions of Significant Board Decisions (Question 14) 152

4.6.6 Stopping and Praying in Midst of Board Decisions (Question 15) 154

4.7 Survey Analysis: Christian Spiritual Discernment..... 155

4.7.1 Christian Spiritual Discernment Intentional Process in Board Decision Making (Question 7) 156

4.7.2 Board Meeting Practices (Question 8) 157

4.7.3 Time Spent in Board Meetings on Spiritual Activities (Question 9)..... 159

4.7.4 Individual Time Spent on Spiritual Activities..... 163

4.8 Survey Analysis: Factors with Potential Influence 167

4.8.1 Differences in Inter-relationships 168

4.8.2 Regression Analysis..... 169

4.9 Summary..... 172

Chapter 5 Research Phase Two: Qualitative Interviews Results and Analysis 175

5.1 Introduction..... 175

5.2 Sample 176

5.3 Analysis Overview 177

5.4 Question Analysis..... 178

5.4.1 Individual Practices in Preparation for a Board Meeting (Question 1)..... 178

5.4.2 Board Discussion About Individual Spiritual Development or Well-being (Question 2) 182

5.4.3 Spiritual Practices at a Board Meeting (Question 3) 185

5.4.4 Change in Board Prayerfulness or Seeking Discernment (Question 4)..... 190

5.4.5 Spiritual Practices that Should be Included in the Board's Decision Making (Question 5) 194
5.4.6 Change in Board's Spiritual Practices (Question 6) 197
5.4.7 Impact of Spiritual Discernment Practices on Board Decision Making (Question 7) 200
5.4.8 Characteristics of a Good Christian School Board (Question 8) 203
5.5 Compilation of Themes by Research Question 206
5.5.1 Introduction 206
5.5.2 Individual Christian Spiritual Discernment Practices and Processes 207
5.5.3 Board Christian Spiritual Discernment Practices and Processes 209
5.5.4 Impact on Decisions of Christian Spiritual Discernment Practices and Processes 212
5.5.5 Characteristics of a Good Christian School Board 213
5.5.6 Summary of Overall Themes 216
5.6 Synopsis of Qualitative Results 217
5.6.1 Introduction 217
5.6.2 Individual Preparation for meetings 218
5.6.3 Characteristics of Schools (Age and Size) 218
5.6.4 Christian Spiritual Discernment Practices in Board Meetings 218
5.6.5 Impact of Christian Spiritual Discernment Practices 218
5.6.6 A Good Christian School Board 219
5.7 Summary 219
Chapter 6 Discussion and Findings 221
6.1 Introduction 221
6.2 Study Orientation 222

6.3 Research Findings 223
6.3.1 Integration 223
6.3.2 Individuals' Preparation for Board Meetings 224
6.3.3 Christian Spiritual Discernment Practices in Board Meetings 227
6.3.4 Ideal Christian Spiritual Discernment Practices in Board Meetings 229
6.3.5 Challenges in Implementing Christian Spiritual Discernment in Board Meetings 230
6.3.6 Impact of Christian Spiritual Discernment in Board Decisions 232
6.3.7 A Good Christian School Board 233
6.4 Towards Greater Usage of Christian Spiritual Discernment in Christian School Board Decision Making 236
6.4.1 Tree of Discernment 238
6.4.2 Elements of the Tree of Discernment 239
6.4.3 Linking the Tree of Discernment to the Research Questions 254
6.4.4 Christian Spiritual Discernment Decision Framework 255
6.4.5 Christian Spiritual Discernment Assessment Tool 267
6.5 Challenges and Opportunities 276
6.5.1 School Board Challenges and Opportunities 277
6.5.2 School Association Challenges and Opportunities 281
6.6 Limitations of Study 283
6.7 Suggestions for Future Study 285
6.8 Summary 288
Chapter 7 Concluding Comments 289
7.1 Implementation of Findings 289
7.1.1 Theoretical Contributions 291

7.1.2 Practical Contributions 291

7.2 Dissemination of Findings 293

7.3 Final Conclusion 295

References 297

Appendices 324

List of Tables

Table 2.1 Spiritual Discernment Common Practices and Processes Linked to the Research Questions 47

Table 2.2 Comparison of Governance Standards 63

Table 2.3 Key Theories Used in Governance Research 71

Table 2.4 Research Questions and Justice Stewardship Theory 73

Table 3.1 Summary of Criteria of Candidates for Interview 96

Table 4.1 Alignment of Research Questions with Results 107

Table 4.2 Position Currently Held by Respondents 111

Table 4.3 Cumulative Length of Time in Current Role Held by Respondents 112

Table 4.4 Age of School 113

Table 4.5 Number of Students Enrolled in the School 115

Table 4.6 Country in Which the School is Located 115

Table 4.7 Location of the School 117

Table 4.8 Affiliation of the School 118

Table 4.9 Board Size 120

Table 4.10 Current Mean Board Size by Enrolments 121

Table 4.11 Maximum Board Size 122

Table 4.12 Comparison of Current versus Maximum Board Size 123

Table 4.13 Vacancy Levels per Board 124

Table 4.14 Mean Vacancy Levels by Enrolment Numbers in the School 125

Table 4.15 Board Meetings in a Typical Year 126

Table 4.16 Board Meeting Frequency by Enrolments 127

Table 4.17 Duration of a Typical Board Meeting 128

Table 4.18 Board Meeting Duration by Enrolments 129

Table 4.19 Total Average Time Spent in Typical Board Meetings in a Year 130

Table 4.20 Average Total Time Spent in Board Meetings by Enrolments in a Year 131

Table 4.21 Orientation Policy for New Board Members 132

Table 4.22 Board Policies for the Board 134

Table 4.23 Time Spent on Researching Issues 135

Table 4.24 Writing Reports 136

Table 4.25 Reading Reports..... 137

Table 4.26 Praying About Issues or Decisions 138

Table 4.27 Talking to Others About the Reports or Issues 139

Table 4.28 Thinking About Issues for the Meeting 140

Table 4.29 Board Holds a Regular/Annual Board Retreat 141

Table 4.30 Board Activities at a Regular or Annual Board Retreat..... 142

Table 4.31 Time Spent in a Month on Bible Reading or Devotions..... 143

Table 4.32 Time Spent in a Month in General Prayer..... 144

Table 4.33 Time Spent in a Month on Specific Bible Reading on Issues Before the Board.. 145

Table 4.34 Time Spent in a Typical Month, Specifically Praying About Issues Before the Board..... 147

Table 4.35 Process in Reaching Board Decisions..... 149

Table 4.36 Nature of Votes on Board Decisions 150

Table 4.37 Sense of Feeling Rushed in Making Decisions at a Board Meeting..... 151

Table 4.38 Board Members' Pre-Meeting Decision Dispositions 152

Table 4.39 Board Members' In-Meeting Decision-Making Experience..... 153

Table 4.40 Occurrence When Stopping to Pray in the Midst of Making a Board Decision..... 155

Table 4.41 Extent of Using Christian Spiritual Discernment in Board Decision Making 157

Table 4.42 Board Meeting Christian Spiritual Discernment Practices 159

Table 4.43 Opening Prayer 160

Table 4.44 Time Spent on Bible Reading or Devotions 161

Table 4.45 Prayer on Specific Decisions 162

Table 4.46 Closing Prayer 163

Table 4.47 General Bible Reading/Devotional Time per week 164

Table 4.48 General Prayer Time Per Week 165

Table 4.49 Specific Bible Reading in Relation to Issues Before the Board 166

Table 4.50 Specific Prayer in Relation to Issues Before the Board 167

Table 4.51 Regression Table of Significant Independent Variables 171

Table 5.1 Interview Questions by Research Question 175

Table 5.2 Christian Spiritual Discernment Practices and Processes Undertaken by Individuals in Preparation for Board Meetings 207

Table 5.3 Christian Spiritual Discernment Practices and Processes undertaken in Board Meetings 209

Table 5.4 Impact of Christian Spiritual Discernment Practices and Processes on Decisions in Board Meetings 212

Table 5.5 Characteristics of a Good Christian School Board 214

Table 5.6 Summary of Overall Themes Linked to the Research Questions 217

Table 6.1 Total Time Spent in Board Meeting Preparation by the Majority of Board Members 224

Table 6.2 Linkage of the Research Questions to Each Element of the Tree of Discernment 255

Table 6.3 Christian Spiritual Discernment Decision Framework 256

List of Figures

Figure 3.1 Concurrent Quantitative and Qualitative Mixed Methods Design Logic 85

Figure 6.1 The Tree of Discernment 238

Figure 6.2 Ministry Style 271

Figure 6.3 Purpose Heart 272

Figure 6.4 Biblical Agenda 274

Figure 6.5 Christian Spiritual Discernment Integration 276

List of Appendices

Appendix A Approval Letter from the Human Research Ethics Committee, Avondale University 324

Appendix B Initial Email to Associations and Email for Associations to Forward to Member Schools 326

Appendix C: Consent to Distribution of Link to Quantitative Survey 328

Appendix D: Quantitative Survey Questions 331

Appendix E Information Statement for Research Participants 344

Appendix F Qualitative Interview Consent Form 347

Appendix G Qualitative Interview Questions 348

Appendix H Research Dissemination Activities 355

Abbreviations

List of principal abbreviations in text

ACE	Accelerated Christian Education
ACNC	Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission
ACS	Associated Christian Schools
ACSI	Association of Christian Schools International
ASA	Adventist Schools Australia
ATO	Australian Taxation Office
CCS	Christian Community Schools
CEN	Christian Education National
CPCS	Christian Parent Controlled Schools
CSA	Christian Schools Australia
K-12	Kindergarten to Year 12 School (i.e. primary and secondary school)
NZACS	New Zealand Association for Christian Schools

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Christian schooling in Australia and New Zealand has grown rapidly over the past 50 years (Buckingham, 2010; New Zealand Government, 2020), both in terms of the number of schools and the number of students within those schools, such that Christian schools now represent a significant part of the Australian and New Zealand educational landscape, which at the same time has become increasingly complex. A central tenet in the formation of modern Christian schools is the integration of Christian faith in all aspects of the school's teaching, operations and management, including the governance of the schools. Despite the centrality of Christianity to Christian school operations, there has been little research on how the Christian faith and its related practices inform decision making at a board level.

1.1 Research Problem

The centrality of the Christian faith in all aspects of a Christian School is an important distinctive for schools, however, in the environment of complex, rapid change and ever-increasing compliance requirements for Christian school boards, there is pressure on school boards to be increasingly focused on the compliance and regulatory aspects of their role as they seek to implement professional governance processes as required by regulators. This increasing regulatory focus may come at the expense of time spent focussing on the mission of the school and ensuring faith is integrated in all aspects of the board's operations. The desire of Christian school boards to seek God's will in their group decision making, in the complex area of school governance, and the utilisation of spiritual discernment in the making of those decisions does not appear to have been a common field of research, Following a detailed global literature search, no equivalent studies appear to have been undertaken in relation to K-12 Christian schools with a focus on the Christian faith aspects of primary and secondary Christian school governance. The closest similar research was completed in

respect of Christian higher education institutions in the United States of America (Barbee, 2019) with no other studies identified on Christian spiritual discernment in board decision making. There has been little empirical research on Christian school boards generally and the integration of Christian faith in the decision making of those boards. Therefore there appears to be a gap in the research that requires futher examination.

Due to the increasing compliance load on school boards generally, a conflict may arise for Christian school boards that, rather than being a key aspect of board decision making, the integration of faith in school governance operations is effectively pushed to the edges of the agenda of Christian school board meetings. The integration of faith in all aspects of a school's governance, leadership and operations was seen as central in the foundation and development of the modern Christian schools movement (Fisher, 2012). A lack of integration of faith in board operations and not seeking God's will in the making of board decisions is likely to be problematic to the purpose of the school's ethos and existence.

The intentional structuring and the setting aside of time to focus on seeking God's will is not a new concept for Christians, but a theme throughout the Bible that Christians seek to implement in their lives, with key Bible passages exhorting Christians to be transformed by the renewing of their minds so that they can discern will of God (Romans 12: 2). Throughout Christian history, key movements that have focused on such discernment have included one founded by St Ignatius in the early 17th century, where a series of spiritual exercises were developed to assist individuals in the discernment of God's will for their lives (Burton et al., 2023; Morris & Olsen, 1997). The Quakers (also known as the Religious Society of Friends) was founded in the United Kingdom in the 17th century and focuses on group discernment processes including the use of silence in worship and business meetings, working towards decisions through unity, group discussions and consensus building in developing a sense of the meetings, and perceiving together God's will for the issue being

decided upon (Burton et al., 2023; Morley, 2023; Velayutham, 2013). There have been a number of more modern authors who have written books on the subject of spiritual discernment using a variety of discernment concepts and practices designed to assist individuals and groups in the undertaking of intentional discernment processes, though these books tend to be theological works or based on experience rather than being focused on empirical research (Barton, 2012b; Benefiel, 2005; Farnham et al., 1996; Fendall et al., 2007; Liebert, 2015; Warner, 2016).

The research problem that is the subject of this study, is the examination of the nature of Christian spiritual discernment and the role it plays in the decision making of Christian school boards in Australia and New Zealand. The study focuses on those who govern and lead Christian schools, being board chairs, board members and Principals of Christian schools.

1.2 The Research Questions

The aim of this study is to gain an understanding of the individual and group practices in relation to the implementation of Christian spiritual discernment by decision makers in Christian schools in Australia and New Zealand, as well as the impact of those Christian spiritual discernment practices on the decisions of Christian school boards.

This study explores the experiences and perceptions of three key stakeholder groups that participate in Christian school board decisions: board chairs, board members and school Principals. Members of these three stakeholder groups have differing roles in the decision-making process of boards; the board chair being the facilitator of decision making, board members as participants in decision making and Principals as the provider of the majority of data and information upon which decisions are based.

The study is directed at the following research questions (RQ):

RQ 1. What Christian spiritual discernment practices do individuals (board chair, board members and Principals) undertake in relation to the governance of Christian school boards in Australia and New Zealand? This question focuses on the preparation for meetings and the activities undertaken by the individuals concerned outside the context of a board meeting in relation to the issues that will be considered at a board meeting when they gather as a group.

RQ 2. What Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes do Christian school boards collectively undertake in relation to the governance of schools in Australia and New Zealand? This question focuses on the practices and processes undertaken during a board meeting in relation to the issues being considered.

RQ 3. How do Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes influence the decision making in the governance of Christian schools in Australia and New Zealand? This question focuses on the impact that Christian spiritual discernment practices have on the decisions made by Christian school boards.

RQ 4. What makes a good Christian school board? This question enables interview participants to provide insights into what Christian school boards aspire to be like from a more general governance and operational perspective, as well as provide additional relevant information that may not have been identified in the previous three specific Christian spiritual discernment-focused research questions.

1.3 The Study and Its Context

This study explores the nature of Christian spiritual discernment and its role in the decision making of Christian school boards in Australia and New Zealand.

1.3.1 Context: Schooling

Education in Australia is delivered in four sectors (Brinton, 2025):

1. Preschool education (non-compulsory and typically for ages three to five years old).

2. Compulsory primary and secondary school education (typically for ages 5 to 18 years old) with three main types of school: government (operated by the respective state or territory governments), Catholic systemic, and independent, with the latter two types collectively known as the non-government sector.
3. Post-school vocational education and training (such as the publicly funded technical and further education (TAFE) colleges and other private providers.
4. Tertiary education consisting of public and private universities plus other accredited higher education providers.

A key differentiator for independent schools from state and territory government schools and Catholic Systemic schools is that independent schools are autonomous and self-managing (Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2020), while government and Catholic systemic schools have central bodies controlling a large number of schools. This autonomy occurs in the context of appropriate accountability structures as outlined by Independent Schools Council of Australia (2020):

- Governance structures
- A Principal with accountability for day-to-day operations
- A well-developed regulatory environment (including state education authorities, Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission [ACNC] and the Australian Taxation Office [ATO])
- Educational accountability through the Department of Education in each school's respective state
- Financial accountability through the Commonwealth Department of Education.

Christian faith-based schooling began in Australia with the construction of the first Church of England (Anglican) church building and schoolhouse in Sydney in 1793 by Chaplain Richard Johnson. All schools in the Australian colonies operated by various church

dioceses and religious orders, predominantly the Church of England (Anglican) and the Roman Catholic Church, until 1848 when the Anglican Church passed the majority of their schools to the various colonial authorities (now state governments) around Australia (Piggin & Lindner, 2018). The Anglican Church retained only a limited number of its schools, which became the core of the independent sector of schools, which, over time, have tended to serve the wealthier elements of Australian society (Chesters, 2019). The Roman Catholic Church retained its schools, and as of 2024, there are 18.6% of total Australian students in Catholic systemic schools (Independent Schools Australia, 2025).

Less than 40 years after the Anglican Church handed control for most of its schools to the State Governments, the first Seventh-day Adventist missionaries arrived in Australia, and within 13 years, they had established their first school in 1892, the Avondale School for Christian Workers (Lloyd, 2022; McIver, 2017). As a small denomination with less than 500 members (McIver, 2017), the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church saw the importance of having schools with a focus that in their studies the image of God may be restored to the soul of the students, and to ensure that the philosophy in the Adventist movement was passed onto its children (McIver, 2017).

By the 1970s, and on into the 1980s and 1990s, there was a growing sense among individual evangelical protestant churches and Christian parents more broadly that there were increasingly damaging impacts on children from schooling “that lacked positive Christian values” (Frisken, 2011, p. 83). There was also a sense that the traditional Anglican schools had drifted from their original mission of the civic and spiritual development of young people to become corporate schools (Sandeman, 2024). Arising from this discontent came the development of a new type of Christian school that focused on the centrality of Christ in all aspects of the school’s governance, leadership and operation (Fisher, 2012). The need to focus on the centrality of Christ was seen as a key principle by the founders and governing

boards of those schools in seeking to discern the will of God in the establishment of the vision and direction for the school (Fisher, 2012). The advent of the new Christian schooling movement was predominantly driven by groups of Christian parents or individual church congregations, with support being provided in Australia through the work of three main organisations: Christian Community Schools (CCS), Christian Parent Controlled Schools (CPCS) and the US-based Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) (Frisken, 2011). Each of these groups focused on a particular emphasis or style of education; CCS focused on schools as a ministry of a local church, CPCS focused on Christian parents operating the schools following the mandate that the education of children is a parental responsibility, and ACE focused on home-schooling that utilised a card based, distance education style system that did not require professional teachers in classrooms.

When discussing the focus of Adventist schools, McIver (2017) highlights that from the very outset, the Adventist schools had a similar focus to the modern Christian schools; seeing God as integral to all studies and also to be evangelical in nature. The importance of remaining true to mission and guarding against institutional drift, as well as seeing schools as crucial to the growth and health of the church, is common between Adventist schools and the broader Christian schools movement. Due to the commonality of purpose, vision and values, as well as the desire to seek to follow God's leading in all aspects of education, the subject schools in this study will be referred to by the single collective term, Christian schools.

Christian schools are a type of independent school and, at the time of this research, form a key element of the independent sector after only being founded in the 1970s and growing rapidly through the 1980s, 1990s and into the 2000s. According to Independent Schools Australia (2025), Christian schools represented 13% of the total enrolments in the Independent Schools sector in 2024, with up to a potential 28% more when adding in other classifications, provided in the data from Independent Schools Australia, that include

Christian schools such as non-denominational, Baptist, interdenominational, Seventh-day Adventist, Presbyterian, Pentecostal and Assemblies of God. The rapid growth in the independent schooling sector has coincided with the modern Christian schooling movement, which commenced in Australia during the mid-1970s (Frisken, 2011) and on through the 1980s and 1990s with a dramatic growth in the number of schools and students within them. Christian schools have accounted for 18% of the additional students in the Independent Sector between 2019 and 2024, with Independent Schools now accounting for 18% of all students enrolled in Australian schools (Independent Schools Australia, 2025).

From a historical viewpoint, while the modern Christian schools movement around the world is quite young, the very first Christian schools pre-date denominations, missions and Sunday schools, commencing in the first centuries of Christianity (Kienel, 1998) approximately 2000 years ago. The reasons for the commencement of those early Christian schools had much in common with the modern Christian schools in relation to parental concerns about the prevailing school educational landscape. In terms of overall operation of schools, the global movement of Christian schools is the second oldest in the Western world, only to Jewish schools (Kienel, 1998).

The journey of schooling development in New Zealand has been parallel to the development of schooling in Australia. The historical foundations of education in New Zealand were Church-based village schools upon the colonisation of New Zealand in the 1840s; the development of a secular government school system in the 1870s, and then the development of a new movement of Evangelical Christian schools during the period of the 1970s to 1990s (New Zealand Association for Christian Schools, 2025a). This new movement of schools in New Zealand arose due to the same issues as those taking place in Australia, with the growing concerns by Christian parents about the direction and policy of government schools (New Zealand Association for Christian Schools, 2025a).

There are now over 65 Christian schools in New Zealand with a biblical Christian distinctive with an enrolment of approximately 13,000 students (New Zealand Association for Christian Schools, 2025a). Many of the New Zealand Christian schools are non-denominational in nature and do not have a special connection with any particular church. During the 1990s, approximately half of the Christian schools in New Zealand became integrated for funding purposes with the state school system, though with a special, clearly defined Christian character and the retention of independent governance, though within the overall staffing and operational restrictions of a government school (New Zealand Association for Christian Schools, 2025a).

There are five main associations of Christian schools in Australia and New Zealand that have all agreed to assist in this research through the distribution of links to the quantitative survey. Each group has its own distinct history, theological underpinnings and flavour, which shape the schools it assisted in commencing, as well as the type and style of its current member schools to which it provides ongoing support. The boards and Principals of these schools are the respondents in this research.

Adventist Schools Australia (ASA). The first Adventist school commenced in Australia in 1892 (Lloyd, 2022) and there are currently 48 schools and 13 early learning services across Australia, educating nearly 17,000 students and young people (Adventist Education Australia, 2025), the majority of whom are in regional and rural areas. ASA is unique among the groups participating in the research in being a denominationally based system of schools where the schools are controlled relatively centrally through a series of state-based school companies. Therefore, each school does not have a separate board and independent governance in the same way as the majority of the schools that are members of the other four associations.

Associated Christian Schools (ACS) was established in Queensland in 2008 as a "friendship of Australian Christian Educators" and currently serves 45 independent schools that educate 30,000 students (Associated Christian Schools, 2025b), with student numbers growing by 4% annually in the past ten years (Associated Christian Schools, 2025a). The typical ACS member school is independent, often with Pentecostal or Baptist Church roots, tends to be large in size, and located in metropolitan and large regional centres.

Christian Education National (CEN) was established in 1966 as Christian Parent Controlled Schools and has a heritage in the Dutch Reformed Christian schools movement in Holland. CEN draws members from every state in Australia, educating approximately 25,000 students (Christian Education National, 2025a) in a diverse range of schools including remote, rural, large metropolitan, multi-campus, trade training and school systems (Christian Education National, 2025c). CEN member schools are generally governed by an independent school board with board members drawn from the parent community of the school.

Christian Schools Australia (CSA). CSA's predecessor organisation, Christian Community Schools (CCS), was established in 1976 with the foundation of the first CCS school as a ministry of a local Baptist Church in Sydney. CCS experienced rapid growth during the 1980's and 1990's with the commencement of independent Christian schools across Australia, predominantly as ministries of local Baptist and Pentecostal churches. In 2002, CSA began operations following discussions with a number of like-minded associations to come together. CSA is currently the largest association of Christian schools in Australia, with member schools educating 86,000 students at around 200 locations across Australia (Christian Schools Australia, 2025c).

New Zealand Association of Christian Schools (NZACS) commenced in 1977 after a number of meetings of existing Christian schools and parties interested in starting Christian schools in New Zealand. This followed on from the initial establishment of modern Christian

schools in New Zealand from the mid-1960s by Christians from a Dutch Reformed heritage. During the 1990s, half of the Christian schools in New Zealand became integrated with the state system based on their special Christian character, which enabled a significant increase in the funding received by the school under the terms of their integration agreement without state interference in respect of the day-to-day operations of the schools as they carry out their Christian purpose. NZACS currently has 65 full member schools educating 13,000 students in schools of all sizes and locations across New Zealand (New Zealand Association for Christian Schools, 2025a).

The commonality in heritage, church history and general history for Australia and New Zealand, including the development of their educational systems, significant government funding that supports parental choice in schools and the common reasons for and the timing of the development of the Christian school movements, enables ready comparison and common research to be undertaken of Christian schools in the two countries. Expanding the study of Christian schools to two countries that are similar, though separate, will enable a better understanding of the role of spiritual discernment in decision making by Christian school boards and how this may differ between nations.

1.3.2 Context: Christian School Governance

The majority of the new type of Christian schools established from the 1960s and 1970s onwards were governed by Christian parents and other Christian people passionate about the ministry of Christian schooling, though without the structures and resources that were generally present in older, more established schools (Frisken, 2011). The economic base of Christian schools has traditionally been focused on the lower and middle socio-economic strata of society, and when most schools first began, there was little focus on good business principles (Fisher, 2012). As the schools grew and matured, many lessons were learned (and re-learned), over a number of years, as board members learned more about their role, the

purpose and role of the School board, and how they should relate to the Principal (Fisher, 2012). All of this occurred against a background of increasing complexity and compliance, as well as schools rapidly growing from small to large organisations, catering for the needs of thousands of students. It is under this increasingly demanding governance background that board chairs, board members and Principals of Christian schools in Australia and New Zealand are to be researched.

The governance structure within Seventh-day Adventist schools is different to what is common in the broader modern Christian schools movement. Seventh-day Adventist schools are part of a denominational structure with each state in Australia having a number of schools accountable to a single incorporated body as a system authority for that state, with its own board of directors and often some form of a local advisory committee at each school location for the Principal (McIver, 2017). The wider Christian schools movement, however, generally has each school in a separately incorporated entity with its own board of directors taking the governance role for that entity. An emerging trend over the past five to ten years has been the growth of multi school organisations, whereby individual Christian schools gather into groups of schools to enable them to meet the increasingly complex governance, leadership, business and compliance requirements of schools with one board being the governing group for all the schools in their group (St Philips Christian Education Foundation, 2025). The purpose and overall role of the boards between the different types of governance structures of schools is the same, although the means through which it is carried out varies in scale and authority structure in each type of organisation.

1.3.3 Christian Spiritual Discernment

The governing boards of Christian schools are the highest decision makers in the school organisation with a fiduciary duty to ensure their organisation complies with the significant legal obligations it must meet, including compliance with the Corporations Act

2001, Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC), Australian Taxation Office (ATO) and Departments of Education (state and commonwealth) among other statutory obligations. Additionally, the board is responsible for ensuring the school achieves its overall purpose and mission, and given the faith integration that is core to the existence of the school, boards set out to follow the will of God in their decision making (Fisher, 2012). In order to deal with the many competing ideas and pressures in seeking God's will, decision making groups, such as boards, are best served through a deliberate process of Christian spiritual discernment in helping to discern what this will is. In this process of Christian spiritual discernment, boards seek to recognise and respond to the presence and activity of God relative to the issues they face and make decisions in response to where God is leading them (Barton, 2012b).

1.4 Purpose

This study is designed to examine the nature of Christian spiritual discernment, the ways in which Christian school boards undertake Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes in their decision making and the impact that these practices and processes have on their decisions as a board.

This study makes a contribution to, and adds valuable insight into, the integration of faith in the decision-making processes of Christian school boards through the implementation of Christian spiritual discernment practices so as to better align with the school's overall Purpose and Vision. It does this by examining the practices and processes of individuals in their preparation for board meetings, the examination of Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes used during board meetings in making decisions, and the impact that Christian spiritual discernment practices have on the decisions made by Christian school boards. Additionally, the research examines the question, "what makes a good Christian school board?" The research is practical in nature and examines the lived experience of the

participants in board decision making, referring to common theological beliefs and traditions that shape the way Christian schools, Christian school boards and individuals approach decision making practices. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods are utilised to explore the research questions and seek participants' perceptions, perspectives and application of Christian spiritual discernment at an individual and group level. The quantitative survey, by its nature, is broad-based but designed to obtain detailed information on the Christian spiritual discernment practices used, which in turn is subject to rigorous quantitative analysis. The qualitative interview sample is smaller than the quantitative pool of respondents, enabling a more in-depth examination of the themes relating to Christian spiritual discernment and its application.

1.5 Thesis Outline

This thesis consists of seven chapters. This chapter has articulated the purpose of this research, defined the research questions, the aims of the research and outlined the significance of the study. Chapter 2 will explore the relevant literature in relation to Christian schools, school governance and Christian spiritual discernment. Chapter 3 will outline the conceptual framework for the research methodology, and include a discussion of the research design, participants and data collection. Chapter 4 will examine the results and analysis of phase one of the research, being a quantitative survey of board chairs, board members and Principals of Christian schools in Australia and New Zealand. Chapter 5 will explore the themes arising from phase two of the research, being a series of qualitative interviews with board chairs, board members and Principals of Christian schools in Australia and New Zealand. Chapter 6 will integrate the research findings from both the phase one and phase two findings, identifying challenges and opportunities for Christian schools and Christian school associations, providing three practical tools arising from the research to assist Christian school boards in the greater implementation of Christian spiritual discernment in

their decision making. The three tools include a graphical representation of the key elements of a Christian school board relating to the best usage of Christian spiritual discernment, a Christian Spiritual Discernment Decision Framework as a process for Christian school boards to utilise in their decision making and a Christian Spiritual Discernment Assessment Tool to enable Christian school boards to assess what type of board they are, and the areas for improvement if they aspire to greater use of Christian spiritual discernment in their decision making. Chapter 7 will outline the proposed means of implementation and dissemination of research findings.

1.6 Summary

This chapter provides an introduction to the research study being undertaken and the gap in empirical research in relation to Christian school boards, specifically regarding the integration of Christian faith in board decision making. Chapter 1 outlines the research problem as the study of the nature of Christian spiritual discernment and the role it plays in the decision making of Christian school boards. This problem is addressed by four research questions that examine the practices and processes of individuals involved in the decision making of the board, the practices and processes undertaken by the board when it meets together, how these practices influence the board's decisions, and, more generally, what makes a good Christian school board.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The chapter reviews the literature on a number of key topics: initially the review examines literature on Spiritual Discernment both at and individual and group level, the literature review then focusses on governance as it relates to boards more broadly and not-for-profit organisations, independent schools, Christian organisations and Christian schools specifically. The final phase of the literature review explores theoretical frameworks for research in governance.

The overall literature shows that long-term sustainability of any organisation, including schools, is strongly influenced by the effectiveness of the organisation's governance, and school boards are increasingly recognising their critical role in a changing and competitive marketplace for educational services (Curry et al., 2018).

2.2 Christian Spiritual Discernment

This section of the literature review informs Research Questions 1, 2 and 3 by examining literature on individual and group Christian spiritual discernment practices relevant to decision making in faith-based contexts such as the Board of a Christian school.

2.2.1 Defining Discernment

As can been seen in the following literature review, discernment does not have a single common definition and is also complex in its implementation and execution as part of a decision-making process, especially in a group setting. The Macquarie Dictionary defines discernment as the "faculty of discerning; discrimination; acuteness of judgement" or the "act of discerning" with the root word of discern as meaning "to perceive by sight or some other sense or by the intellect" included in the notes is the concept of "discriminating between good and bad" (Macquarie University, 1985). The Merriam-Webster Dictionary and the Cambridge

Dictionary provide simpler definitions for discernment as “1. the quality of being able to grasp and comprehend what is obscure” and “2. the act of perceiving something” (Merriam-Webster, 2025), while Cambridge defines it as “the ability to judge people and things well” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2025). The lack of commonality in definitions provides an indicator of the complex nature of discernment, however, each of the dictionary definitions align with the required work of a school board, in making choices and decisions, exercising judgement, while the decisions to be made are in relation to people and matters within the school. The issues the board examines are often obscure and complex, requiring the use of perception rather than just facts in the reaching of a decision.

Burton et al. (2023) describe discernment as an approach to decision making that integrates emotions, feelings and perceptions that is a “process of entwined individual unlearning and collective relearning” (p. 680) where individuals need to set aside their own opinions and ideas, being open to new ways of seeing issues and then in a group setting creating new meanings and a new dialog in the making of decisions. While Burton approaches discernment as a purely secular process, he acknowledges that the processes and practices of discernment utilised, even in a non-Christian setting, have deep spiritual roots drawing on the Ignatian tradition of individual discernment and the Quaker tradition for group discernment (Burton et al., 2023). The Christian faith basis of the role and nature of discernment in decision making will be explored in the following sections of this literature review.

2.2.2 Defining Christian Spiritual Discernment

Christians, and in particular Protestant and evangelical Christians, who comprise the majority of the leaders and governors of the type of Christian schools that are the subject of this research, believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and has authority in all aspects of human life, with the expectation that Scripture will provide guidance in their daily

actions and that they will be familiar with it (Chalfoun, 2023; De Vries, 2024; Farnham et al., 1996). The belief in Scripture is one of the key tenets set out in the statements of faith for Christian schools that shape their practices and operations plus the employment of staff and the eligibility to become a board member. An illustration of the centrality of Scripture common to Christian schools is provided in the Statement of Faith for Green Point Christian College, NSW which includes "The whole Bible is uniquely inspired by God and is therefore wholly trustworthy and of supreme and final authority in faith and life" (Green Point Christian College, 2025). Given the centrality of Scripture in Christian schools, a key verse relevant to this research from the Bible that is foundational to Christians on the importance of discernment, is Romans 12:2, where the apostle Paul encourages believers to be transformed by the renewing of their minds so that they can discern what the will of God is. (Holy Bible: English Standard Version, 2025).

Historically, spiritual discernment has formed part of the beliefs and practices of Christians; from the early centuries of the Christian church where the Bible records that cases of "community discernment and common life" (Liebert, 2015, p. 22) were common. Liebert (2015) provides a good overview of the early development of thinking on spiritual discernment, highlighting that by the sixth century, the use of discernment was becoming more systematised through key Christian leaders such as St Benedict, who included what he called "discretion" in the Benedictine Rule where all members of the religious community were to be consulted for wisdom about decisions. The use of individual discernment practices was further developed to assist the companions of Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) in the making of decisions that would affect their life together in the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises.

Following the Protestant Reformation of 1517 the development of the concepts and practices surrounding spiritual discernment moved from the Catholic orders, to movements within the Protestant Church, with Scripture being brought to the fore as a key way of

discerning God's direction (Barbee, 2019), though still building on the practices and insights of thinkers such as Benedict and Ignatius. George Fox (1624-1691), one of the founders of the Quaker movement (also known as the Society of Friends), developed a method of corporate discernment that was based on the concept of not just decision making or coming to a consensus as a group, but rather in unity coming to a sense of God's leading and that the following of this leading was an act of worship (Barbee, 2019). The Quaker processes, including times of fellowship together, times of silence and prayer, with the centrality of slowing down processes and contemplation, were hallmarks of how Quakers sought to make decisions as a group. Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) a Reformed theologian who was a key leader and preacher in the Great Awakening, that initially took place in the American colonies and Britain in the 1730's and 1740's, attempted to assist other Christian leaders with ministry and discernment in dealing with the major increase in Christian believers and churches during this period. Edwards key contributions were to not separate the intellectual and emotional dimensions to discernment in decision making, but to integrate them together in decision making and judgement. He also saw that an individual's affections (or values) and character were key markers of true Christian faith rather than just the words of a person (Barbee, 2019).

Throughout the historical development of spiritual discernment, there has continued to be a lack of consensus on a standard definition for "discernment" or "spiritual discernment" with the terms being more reflective of the circumstance being encountered during the various phases in which the discernment processes were formed and the terms are used interchangeably. This lack of common definition and missed usage has continued through to more contemporary literature (Barbee, 2019) with the following definitions of discernment being provided by more recent Christian writers on the subject.

(Barton, 2012b, p. 10)) defines discernment as "the capacity to recognise and respond to the presence and the activity of God – both in the ordinary moments and in the larger decisions of our lives" (Barton, 2012b, p. 10). Bieber (Bieber, 2010, p. 5). defines discernment as "the process of opening our lives and decisions to God and being attentive to what we see with the aid of divine Light" (Bieber, 2010, p. 5). While Farnham et al. (1996) define discernment as:

> Distinguishing the voice of God from other voices that speak to us. It is a prayerful, informed and intentional attempt to sort through these voices to get in touch with God's spirit at work in a situation and to develop a sense of the direction the Spirit is leading. (Farnham et al., 1996, p. 6)

Fendall et al. (2007) define discernment as "the essence of discernment is hearing and obeying God's voice" (Fendall et al., 2007, p. 5). Liebert (2015) defines discernment as "the Christian spiritual practice of seeking and responding to God's call in the midst of all the forces, options and decisions that mark our lives" (Liebert, 2015, p. 19). Morris and Olsen's (1997) definition states, "Discernment creates the capacity to see through to the essence of a matter" (Morris & Olsen, 1997, p. 18), and Nouwen et al. (2013) defines discernment as "a spiritual understanding and an experiential knowledge of how God is active in daily life that is acquired through disciplined spiritual practice…so we can fulfil our individual calling and shared mission" (Nouwen et al., 2013, p. 3).

While the definitions provided by the literature are quite different in their focus and complexity, there are some common threads for discernment, involving hearing, seeing and being attentive to what God is saying to Christian believers, and in so doing, the literature goes on to outline the importance of prayer, stillness, silence and focus to enable Christians to attune to what God is saying to them. The literature reviewed also has a common theme that Christians are to respond to the messages they are receiving from God, with appropriate

decisions and actions, even when the resulting actions may be dangerous or require courage (Liebert, 2015).

2.2.3 Group Christian Spiritual Discernment

As previously cited in this literature review, Christians of the type leading and governing Christian schools will seek to implement the words of Romans 12:2 from the Bible, that instructs believers to seek to discern God's will for their personal lives. Similarly, St Ignatius in the 16th century, followed this individual theme in the development of his spiritual exercises on discernment (also known as the Examen), which are largely centred on personal discernment (Morris & Olsen, 1997). In more modern times, Barton (2012a) observed that at an individual level, spiritual discernment is the capacity to recognise the presence and activity of God. Barton (2005) states that for many Christians, however, they struggle with how to actually go about discerning God's will when decision making moves from the individual person and into a group setting, such as in the board of a Christian organisation. Barton (2012a) simply outlines that corporate discernment is responding in a group setting to the activity of God and making decisions in response to this.

From anecdotal observations in attending hundreds of Christian organisation board meetings over nearly 40 years, many boards reduce the role of Christian spiritual discernment in a corporate setting to a brief devotion or Bible reading at the start of a meeting and prayers at either end of the meeting. As a result, discernment is "often viewed as irrelevant to the business portion of the meeting" (Barton, 2012b, p. 10). The issue of how to best discern the will of God in a corporate setting has been the focus of the Quaker movement, in particular, where the decision-making process is based on having everyone participate in meetings, that decision making is a transparent process and non-competitive between the participants, with no lobbying in advance of the meeting (Velayutham, 2013). The Quakers include the use of silent waiting during worship and decision making (Velayutham, 2013), and a Clearness

Committee and a person who acts as the Clerk of the meeting to assist and facilitate discussions in forming an agreed decision in accordance with what the meeting perceives together as God's will in the matter (Farnham et al., 1996; Fendall et al., 2007; Liebert, 2015; Morris & Olsen, 1997).

Modern authors such at Barton (2012b), Butts (2019), Hoag (2018), Morris and Olsen (1997) and Liebert (2015) follow similar patterns to the Quakers in recommending key aspects of Christian leadership groups, such as boards, adopting a process of corporate spiritual discernment, though with slightly different focuses in each of their approaches. Barton (2012b), Butts (2019) and Liebert (2015) all stress the critical role of personal spiritual discernment practices for board members to enable them to fully participate and contribute to decision making in a corporate setting.

In contrasting four councils in the Bible; the council of Moses, the Jewish councils of the first century, the Gentile councils to the Roman world and the Jerusalem council in Acts, Hoag et al. (2018) provide four disciplines for boards to follow: Scripture, silence, sharing and supplication in their decision making. Barton (2012b) in turn provides a more detailed list that is harmony with the simple list provided by Hoag of what ideally should happen in a meeting, which is largely centred around prayer and listening:

1. The prayer for indifference: prayer seeking freedom for board members from being too attached to decisions and ideas.
2. The test for indifference from the Quaker tradition where participants share their status in terms of indifference to the issue being discussed.
3. The prayer for wisdom: participants acknowledge that the matter to be decided upon is beyond their own wisdom and they pray that God will provide the required divine wisdom.

4. The prayer of quiet trust: participants pray that they put their trust in God, often incorporated as part of the prayer for wisdom.
5. Praying without ceasing: praying throughout the discernment process including stopping in the midst of discussions to pray.
6. Listening to each other: slowing down discussions to notice what people are saying without judging their input or debating the topics.
7. Listening to the facts and also the use of silence, including the consideration of data and factual information, but also spending time in silence to consider the issues that have come up rather than rushing towards an answer, even if at first consideration it appears obvious.
8. Stepping back from the decision or even the meeting entirely if it is agreed as appropriate, particularly for significant or difficult decisions taking time to make a decision, including pausing the meeting or even going away to consider the matter separately before reconvening.

Barton (2012a) also provides specific steps for an actual decision to be made that should be followed:

1. Setting the agenda: ensuring the items to be discussed are clear, all the pertinent information is available, and the correct people are in the discussion.
2. Listening together: speaking one at a time and listening carefully as a group.
3. Notice without judging: comment on key issues that each speaker has brought up, but do so not causing debate and counterpoints.
4. Listening in silence: spending time in the midst of a meeting silently praying.
5. Select an option in line with what God is doing: sift through what the direction of a decision may look like.

6. Weigh the option(s) and finally agree together: after considering the options, come to a consensus on the way forward.

Barton (2012a) stresses the importance of reaching an agreement among the group on how they will make decisions together, even to the point of making a covenant agreement on the process to be used in making decisions. This additional step will take upfront time and discussion by the board, even before it seeks to work through an issue that requires discernment. It is important that individuals involved in discernment processes undertake significant personal preparation prior to a meeting as they consider the matters to be discussed as well as spending considerable time individually in prayer (Barton, 2012a; Butts, 2019).

Liebert (2015) provides a very similar series of seven steps for discernment to those of Barton in her Social Discernment Cycle:

1. Seeking spiritual freedom/indifference. The same as Barton's process.
2. Discover and focus the options. Liebert moves to options more quickly than Barton.
3. Gather and evaluate appropriate information. Barton's step 7 in examining factual data.
4. Pray for direction given the information gathered. Inclusion of prayer is also seen as a key factor by Barton.
5. Formulate a tentative decision. The same as Barton's Step 5 in making an actual decision.
6. Seek confirmation from God about this decision. As with Barton, this is through prayer.
7. Finalise the decision and put it into action. The final step, which is common to Barton's process.

Whilst noting that Christian spiritual discernment should not be mechanical and that it should not be treated as "ten easy steps to spiritually fulfilling decisions" (Morris & Olsen, 1997, p. 19), the process they provide is similar to both of those outlined by Barton and Liebert:

1. Frame the issue to be discerned.
2. Ground the decision to be made.
3. Shed pre-conceived ideas and bias.
4. Root the discernment process in an organisation's decision-making system.
5. Listen to the voices of others (including in the meeting, God and who will be affected by the decision).
6. Explore possible options.
7. Improve, in consultation and prayer, upon each possible option.
8. Weigh the options in response to the leading of God's spirit.
9. Close towards a final decision.
10. Rest in the decision and see if it brings consolation/desolation.

Barton (Barton, 2008, 2012a, 2012b) provides a very clear decision-making process, while it may be perceived as slowing down the decision making speed, it also shows care in discerning God's will in unity and is a process that should be adopted slowly and on key issues first as a board gets used to how discernment practices may work for them (Barton, 2012b).

The various processes outlined in the literature all rely on considerable time, prayer and discussion being undertaken by the group seeking to make a decision, which effectively amounts to making decisions by consensus rather than issues being put in a proposed resolution and the group voting on the outcome. Butts (2019) goes as far as suggesting that in the making of spiritually-discerned decisions, voting is not used at all, but consensus only. In

the experience of the researcher, it would be typical that Christian schools in Australia and New Zealand utilise formal voting and a majority in favour of a decision during discussions effectively represents the resolution of the board. However, according to Butts (2019) only using formal voting on decisions and the process of undertaking spiritual discernment are incompatible, voting should only be the final step in formalising the decision that has been reached by consensus rather the means to actually decide what the decision is that the board is making. None of the authors on group spiritual discernment indicated that the voting process would impact on the decision being made in the same manner as Butts.

Based on the literature reviewed, the researcher has synthesised the spiritual practices and processes for individual and group discernment decision making from the various models outlined in the modern writings on spiritual discernment. The synthesis shows that there is a great degree of commonality and overlap from the various discernment models described in the literature. Table 2.1 outlines the synthesis of practices and processes, the setting for these practices, the literature sources for each practice, the relevant Christian spiritual discernment-based research question for this study for that practice or process as well as the relevant Quantitative and Qualitative questions that will take place in the research phases.

Table 2.1

Spiritual Discernment Common Practices and Processes Linked to the Research Questions

No.	Practice or Process	Setting for the Practice	Literature Source	Research Questions	Quant Questions	Qual Questions
1	The need for individuals in the group to be seeking discernment on matters before they come together.	Individual	Butts (2019); Morris and Olsen (1997)	RQ1	1, 2, 12	1
2	The need for the individuals to be indifferent to the outcomes as they start discussions.	Individual	Barton (2012b); Bieber (2010); Liebert (2015); Morris and Olsen (1997)	RQ1	8,12	1
3	The key of listening carefully individually and as a group to God and others.	Individual Board	Barton (2012b); Morris and Olsen (1997)	RQ1 and RQ2	8	3
4	Develop an agreed process and use of spiritual	Board	Barton (2012b); Bieber (2010); Butts (2019);	RQ2	7	2

No.	Practice or Process	Setting for the Practice	Literature Source	Research Questions	Quant Questions	Qual Questions
	discernment as a group in the making of decisions.		Morris and Olsen (1997)			
5	The need to clearly frame the issue/s, especially if they are large and complex.	Board	Butts (2019); Liebert (2015); Morris and Olsen (1997)	RQ2	2	3
6	To gather data and information that is helpful for the issue being examined.	Board	Barton (2012b)	RQ2	2	1
7	The centrality of prayer, Scriptures and silence in the meeting.	Board	Barton (2012b); Butts (2019); Hoag et al. (2018); Liebert (2015)	RQ2 and RQ3	8, 9	4
8	Exploring options as a group in forming a tentative decision as a consensus.	Board	Barton (2012b); Butts (2019); Hoag et al. (2018); Liebert (2015); Morris and Olsen (1997)	RQ2 and RQ3	14, 15	7
9	Seeking confirmation from God about the decision.	Board	Hoag et al. (2018); Liebert (2015); Morris and Olsen (1997)	RQ2	15	7
10	Finalising the decision and putting it into action.	Board	Barton (2012b); Liebert (2015)	RQ2 and RQ3	5	7

The synthesis of ten practices and processes developed from the literature will form part of the basis for the survey and interview questions as per the table, that are implemented in research phases one and two of the data collection of this research as outlined in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively. The literature provides a number of different definitions and lists of practices and processes, while similar, for the purposes of the survey and interviews. No single definition of Christian spiritual discernment, nor specific list of practices will be provided so as to ensure the respondents do not exhibit unconscious bias through confirmation bias (Suveren, 2022) that a focus on a specific definition of Christian spiritual discernment may cause.

2.3 Board Governance

This section of the literature review informs Research Questions 2 and 3 by examining literature in relation to the broad area of governance, whether it be in a for-profit or not-for-profit setting such as a Christian school, and the expectations for boards and board members.

Board governance, which is often used interchangeably by some with the terms "corporate governance" or simply "governance", has been a growing area of research, especially in the early 2000s, with the focus on a number of large corporate failures such as Enron and WorldCom in the United States of America and HIH Insurance and OneTel in Australia. The importance of board governance was also highlighted in the 2019 Australian Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry. In the final report following the Royal Commission, Commissioner Hayne placed responsibility for organisations (and their misconduct) onto senior management and boards (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019).

Board governance has a number of different, though similar definitions, from a broad range of regulators, associations and researchers in relation to for-profit organisations, as well as those applying to not-for-profits and those definitions specifically for schools. While the definitions may come from different sources and relate to different sectors, they all contain common themes on the importance of governance, the impact it has on organisations, as well as some of the contributing factors behind good governance. Basic definitions for governance from the for-profit world include those of Commissioner Hayne in the Banking Royal Commission where he states that governance is "the structure and processes by which an entity is run" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019, p. 394). The Governance Institute of Australia (2020) website defines the concept of good governance as being "not only the system by which organisations are controlled, but the mechanisms by which organisations and those who comprise them are held to account". These definitions indicate that it is a key role for boards as they govern, to ensure that managers keep their promises through embedded relationships within the organisation (Bird & Park, 2018).

From the for-profit world, Justice Owen in the report from the HIH Royal Commission in 2003 provides one of the most comprehensive definitions of governance as

"the framework of rules, relationships, systems and processes within and by which authority is exercised and controlled within corporations. It encompasses the mechanisms by which companies, and those in control, are held to account" (Owen, 2003, p. 101). While being focused on publicly listed entities rather than not-for-profit organisations, such as schools, this definition indicates the importance of not just the legal compliance aspects of board decision making, but also the importance of relationships and processes in the decision making of a board.

The Australian regulator for the charity sector (of which Christian schools are a part) is the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC). The ACNC's definition of governance is "the processes, activities and relationships that make sure your charity is effectively and properly run" (Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, 2018, p. 3). This definition is less focused on the importance of financial returns for shareholders and has a greater focus on the way an organisation is run and fulfils its purpose. The ACNC provides six governance standards (Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, 2025a) as core minimum standards that not-for-profit organisations need to comply with to continue to be registered as a charity in Australia:

1. Purposes and not-for-profit nature
2. Accountability to members
3. Compliance with Australian laws
4. Suitability of responsible people
5. Duties of responsible people
6. Maintaining and enhancing public trust and confidence in the Australian not-for-profit sector.

In relation to school governance specifically, a definition of governance from the literature states that it is the "structures, processes and collective action, in order to fulfil the

responsibility and accountability to a range of stakeholders in achieving the purpose and objectives of the school" (Austen et al., 2012, p. 73). This definition highlights that in a school or not-for-profit organisation, the central focus of the board should be on the achievement of the organisation's purpose, vision and mission. Huse (2005) states that in relation to for-profit entities, the prime objective of the board is to direct a company in the creation value as a return to shareholders. These two contrasting definitions provide an insight of how a board views organisational success; in for-profits financial return is the key measure to be used, while not-for-profits are missionally motivated.

In summary, the literature indicates that it is not just the legal construct of the board of an organisation or its legal compliance work, of which the six governance standards from the ACNC are the most appropriate corporate governance guidelines for a not-for-profit organisation operating in Australia, that are important, but also the processes and relationships of the board and accountability within the board. The primary, and sometimes the only focus areas for many board members are in the areas of compliance, fiduciary and legal structures of the organisation (Chait et al., 2004), at the omission of processes and relationships within the board and into the rest of the organisation. The literature is clear that a significant focus on the processes and relationships in the decision making by boards is critical beyond the mere compliance of the board with their legal and fiduciary requirements.

2.3.1 Governance and Organisational Effectiveness

The literature contains a significant number of studies that have indicated there is a positive relationship between overall board performance and the effectiveness of not-for-profit organisations (Bernstein et al., 2015; Carver, 2006; Green & Griesenger, 1996; Herman & Renz, 2000; Jackson & Holland, 1998). According to Bernstein et al. (2015), these studies found that internal board functions impacted on the external governance practices of a board,

as well as the ability of an organisation to fundraise, improve community relations and outreach, and recruit new board members.

Research on school governance indicates that conflict among board members impairs board performance and, in some measures, board issues can also impair the organisational performance of a school (Grissom, 2014). A study of schools from the Netherlands provides support to the concept of board performance impacting a school's operations; the research revealed that boards have an indirect impact on school improvement and on occasion, board improvements "trickle down to the classroom level" (Ehren et al., 2015, p. 210). A more recent Australian study by Loh et al. (2021), found that board effectiveness influences both the academic and financial performance of the school, though this study only measures the effectiveness of a school in terms of academic and financial performance and does not include the fulfilment of a broader mission or purpose as being a measure of organisational effectiveness. Similarly, the Loh study creates a direct link from the inputs of board diversity, board practices and the influence of the Principal as being an effective school board. For the purposes of this research, organisational effectiveness is measured in terms of academic and financial performance, as well as the fulfillment (or working towards the fulfillment) of the purpose of the school in accordance with the core values or ethos of the school.

It is beyond the scope of the current research to undertake a detailed examination of the impact of effective board governance on the specific academic outcomes of the school, as well as the impact that a board's performance has on the social, emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing of students. This research instead focuses on the nature and role of Christian spiritual discernment in board decision making and the impact this has on the decision making of the board without examining the nature of the decisions in detail.

2.4 School Governance

This section of the literature review informs Research Questions 2, 3 and 4 by examining literature in relation to school governance drawing on literature from Australia and internationally.

The research on school governing boards is severely limited by the paucity of empirical investigations (Curry et al., 2018; Krishnan et al., 2016; McCormick et al., 2006) with only six empirical research studies on the boards of Australian or New Zealand independent schools in the past 20 years (Austen et al., 2012; Bambach, 2020; Bradley, 2022; Krishnan et al., 2016; Loh et al., 2021; McCormick et al., 2006). An important limitation to the research that has been conducted on school boards is that they have not been researched as "discrete units of analysis" (Land, 2002, p. 266), but instead boards tend to be analysed and discussed only in terms of their relationships with others, in particular the head of school/Principal (Ford & Ihrke, 2018), or only in relation to student outcomes (Ford & Ihrke, 2015; Leithwood, 2017). Most governance research has focused on board characteristics (such as board size and board composition), and there has been a lack of research on the behaviour of boards (Honingh, 2020). The subject of this research in relation of the examination of the role of Christian spiritual discernment in decision making by Christian School boards, fills the gap in providing greater board behavioural and processes research, rather than what has been the subjects of the majority of studies on school governance, that tend to focus only on the characteristics of the board and not examining processes or behaviour in meetings.

There has been significant research into district public school boards in the United States of America (Allen & Mintrom, 2010; Alsbury, 2008; McGuinn & Manna, 2013; Saatcioglu et al., 2011; Wong, 2013). Research into public school governance is fairly limited in countries other than the United States of America, though it does exist in a number of

diverse settings: Switzerland (Hangartner & Svaton, 2014; Huber, 2011), South Africa (Xaba & Nhlapo, 2014), Turkey (Yüner & Burgaz, 2019), United Kingdom (Ranson, 2011; Sheard & Avis, 2010; Wilkins, 2014), and Wales (Ranson et al., 2007). The duties between public and private school boards are similar in relation to the establishment of a vision, setting educational policies of the school, ensuring there is accountability for student outcomes, appointing a Principal and evaluating policy decisions (Curry et al., 2018). The are significant differences, however, between the boards of public schools and independent schools in terms of their organisational structure, the decentralised nature of independent schools compared to public schools, the corporate responsibilities of the board, stakeholder responsibilities, setting strategy aligned with the ethos of the school, financial decisions , financial responsibilities and employment practices (Curry et al., 2018; Loh et al., 2021; McCormick et al., 2006), meaning that the public school governance research has limited application to independent schools, including Christian schools.

2.5 Christian Organisation Governance

This section of the literature review informs Research Questions 2, 3 and 4 by examining literature in the area of Christian organisational governance, examining standards from regulators in relation to issues unique to the Christian sector.

Christian organisations are generally incorporated entities, with the most common legal entities utilised being incorporated associations (in accordance with the Incorporated Associations Act in the relevant state) and companies limited by guarantee (in accordance with the Corporations Act). Christian organisations in most cases come under the same statutory compliance requirements as any other not-for-profit organisation via the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC), the Australian Taxation Office (ATO), Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) and other regulators relevant to the state and industry the organisation operates within. The need for boards of Christian

organisations to ensure their statutory requirements are complied with is a basic expectation. However, the call of traditional Christian virtues to go beyond compliance is perceived by many Christian organisations as an ethical obligation (Norman, 2011).

Schoonover (2013, p. 66) indicated that Christian boards need to ensure they are focused on "the big picture, the long term, and the value laden" (p. 66), not the day-to-day operations of the organisations they govern. Focusing on the big picture according to Schoonover (2013) is best achieved by boards through three top level tasks where they seek to operate beyond compliance alone:

1. Purpose: develop the mission and strategic plan on how the organisation will achieve its purpose
2. Policy: develop policies that reflect the mission, vision and values of the organisation and that enable ministry to be carried out
3. Fiduciary: provide a mechanism to ensure accountability takes place while ministry happens.

An Australian organisation, Christian Ministry Advancement (CMA) that seeks to assist Christian organisations to function well both spiritually and organisationally (Christian Ministry Advancement, 2025) has established the CMA Standards Council (CMASC) that accredits Christian organisations and churches. While these standards are not compulsory for Christian organisations or Christian schools to implement, the "9 Principles of Ministry Accountability" (Christian Ministry Advancement Standards Council, 2025) provide useful guidance for organisations to abide by to enhance their organisational accountability, not their organisational effectiveness:

1. God first
2. Charitable status
3. Diligent governance

4. Responsible leadership
5. Charitable purpose
6. Financial oversight
7. Risk management
8. Transparency and accountability
9. Honest communication.

Principles 2 through 9 of the CMA Standards Council list are not uniquely Christian and, according to ACNC, if an organisation complies with the CMASC Principles and Standards, it "is likely to meet" all five of the ACNC Governance Standards (Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, 2025b). Examining the CMASC list, Principle 1 is unique to other guidelines and standards from non-Christian organisations in its requirement to "put God first". Principle one and the underlying standards are:

> Principle 1: God First. The organisation must declare its Christian ethos and confirm that it acts in accordance with that ethos. Standard 1.1. The organisation must publicly state its Christian ethos and purposes, for example in its constitution, vision/mission statements or website. Standard 1.2. The organisation must have a written statement of faith, approved annually and unanimously by its governing body, which is consistent with, and is not in conflict with, the Nicene Creed or otherwise satisfactorily demonstrate its commitment. (Christian Ministry Advancement Standards Council, 2025)

Principle 1 of the CMASC Principles of Ministry Accountability requires an organisation to have a clear Christian purpose, and that this ethos is preeminent in all decisions and actions of the organisation. The underlying standards require the Christian ethos and purpose be embedded in the core documents of the organisation and that the

governing board attests to this annually as part of their organisation's ongoing meeting the requirements of the Standards Council.

2.6 Christian School Governance

This section of the Literature Review informs Research Questions 2, 3 and 4 by examining literature specifically focusing on Christian school governance including the findings of results of what research has been carried out.

As previously outlined in this literature review, the amount of research in respect of independent school boards is low in Australia and New Zealand, with Christian schools being a subset of the independent schools' sector. The research on Christian school boards is even lower. Only two empirical studies that include any examination of Christian school boards in Australia or New Zealand have been identified as being undertaken in the past 15 years as part of this literature review (Buckingham, 2010; Fisher, 2012). Neither Buckingham nor Fisher examined closely the role of the boards and their decision-making processes, Buckingham focused on the general growth of independent schools (and Christian schools) in the 1990s and early 2000s with some mention of the role of school boards in this growth. Fisher's study was directly in relation to Christian schools, again focussing more on their general growth in recent years and the reason for this growth. Fisher found that boards did play an important role in the growth of Christian schools though this was largely in respect of their relationship with the school Principal, rather than examining the Christian school Board as a discrete unit.

The lack of research in respect of Christian school boards is surprising given the growth of Christian schooling both in terms of the number of schools and student enrolments in the past 50 years in Australia (Buckingham, 2010), New Zealand (New Zealand Government, 2020) and the United States of America (Murnane, 2018). As an illustration of this rapid growth, one association of schools in Australia, Christian Community Schools

(now known as Christian Schools Australia [CSA]), has grown from just one school and 14 students in 1976 to be 74 schools and 13,281 students by 1991 (Frisken, 2011). By 2020, enrolments in CSA member schools were over 64,000 students (Spencer, 2020), and by 2025, enrolments in member schools were 91,500 students with over 14,500 staff employed in more than 200 locations (Christian Schools Australia, 2025b). As Christian schools have developed, there has been significant research in relation to school educational programs, teaching practice, professional development of teaching staff and to some degree the impact of leadership, however, not in respect of Christian school governance.

2.6.1 Mission Directed Governance Model

There has been limited research specifically on the topic of Christian school governance, worldwide. Stob (2015) developed the Mission Directed Governance Model (MDGM) as an outcome of his research into Christian school boards in the United States of America. The MDGM (Stob, 2015) provides three bases from which the Christian school board should operate:

1. Purpose: the board needs to ensure that the school is aligned to a clear mission or purpose
2. Relationships: the board needs to make decisions as a unified and connected community, not just as individuals
3. Processes: the board needs to establish an organised, efficient process of operation.

MDGM (Stob, 2015) also identifies three primary objectives that an effective and flourishing Christian school board must fulfil:

1. Policy that upholds and supports the vision and mission of the school
2. Strategy that advances the future of the school
3. Fiduciary in the provision of the financial security and sustainability of the school.

The three main bases in the Mission Directed Governance Model (Stob, 2015) warrant further exploration as part of this literature review, as it is one of the few detailed studies of K-12 Christian school governance undertaken globally:

1. Purpose: the purpose of the school provides the core driver of the ministry and is the basis of why the school exists as a Christian organisation (Bartlett & Campey, 2008), and as such should underpin all board operations and decisions.
2. Relationships: the relationships within the board are critical for growing a healthy organisation which reflects biblical values (Bartlett & Campey, 2008). The ability for a group to discern together is built upon these relationships with clear discernment relying on trust within the group, a sense of working together in unity, being in a communal context, and sharing extended times together (Liebert, 2015; Stoesz, 2011). Discerned decisions are to be made by common agreement or consensus; the absence of healthy relationships within the board makes such consensus difficult to reach (Butts, 2019) and difficult for the board to sustain the length of time required to be spent together in discerning issues.
3. Processes: the processes the board undertakes in terms of the conduct of meetings. Broader governance literature points to the importance of overall board processes, the construction of agendas and board papers, general board operations, a diversity of skills among board members, and the board-chief executive officer (CEO) relationship (Carver, 2006; Chait et al., 2004). In addition to these general processes, so as to enable Christian boards to implement Christian spiritual discernment, there also needs to be a common commitment among board members in respect of the use of discernment practices and processes, as well as agreeing on the actual steps to implement a process of Christian spiritual discernment in their decision making (Barton, 2012b; Bieber, 2010; Butts, 2019; Liebert, 2015; Morris & Olsen, 1997).

A research survey undertaken by McKinsey & Company supports the importance of the elements of purpose, relationships and processes by finding a link between the financial performance of an organisation and the board's dynamics and processes, as well as board members having a good understanding of an organisation's overall strategy or purpose (McKinsey & Company, 2018).

The primary objectives in the MDGM are the outcomes of the board's decision making (Schoonover, 2013; Stob, 2015) and align with board best practices, as per the literature: (a) the setting and monitoring of "Strategy" (Chait et al., 2004), (b) the setting and monitoring of "Policy" (Carver, 2006), and (c) the meeting of "Fiduciary" responsibilities.(Chait et al., 2004)

2.6.2 Effective Practices of Christian School Boards

Coley (2015) undertook research of Christian schools in the United States of America and identified key Christian school governance principles and practices, with the study's aim of the findings having a practical application for boards. The research identified the top ten most effective practices of Christian school boards:

1. The mission/vision of the school should be clearly understood by the leaders.
2. Board members should evaluate the Principal as their one employee.
3. Board members only have authority in a board meeting.
4. The board should have strong working relationships with the Principal.
5. Board members need to rotate off the board and bring new people on.
6. Board members should financially support the school.
7. The board should ensure the protection of the ethical, financial, legal and security of the school, as well as safety of the students.
8. Board members should direct complaints appropriately.
9. The board should include the Principal in all their meetings.

10. The board should conduct an annual appraisal of the Principal.

Coley's (2015) list on board effective practices is comprehensive. However, there appear to be two significant omissions that the literature review identifies as important elements of school governance, generally, that are also relevant for Christian school governance:

1. Board Training: The need for boards to undertake training that is timely, specific to their circumstances and that sees the continual upgrading of board member skills and knowledge in all aspects of their roles and responsibilities (Bernstein et al., 2015; Plough, 2014; Xaba & Nhlapo, 2014; Zimmermann, 2008). Regulators emphasise the importance of board training of board members for non-government schools (Catholic and independent schools) in one Australian state, being New South Wales, whereby one of the requirements for state registration of schools is that board members, as "responsible persons", undertake at least 12 hours of accredited board training every three years (NSW Education Standards Authority, 2023).
2. The role of the board chair as distinct from the whole board. The influence that the board chair has on the effectiveness of the board, including the board's operations, understanding of its role and its relationship with external stakeholders. The literature also highlighted the importance of the board chair's relationship with the CEO of the organisation (in a school's case, the Principal) and chair's relationship with the board. The board chair's relationships are seen to have a significant impact on board effectiveness (Freiwirth, 2017; Freiwirth et al., 2017; Hiland, 2008; Loh et al., 2021).

Coley's (2015) research was specifically on the effective practices of Christian school boards. However, most significantly for the current research study, the results did not include any practices that were unique to being a Christian school as compared to being any other type of school. In particular, the research findings make no mention of including the

discernment of God's will in the decision making by the board, ensuring there is a clear Christian purpose or ethos, or any sense of integration of faith in how the board, Principal and school operates or make decisions. There is no mention of any uniqueness of a Christian school in reference to the role of faith in the school or the inclusion of the issues captured by principle one of the CMASC Principles and Standards listing, whereby God is to be put first in all the decisions and actions of the organisation and board. Finally, Coley (2015) also duplicates a number of items on his list of Christian school board effective practices in the areas of the board/Principal relationship (items two, four and nine) and the Principal's appraisal (Items two and ten).

2.7 Governance Principles

The literature review indicated that there are a number of sets of governance principles that Christian school boards could align with, and the comparison of the three main potential sources of standards is important in determining the most appropriate and comprehensive one covering Christian schools. The sets of governance principles utilised in the comparison are the nine governance principles, provided by Christian Ministry Advancement Standards Council (Christian Ministry Advancement Standards Council, 2025), the six governance standards as established by the Australian Charities and Not-For-Profit Commission (Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, 2025b), and the ten key board principles for Christian schools contained within the research by Coley (2015). The basis of the comparison provided in Table 2.2 are the nine governance principles from CMASC with the numbers in each of the columns headed "ACNC" or "Coley" corresponding to the relevant standard or principle arising from those sources. As previously outlined, the ACNC has provided guidance that compliance with the CMASC principles and standards will also result in compliance by an organisation with the ACNC governance standards (Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, 2025b).

Table 2.2

Comparison of Governance Standards

No.	CMASC	ACNC	Coley
1	God First		
2	Charitable Status	1	
3	Diligent Governance	3	
4	Responsible Leadership	4, 5	3, 5
5	Charitable Purpose	1	1
6	Financial Oversight	5	
7	Risk Management	5, 6	7
8	Transparency and Accountability	2, 5, 6	2, 4, 9, 10
9	Honest Communication		8
A	Board Members to financially support the school		6

The comparison in Table 2.2 indicates that the CMASC list of nine principles is the most comprehensive of the three sets of governance principles compared, and addresses the issues included within the standards from the ACNC and the principles arising from Coley's research. The only exceptions to this correlation are twofold:

1. Neither of the lists of principles provided by the ACNC or Coley include the need to put God first, or the seeking God's will in decision making in the governance of the organisation. This is to be expected of the ACNC standards, as it provides secular regulation beyond Christian faith-based organisations. The omission of this principle from the Coley listing, however, is indicative of an approach to governance that does not examine the unique issues of governing a Christian organisation.
2. The additional item labelled "A", provided by Coley, in requiring board members of Christian schools to be financial supporters of the school they govern is reflective of Coley's research being in relation to Christian schools in the United States of America, where most schools receive none or limited financial support from government and instead rely on tuition fees and significant donations to operate (Campey, 2024; Swaner et al., 2023). This is in contrast to Christian schools in

Australia and New Zealand, that receive considerable financial assistance from government and place little reliance on donations to operate (Campey, 2024).

Christian school governance research has been very limited and non-existent when examining Christian school board decision making and particularly the practice of Christian spiritual discernment in that corporate decision making. Following a global search, it appears that the research findings on Christian organisation boards, with the exception of Barbee's 2019 research on Christian higher education boards in the United States of America, is focused on good corporate governance practice that is suitable for any not-for-profit organisation, whether they have a Christian faith basis or whether it has no Christian religious purpose (Barbee, 2019). As a result there appears to be a research gap in a school's ministry setting where Frisken (2011) and Fisher (2012) both highlight Christian distinctiveness of modern Christian schools in teaching practice, delivery, staffing and policies. However, the literature review on Christian school boards does not include information on how decision-making processes of the boards of a Christian school are influenced and may look different from that in a non-Christian school (Coley, 2015; Stob, 2015).

Lowrie (2004) states that Christian school governing boards should be committed to seeking Christ's will for guidance in the principles and practices of the schools, which would also include all decision making and operations at a board level. Similarly, Fisher (2012) outlines that a key feature of Christian schools is the centrality of Christ and that this begins at a board level, with the board needing to discern the will of God in establishing the vision for the school. The board's important role in establishing the vision/mission/purpose of the school is outlined by Fisher (2012), however, there appears to be no substantive research amongst the governance literature for Christian schools, nor any research in relation to the involvement of Christian spiritual discernment in the decision making and the setting of the ongoing strategic direction for the school beyond the establishment of an initial vision for the

school. Barbee (2019) provides relevant research where she examines the processes of spiritual discernment utilised by governors of Christian Higher Education institutions in the United States of America in their decision making. Barbee's research is appropriate in the context of examining the history and role of Christian spiritual discernment as it relates to individual and board decision making. However, it has limited application to the current research subject of K-12 Christian schools, given its focus on Christian higher education boards rather than the boards of K-12 schools (2019). The two types of institutions operate in different regulatory environments and there are geographical and historical difference of Barbee's research being in the United States of America as compared to the subject research being in Australia and New Zealand.

2.8 Theoretical Frameworks for Research on Governance

The literature mentions a range of different theories that have been utilised in governance research over many years. The following section explores the main theories that have been used and highlights the challenges with each of those theories when applied to a Christian school and the current research on the decision making of school boards.

2.8.1 Agency Theory

Agency theory's key principle is that a Principal appoints an agent to act on their behalf through the delegation of decision making. Agency theory contends that the interests between the principal and the agent are in conflict, with the parties only focused on financial issues (Bernstein et al., 2015; Brown & Guo, 2010; Courtney, 2018). Agency theory focuses on the principal/agent relationship and does not account for other stakeholders in the organisation and its operations.

Olson (2000) researched the application of agency theory in relation to the boards of not-for-profit colleges in the United States of America and found that agency theory applies in part to boards, though without the concept of owners (shareholders) and the distribution of

profits. Agency theory, however, does not fully apply to not-for-profit organisations in the same way as it does in a corporate profit making structure. Agency theory assumes that there is a goal conflict between the principal and the agent, which is not the case in a mission-based organisation such as a Christian school (Van Puyvelde et al., 2012). It would therefore seem that agency theory, whilst applicable to some extent in Christian schools, as there can be a mismatch in priorities between board and management is, however, an incomplete theory for research into Christian schools due to their not-for-profit nature and the significant involvement of additional stakeholders such as parents, students and a sponsoring church of the school, beyond just the relationship between principal and agent.

2.8.2 Group/Decision Process Theory

Group/decision process theory examines the processes utilised, particularly by the management of the organisation, in the provision of information to a board so as to make its decision making more effective (Bernstein et al., 2015; Mwenja & Lewis, 2009). The reality of the transparency and clarity around such basic processes and information flows is a practical issue that management should be undertaking as a matter of course in fulfilling their role obligations. The provision of such information is part of the ordinary business of a board and management. Any gaps, especially intentional ones, in these processes are covered by the conflict of goal interests between the Principal and Agent highlighted under agency theory (Van Puyvelde et al., 2012).

2.8.3 Institutional Theory

Institutional theory focuses on the influence and expectations of government, society and culture in the composition and structure of boards (Bernstein et al., 2015; Brown & Guo, 2010; Guo, 2007).

The impact of institutional theory on Christian schools is limited, as the schools are independent in nature, including their governance structures (Independent Schools Council of

Australia, 2020) and, whilst they receive significant government funding and there are regulatory requirements and expectations relating to their educational delivery (Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2020), there is little impact on boards other than what would be expected of any incorporated entity. There are no additional legal requirements at this time placed on Christian schools beyond the requirements expected of any school and the fulfilment of its mission. Although, there is ongoing cultural pressure to change the way Christian schools operate including the right to discriminate in the hiring of staff to ensure there is strong alignment between the vision, mission values of the school and the staff that are employed (McAlpine, 2024) .

The nature of institutional theory makes its application to government schools and instrumentalities more likely, though it may be linked by researchers to the resource dependency theory for not-for-profits where there is a high level of dependency on government funding and the conditions attached to that funding becomes greater (Guo, 2007).

2.8.4 Resource Dependency Theory

Resource dependency theory contends that the more poorly resourced an organisation, the more time that boards need to spend on raising funds and therefore the board becomes less effective in governing the organisation, because it has to spend more time on financial development and less time on governance (Bernstein et al., 2015; Brown & Guo, 2010; Mwenja & Lewis, 2009).

Christian schools in Australia and New Zealand are not required to undertake significant financial development work for their operations as they receive significant funding in the form of school fees from parents and annual recurrent grants from state and commonwealth governments on a per student basis. Similarly, in New Zealand, most Christian schools receive significant government funding in addition to school fees collected from parents. Christian school boards in both countries are therefore not distracted from their

key task of governing the school due to needing to spend significant time on fundraising for operational purposes. Christian schools may be seen to be dependent on government for resources with on average around 50% of their annual revenue coming from government (Resolve Consulting Group, 2025). Under current legislation in both Australia and New Zealand, there are no conditions placed on the funding provided by government that adversely impact Christian schools in fulfilling their purpose, vision and mission, though these is ongoing cultural pressure to make changes to government policy that may impact on the school's ability to operate and access funding (McAlpine, 2024).

2.8.5 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory addresses the perceived weakness of agency theory outlined above, in that it states that multiple groups are involved in an organisation beyond just the principal and agent, as well as addressing the internal and external nature of stakeholders (Van Puyvelde et al., 2012). The stakeholder theory is suitable in a school setting where there are multiple stakeholders such as parents, employees, students and often a sponsoring church of the school involved in the governance and operations of the school, with each stakeholder group holding different expectations of the school. Wicks (2014) points out that there is a connection between stakeholder theory and spiritual life, as the theory allows the consideration of the "Why?" question for an organisation. Stakeholder theory also differentiates between the different stakeholders taking into account whether they are internal or external in nature. However, it does not account for contractual and non-contractual (i.e. personal) relationships that exist between different parties, as well as the transfer of decision making authority between the parties involved (Van Puyvelde et al., 2012). The researcher has anecdotally observed that this transfer of decision making can be very common within the context of a Christian school due to their nature of the schools being in close community. Christian schools often experience multiple relationships at various levels within the

community that will at times, impact on what would be normal contractual or hierarchical decisions and processes, such that non-contractual/relational issues may cause conflict and there being associated changes in processes and decisions of the Christian school board that may not follow an orderly pattern. An example of this would be where the pastor from the church that sponsors the school is a board member due to their position. Ordinarily they would only have a single vote on decisions, but due to their relational connection to other board members through church membership and other power dynamics beyond the school they may have an effective veto over decisions even where there is no legal power to do so. Stakeholder theory alone does not adequately cover this type of complexity or relational impact beyond contractual structures.

2.8.6 Stewardship Theory

Stewardship theory is complementary to agency theory, though this theory assumes managers will act as stewards in putting the organisation's interests ahead of their own personal interests (Charas, 2014; Van Puyvelde et al., 2012). The proposition of stewardship does resonate within the context of a Christian school, as the majority of persons involved in the governance and leadership of Christian schools are in their roles seeking to achieve a purpose larger than themselves in relation to Christian education, while contributing to the training up, development and care of young people (Christian School Management, 2026; Christian Schools Australia, 2026). Stewardship theory addresses the conflict problem highlighted above for Agency theory, though it only focuses on the relationship between principal and agent to the exclusion of all other relationships in the organisation (Van Puyvelde et al., 2012). Given that schools rely on multiple relationships in their operations: moral owners, board, personnel, beneficiaries (parents and students) (Bartlett & Campey, 2008), a single view of an organisation through a principal and agent relationship does not account for the complexity of relationships that exist within a school. The concept of goal

alignment contained within stewardship theory and the Christian belief of looking after someone else's assets on their behalf, does resonate well within a Christian organisation.

2.8.7 Justice Stewardship Theory

Justice stewardship theory (Till & Yount, 2017) is a relatively new theory that has been utilised in governance research. Justice stewardship theory has been shaped by Catholic social thought and provides for the integration of agency, stakeholder and stewardship theories as outlined by Van Puyvelde, et al (2012) and includes the integration of the Christian faith as a basis for decision making as well as the underpinning of the biblical concepts of human dignity and justice. The integration of a Christian faith basis in the theory used for this research is important, as Christian schools see themselves quite differently from other schools in the embedding of Christian faith in all aspects of their operations (Fisher, 2012).

The concept of human dignity and seeing people to be valued is central to Christianity having its foundation in the first chapter of the Bible. In Genesis 1:26 it states "Then God said, 'let us make man in our image, after our likeness'" (Holy Bible: English Standard Version, 2025). Human dignity is a virtue that originates from the Judeo-Christian worldview and forms one of its central tenets, with all people being seen as created in the image of God (or *imago Dei*) and therefore treated as someone of value. The belief that a person is created in the image of God is a key motivator for Christian organisations in the way in which they treat and care for others. The importance of human dignity was conceptually developed by key thinkers in the early church including St. Augustine and Lactantius (religious advisor to Constantine I) (Mangalwadi, 2011), while Christians in more modern times have continued this tradition; Pally (2018) quotes Dr Martin Luther King, Jr from 1965:

> Our Judeo-Christian tradition refers to this inherent dignity of man in the biblical term 'the image of God'. The innate worth referred to in the phrase, the image of God, is universally shared in equal portions by all men. (Pally, 2018, p. 175)

In summary, justice stewardship theory brings together the strengths of the main theories utilised in governance research, as well as including the additional elements of integrating the Christian faith and the concept of human dignity both of which are integral to the beliefs of the governors of Christian schools.

2.8.8 Summary of Research Theories of Governance

To assist in summarising the main theories utilised in the research of governance, the researcher has developed a table providing the relevant references for each theory, a brief overview and summary comments in relation to each theory (see Table 2.3).

Table 2.3

Key Theories Used in Governance Research

Theory Name	References	Basis of Theory	Comments
Agency Theory	Bernstein et al. (2015), Brown and Guo (2010), Courtney (2018), Van Puyvelde et al. (2012)	A principal appoints an agent to act on their behalf through the delegation of decision making. The theory is based on the premise that the interests between the principal and agent are in conflict and are focused on financial issues	The theory is based on a single principal-agent relationship. It is the most common theory used for studies on boards and management, but tends to assume that conflict in aims and objectives exists (mainly in relation to money and profits)
Group/Decision Process Theory	Bernstein et al. (2015), Mwenja and Lewis (2009)	Focuses on processes that make the board more effective, covering issues such as the management and channelling of information for decision making purposes.	Most advice to boards is in relation to improving board reporting and information flows. The proposed research will not focus on the basic procedures to assist board effectiveness but instead focuses on relationships and higher inputs to decision making.
Institutional Theory	Bernstein et al. (2015), Brown and Guo (2010), Guo (2007)	Emphasises the influence of government, society and culture on the composition and structure of boards and the meeting of the expectations of these external groups on the institution	This theory is often linked to government regulation and funding and the conditions a government may impose. While this has some impact on all school boards, it is not unique to Christian school boards.

Theory Name	References	Basis of Theory	Comments
Resource Dependency Theory	Bernstein et al. (2015), Brown and Guo (2010), Mwenja and Lewis (2009)	Boards from more poorly resourced organisations will spend more time engaging in financial development work to increase their resources than boards with greater resources levels. As a result, more poorly-resourced organisations will see a decline in board effectiveness.	Christian schools in Australia and New Zealand receive their income (resources) from two main sources being tuition fees paid by parents and government grants with only relatively small fundraising. Their effectiveness as a board is generally not impacted by excessive time and effort required to generate funds.
Stakeholder Theory	Bartlett and Campey (2008), Drexler (2007), Miles (2017), Van Puyvelde et al. (2012)	An extension of agency theory in that management is seen as agents not just for one owner, but for a broader group of stakeholders. There is a resulting obligation to consider their influence upon the organisation and the impact the organisation has on them.	Christian schools are seen as communities with key stakeholders including the local church, parents, and government. To each of these groups the board and management have different accountabilities and responsibilities they need to undertake. Though the role is more than just dealing with stakeholders
Stewardship Theory	Charas (2014), Van Puyvelde et al. (2012)	Is complementary to agency theory though it assumes that managers will act as stewards in putting the organisation's interests ahead of their own personal interests.	Correlates for many in leadership in Christian schools who are "called" to their positions. Their motives are not first and foremost financial in nature, but instead the society and faith impact they can have.
Justice Stewardship Theory	Till and Yount (2017)	Integrates agency, stakeholder and stewardship theories with the addition of Catholic social thought in relation to human dignity and justice.	Provides a well-rounded theory that resonates in a faith-based organisation that is community focused, where the prime motivation for all involved is not personal financial gain, but transformational impact on the educational and spiritual lives of students.

This research will utilise the justice stewardship theory as its basis given its unique resonance with Christian faith-based organisations where community and transformational impact on the beneficiaries of the organisation such as students in a school, is seen as the key focus of those involved in the organisation rather than just personal financial gain. At the same time, the theory draws from the most common governance related research theories of agency and stewardship in understanding the differing roles of management and board (agency), as well as the holding of finances on decision making on behalf of others

(stewardship). Justice stewardship theory is ideal in addressing the four research questions as it provides a combination of different elements and concepts into a single theory. Table 2.4 provides an outline of the four research questions and the relevant components as outlined in 2.8.7 and 2.8.8 that are within justice stewardship theory, that make it the most suitable theory for this research.

Table 2.4

Research Questions and Justice Stewardship Theory

Research Question	Justice Stewardship Theory Relevance
RQ1: What Christian spiritual discernment practices do individuals (board chairs, board members and principals) undertake in relation to the governance of Christian school boards?	• Resonance with Christian faith • Agency theory
RQ2: What Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes do Christian school boards collectively undertake in relation to governance?	• Resonance with Christian faith • stewardship theory • Community focused
RQ3: How do Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes influence decision making in the governance of Christian school boards?	• Resonance with Christian faith • Stewardship theory • Transformational impact • Stakeholder theory
RQ4: What makes a good Christian school board?	• Stewardship theory • Agency theory • Stakeholder theory • Community focused

2.9 Summary

In synthesising the literature in relation to Christian spiritual discernment of Ignatius, the Quakers, Barton, Butts and Leibert, as well as the concepts set out in justice stewardship theory and the foundations seen as being important to Christian schools, such as the centrality of Christ in all they do (Fisher, 2012), there appear to be two key underpinning themes at play. First, the relationships within the board as well as those between the board and management, need to be healthy, trusting and based on a commitment to focus on the purpose of the organisation above all else. Second, processes need to be clearly articulated and embedded deeply within the culture of the board, as well as being reflective of the desire to

integrate board members' faith and the seeking of God's will for the organisation in all key decisions. As such, this research will be looking at Christian spiritual discernment at an individual level and its interaction with Christian spiritual discernment at the board group level.

The literature review indicates that there is a plentiful supply of general material in respect of governance and spiritual discernment as they relate to individuals; however there are limited materials on group spiritual discernment, and in undertaking this research study, much of the literature was not easily accessible or readily obtained by the typical Christian school board member. The level of research on independent school board governance and specifically Christian school boards is very limited, particularly in relation to the decision-making processes of school boards. The drawing together of all these elements does not appear to have taken place in the literature previously. There is a uniqueness to Christian school boards in that they operate in the highly regulated industry of K-12 school education, the boards need to be effective governors who ensure ongoing compliance and at the same time board members are called to their roles in response to an overall purpose for the school in serving God as the governors of a Christian ministry organisation (Lowrie, 2004).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines a pragmatic mixed-methods approach as the methodological orientation of the study and why this methodology was selected. The chapter then presents the research design implemented and how the analysis of the data will be presented in subsequent chapters.

The research examines the nature of Christian spiritual discernment and the role it plays in the decision making by Christian school boards, by seeking the experience, views and insights from the key people who are intimately involved in the decision making of school boards; board chairs, board members and Principals (Crum, 2007). The research is geographically limited to schools located in Australia and New Zealand, given their common legal systems, heritage as countries, impact of Christian faith and their development of educational systems. The researcher by their own observations has identified that there is a broad range of size, socio-economic and theological backgrounds for the subject schools. The research examines four research questions in relation to Christian schools. Christian school boards and Christian spiritual discernment:

RQ 1. What Christian spiritual discernment practices do individuals (board chair, board members and Principals) undertake in relation to the governance of Christian school boards in Australia and New Zealand?

RQ 2. What Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes do Christian school boards collectively undertake in relation to the governance of schools in Australia and New Zealand?

RQ 3. How do Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes influence the decision making in the governance of Christian schools in Australia and New Zealand?

RQ 4. What makes a good Christian school board?

3.2 Methodology: The Conceptual Framework

The study is in the form of a convergent mixed-method approach that provides for the integration of both quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018; Dainty, 2008; Fetters et al., 2013). As outlined in the Literature Review, the role of boards in Christian schools is quite complex and involves multiple stakeholders with connection points across multiple levels within the organisation. It is not uncommon to have school board members who are also school parents (beneficiaries of the services of the school), members of the church that sponsors the school (moral owners), while also having friendships and other relationships with the personnel of the school, other parents and stakeholders (Bartlett & Campey, 2008). The board also operates in a regulated environment with multiple regulators from government at both a state and federal level requiring compliance with multiple pieces of legislation, regulations and standards. The research of complex processes, systems and organisations, per Fetters et al. (2013), is best suited to a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data. As a result, a mixed-method approach has been determined as the most appropriate approach.

3.3 Philosophical Orientation

The methodology utilised in research activity depends on the type of research that is being carried out and the context in which the study takes place, as it involves assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), assumptions about knowledge (epistemology) and the role of values and ethics (axiology) (Saunders et al., 2019). According to Saunders et al. (2019), the five major philosophies in business and management research are positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, postmodernism and pragmatism. The following sections explore these five major philosophies and their suitability for this research.

3.3.1 Positivism

Positivism is a philosophy based on empiricism and seeks to mimic the principles outlined in the natural sciences and apply them to the social sciences through observation with no input from the abstract or invisible, which includes emotions and feelings (Howell, 2013). The researcher believes that positivism is not the most suitable philosophy for this research, as in utilising immutable laws and predictions, this philosophy is "almost impossible" in the social sciences (Howell, 2013, p. 41). In addition, the research being undertaken is seeking to examine areas that are not just limited to observable human behaviour (such as time in prayer and reading scripture) but includes the invisible in terms of spiritual discernment, including the hearing of God's voice through Scripture, prayer, feelings and meditation (Cook, 2019). The research does not include any direct observation of human behaviour as it utilises the reflections and secondary observations by research participants on their individual actions, as well as on the actions and discussions during Christian school board meetings, of which they are participants.

3.3.2 Critical Realism

Critical realism as identified by Roy Bhaskar (1975) and Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 2000 and 2005), is a post-positivism theory that involves a distinction between the production of knowledge by human beings (which can change, as it is created by humans), as opposed to knowledge that is discovered by human beings and remains independent of whether humans exist or not to observe the activity (Howell, 2013). Critical realists hold that the knowledge exists whether a human is involved or not. Given that the research being examined is in relation to decision making by boards of human beings as they govern Christian schools, the subject by its very nature is integral to the activity and actions of human beings and therefore critical realism would not be an appropriate philosophy in relation to this research.

3.3.3 Interpretivism

Interpretivism is derived from idealism and also rationalism, with key philosophers subscribing to this view including Socrates, Schopenhauer, Descartes and Leibniz (Turyahikayo, 2021). The paradigm is built on science, and that the ability to think is the only source of true knowledge (Turyahikayo, 2021), which is encapsulated by Descartes in his quote "I think therefore I am" (Gamlen & McIntyre, 2018, p. 375). Interpretivist researchers obtain data that provides deeply contextual insights based on the insights of the individuals in their specific context (Elgeddawy & Abouraia, 2024) and viewpoint, not data that may be generalised across a range of contexts (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). As a result, most interpretivist research involves in-depth, small sample data that utilises qualitative methods only (Saunders et al., 2019; Turyahikayo, 2021).

Interpretivism was considered in depth by the researcher as a philosophy on which to base this research, however, it was ultimately discounted as the methodology to be adopted. Interpretivism assumes that reality is subjective and can differ based on the study of perspectives of different individuals and that these differences can be due to lived experiences (phenomenology), the study of cultural artefacts such as texts, symbols and stories (hermeneutics), and the study of symbols as a creation of meaning (symbolic interactionists) (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Saunders et al., 2019).

To undertake research on the nature and role of Christian spiritual discernment in the decision making by Christian school boards it would be extremely difficult to utilise interpretivism to make generalisations across all Christian schools in Australia and New Zealand due to the range of different types of schools, enrolment sizes and theological underpinnings of the schools, their boards and their board members. The adoption of a mixed-methods approach, whereby both quantitative and qualitative methods are used, to construct generalisations about practices across a broad range of schools provides the

likelihood of better answers to the research questions being posed, than an in-depth qualitative only analysis of a small number of schools.

3.3.4 Postmodernism

According to Howell (2013), postmodernism is a philosophy that questions and undermines theoretical frameworks that claim ultimate truth or knowledge. Key writers in support of postmodernism such as Frederich Nietzsche and Jean-Francois Lyotard in the late 20th century and early 21st century, encouraged objectivism and sought to discount grand theories on the grounds that by their nature they are not open to questioning and are actually a means of controlling people.

There are a number of incompatibilities between postmodernism and traditional Christian faith outlined by Kelly and James K Dew (2017) in that the central tenets of postmodernism include that beliefs, values and worldviews are shaped by a person's situation in life and not emanating from the concept of an objective truth. Truth is something created by humans rather than something to be discovered by humans. Truth is therapeutic rather than objective, and any overarching story or worldview is inherently oppressive, with Christianity specifically identified as one such meta-narrative.

In contrast to postmodernism, the type of schools participating in the research operate with a philosophy that integrates a biblical worldview as a distinctive of their teaching programs, ensuring that the beliefs and values taught to students are consistent with Christian values and beliefs (Brink, 2023; Prior, 2021). The nature of this research examines the role that faith plays in decision making of Christians, who are believers in objective truth as outlined in the Christian Scriptures (Groothuis, 2022), while Nietzsche as a key proponent of postmodernism states "I call Christianity the one great curse, the one great intrinsic depravity…the one immortal blemish of mankind" (Kaufmann, 1954, pp. 655-656). Therefore, the application of a postmodern philosophy to this research is not consistent with

the core aspects of this study that centres on Christian beliefs, worldview and the application of Christian faith in the practice of making decisions.

3.3.5 Pragmatism

Kelemen and Rumens (2012) outline that pragmatism emerged in the late 19th century in the United States of America from a number of scholars, including Charles Sanders Pierce, William James and John Dewey. Those writers shared a common belief that truth was fallible and based on experience, however, William James also located truth as emerging from an individual religious belief (Simpson & den Hond, 2022), which aligns well with the nature of this research, being in relation to the role of faith as part of the decision making of a Christian school board. The present study also seeks "towards knowledge that makes a positive difference and contributes to better practice" (Kelemen & Rumens, 2012, p. 10). Similarly, Kelly and Cordeiro (2020) view pragmatism-based research as seeking useful actionable knowledge and involves the examination of habits or ways of acting and dealing with multiple experiences of the same phenomena. The principle of actionable knowledge anchors the research in the experiences of three differing roles, being the board chair, board members and school Principals as both participants and observers in the utilisation of Christian spiritual discernment in the decision-making processes of a Christian school board meeting.

Pragmatism as a methodology equips research to deal with complex and dynamic organisations where actions can have varied qualities and outcomes (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020); such a methodology is well suited to schools as organisations that are not simple but quite complex in nature from both a regulatory and relational standpoint, where mechanistic theories of control do not necessarily lead to the desired outcomes (McNeil, 1999). Similarly, Kelly and Cordeiro (2020) outline that a methodology of pragmatism is well suited to a study

where improvement is sought in the policy and practice of providing a public good, such as education.

According to Saunders et al. (2019), pragmatist research starts with a problem, which in this research is rooted in the question of "What is the nature and role of Christian spiritual discernment practices used in Christian school boards by individual board members, and by the board as a whole, and how do these influence board decision making?" The research aims to contribute practical solutions that inform future practice by Christian school boards, and that these research outcomes may also be transferable to the performance and decision making of boards of other types of Christian organisations. This research centres on examining the current actions and processes of boards in the complex setting of a school and what works, with the clear aim of transferring this research (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020) into the creation of resources, tools and training for boards to assist them in seeking to govern Christian schools in accordance with the established religious beliefs and values of those schools.

The philosophy selected for this research is pragmatism, given its strong faith alignment, that the philosophy is based on practical application in a complex setting and is therefore ideal for researching the processes and practices utilised by Christian school boards in the making of their decisions through the use of Christian spiritual discernment. Pragmatism as a philosophy also aligns with justice stewardship theory in being practical in nature with a resonance with Christian faith and where the focus is on the benefit of other people.

Gobo (2023) outlines that the selected philosophical orientation of pragmatism includes some of the strengths of positivism, utilising traditional, standardised, forced choice, closed question questionnaires, with such a survey being used as one of the research tools in the quantitative phase of this research. In this research, with the addition of subjective data

from the qualitative phase, along with the need to deal with the complexity of the organisations being researched and the aim to contribute to better practice, it was determined by the researcher that pragmatism would be more appropriate as a philosophy for this study than positivism.

To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the collective views of board chairs, board members and Principals in terms of the research questions a two-phase approach was determined as the best approach for this research. Research phase one, a quantitative survey of Christian school board chairs, board members and Principals seeking information in respect of their school board and its implementation of Christian spiritual discernment practices in decision making. Research phase two, a qualitative interviews of a selected group of board chairs, board members and Principals seeking greater insight into their board and Christian spiritual discernment. In addition, participants are to be requested to provide information in respect of what they believe are the characteristics required for a good Christian school board.

3.4 Research Design

Research studies are generally classified into one of three primary methodologies being quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods (Creswell, 2009). Quantitative research systematically examines phenomena, variables between relationships and provides precise measurement through mathematical operations, numerical data and statistical analysis (Kawar et al., 2024; Mulisa, 2022). Qualitative research examines narrations and stories that provide deeper knowledge and understanding of real-life situations and individuals lived experiences with the data presented non-numerically (Kawar et al., 2024; Mulisa, 2022). Mixed methods:

> Involves the collection or analysis of both quantitative and/or qualitative data in a single study in which the data are collected concurrently or sequentially, are given

> priority and involve the integration of the data at one or more stages in the process of research. (Gunasekare, 2015, p. 362)

Mixed methods, in combining both quantitative and qualitative methods, benefits from the strengths of each method while limiting the disadvantages of each method if they were each utilised in isolation.

Kawar et al. (2024) indicates that quantitative research alone is beneficial in that it is objective in nature, can be done quickly, covering a large amount of data and is well accepted in more scientific areas of research, however, the certainty of evidence it generates can be variable depending on the way in which the data is generated, whereby descriptive studies are less reliable than controlled trails. Quantitative research is also "not ideal for human subject research" (Kawar et al., 2024, p. 3). Given the subject research is more descriptive than scientific in nature and involves the behaviour and perceptions of humans, qualitative research as a method alone would have some weaknesses. Qualitative research, however, is ideal for the exploration of attitudes, perceptions and behaviour while obtaining an understanding of the world as different people experience it (Opsal et al., 2016), which compensates for the weakness in quantitative research in the study of human attitudes and behaviour. The limitations of using qualitative research alone, such as clearly identifying the research problem and what the area to be studied is, plus the overcoming of very small sample data being examined (i.e., individual interviews) are overcome through the clarity quantitative research provides and its ability to assess large amounts of data (Kawar et al., 2024).

The use of a mixed-method approach combines the strength of quantitative and qualitative research and a result "scholars believe that mixed research can frequently provide a better study than either quantitative or qualitative research alone" (Mulisa, 2022, p. 126), particularly where the study is examining both generalisations and in-depth matters in the

context being researched (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). The subject research is exploring the nature of Christian spiritual discernment (generalisation) and the role it plays in the decision making (in-depth) of Christian school boards (context), which supports the decision that a mixed approach is the most suitable for this research study.

As a philosophical orientation Johnson et al. (2007) proposed pragmatism as the primary philosophy of mixed research as it applies both subjective objective quantitative data and subjective qualitative data to understanding the world and seeking to solve its problems (Elgeddawy & Abouraia, 2024). In selecting pragmatism as the most appropriate philosophy for this research, the use of a mixed-methods methodology is a logical extension, as the research seeks to examine the lived experiences of the research participants (Elgeddawy & Abouraia, 2024) as they relate to Christian spiritual discernment in the decision-making of Christian school boards of which they are part. The research further seeks to understand their perceptions of truth and theological beliefs, the integration of these within the practices and processes of their boards, and the impact that Christian spiritual discernment has on their decisions.

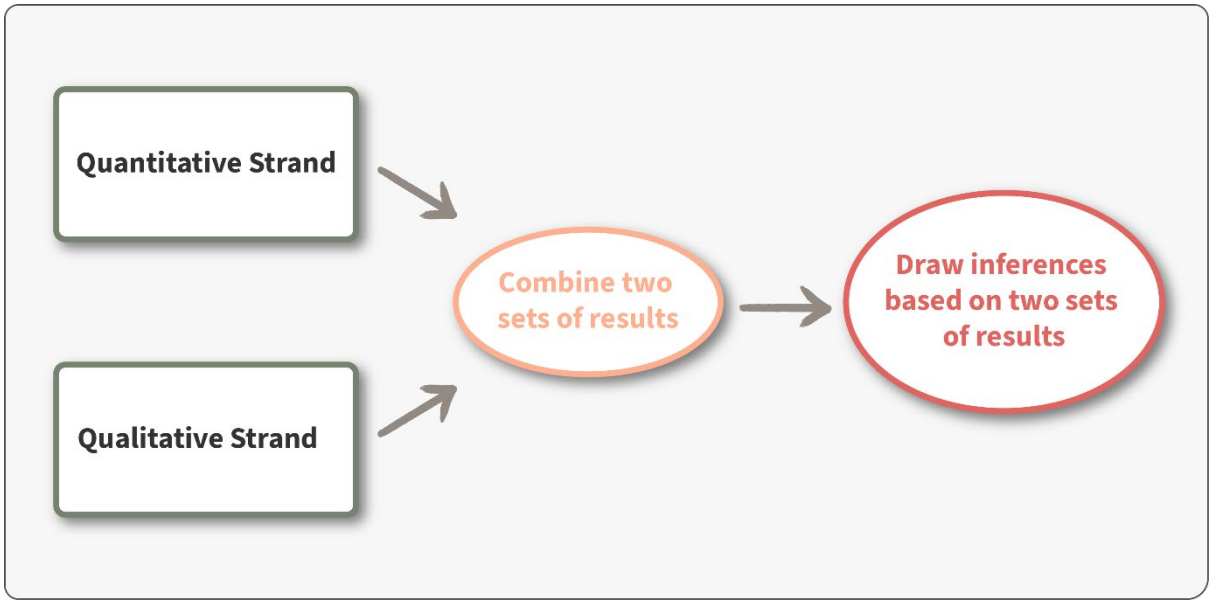
3.4.1 Mixed-Method Research Design

For this research, a convergent (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018) mixed-method design has been adopted that will be implemented concurrently (Plano-Clark, 2017; Teddlie, 2009), whereby quantitative and qualitative data is collected at the same time with a synthesis of the two data sources occurring at the interpretative phase (Kawar et al., 2024). This method addresses the research questions through the implementation of "quantitative and qualitative strands concurrently or independent from each other with the purpose of comparing or merging quantitative and qualitative results to produce more complete and validated conclusions" (Plano-Clark, 2017, p. 107). Plano-Clark (2017) expands on this design logic by providing the process as the gathering of numeric data and this is subsequently analysed by

statistical methods to produce quantitative results. Similarly, qualitative data is gathered, and this data is analysed using thematic approaches to provide qualitative findings. Plano-Clark (2017) shows this approach in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1

Concurrent Quantitative and Qualitative Mixed Methods Design Logic



Plano Clark (2017) states that an advantage of the proposed design is that it produces well-validated and substantiated results as it draws on "different but complementary data on the same topic" (p. 16) and in the process of collecting the two different types of data before analysing and drawing inferences, the researcher can also save time and costs. Similarly, Tashakkorie (2003, p. 205) outlines that the strength of mixed methods lies in its provision of "different perspectives on the phenomenon" as well as "different levels of data" (p. 205), while Caruth (2013) highlights the enhanced validity that comes through "cross validation" (p. 115) by utilising both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Disadvantages of mixed-methods research include the different sets of research skills needed to integrate the two strands of data (Plano-Clark, 2017; Teddlie, 2009) and the criticism of some researchers as being not as rigorous as a multi-method research approach

(Tashakkorie, 2003). In the case of this research, it is believed that the findings will be enhanced by utilising two different methods of data collection rather than just one. After examining the different options available as to the methodological approach, and the advantages and disadvantages of each, a mixed-method approach has been selected as the most appropriate method to use for this research. The selection of pragmatism as the theory being utilised in obtaining the data in relation to what works for the boards in their group decision making, a practical survey of board chairs, board members and school Principals will be used in the quantitative phase, while semi-structured interviews will be utilised in the qualitative phase to better understand a smaller sample of participants perceptions in respect of the process and practice of Christian spiritual discernment and the impact these have on their decision making.

The first two research questions (RQ) are:

RQ 1. What Christian spiritual discernment practices do individuals (board chair, board members and Principals) undertake in relation to the governance of Christian school boards in Australia and New Zealand?

RQ 2. What Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes do Christian school boards collectively undertake in relation to the governance of schools in Australia and New Zealand?

The first two research questions are addressed through both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the research. In the quantitative phase, a broad field of survey participants are able to answer those questions in such a way that the researcher is able to collect data that examines the practices and processes utilised by the school boards corporately and individually in relation to Christian spiritual discernment. The quantitative data collected enables an exploration of the relationships between respective variables and make comparisons across a range of demographics to enable findings to be made against the

research questions. In the qualitative phase, greater input is able to be provided by interviewees as questions are asked that relate to their own and their board's experience with Christian spiritual discernment. The data from the qualitative phase is analysed through a thematic understanding of the interviewees' reflections on their own and their boards' Christian spiritual discernment practices.

The third research question is:

RQ 3. How do Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes influence the decision making in the governance of Christian schools in Australia and New Zealand?

This question is addressed through qualitative research only, as it seeks to determine the opinions and perceptions of the respondents as they view the decision-making processes utilised within their own school board. The data from this question is analysed through a thematic understanding of the perceived impact and influence of Christian spiritual discernment on decisions made by a school board.

The fourth research question is:

RQ 4. What makes a good Christian school board?

This question is addressed through qualitative research only, as it seeks to determine the opinions and perceptions of the respondents as they view the decision-making processes as to the key characteristics of Christian school boards that may be relevant to the overall research problem. The data from this question is analysed through a thematic understanding of the perceived characteristics of a good Christian school board.

3.4.2 Ethical Considerations

In conducting mixed-methods research, the ethical considerations of both quantitative and qualitative research need to be addressed as mixed-methods research is the combination of the two (Caruth, 2013; Creswell, 2012). In relation to quantitative issues, the potential ethical issues that were taken into consideration in the research included ensuring: (a)

relevant permissions are obtained prior to the conduct of the survey, (b) the anonymity of survey respondents, and (c) the overall purpose of the study was well communicated to participants prior to them undertaking the survey.

Qualitative potential ethical issues that were taken into consideration in data collection included: (a) communicating the purpose of the study accurately to participants, (b) ensuring permission was obtained from participants prior to commencing the interviews, (c) ensuring they were aware they could cease their participation in the study at any time, and (d) ensuring the confidentiality of the data collected in the interviews.

Prior to the commencement of this research, formal ethics approval was required. The researcher completed an "Application for Ethical Clearance of Research Projects Involving Human Participants" form, having read the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. The submission for ethics approval was lodged on August 23, 2021. Approval from the Avondale University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) was received on September 20, 2021 (Project number ETH.2021.008, see Appendix A).

Email correspondence was undertaken by the researcher in March 2021 with the CEOs of each of the relevant Christian school associations, through whom the quantitative survey link would be distributed to potential participants. The emails sent to the CEOs included a brief overview of the research to be undertaken, a link to an article the author had recently published on the topic and a request for their consent to participate in the research process by forwarding on the link to an online survey with their endorsement to their member schools. Written confirmations were received from each of the CEOs prior to the ethics approval application being lodged, that they had consented to being involved in the research process, copies of which are included in Appendix C.

3.4.3 Administration

3.4.3.1 Anonymity

Anonymity for respondents in completing the surveys was seen as key to ensuring research participants' identities were not known (Nayak & Narayan, 2019). This provided assurance to survey participants that enabled them to disclose potentially sensitive information about their school and board. The questions asked of participants in the research instrument were in relation to matters that take place in private and confidential meetings held by Christian school boards and therefore research participants may be concerned about the public disclosure of such information, particularly if their school or themselves could be identified in the research findings.

In completing the online surveys, respondents were provided with the option of not completing the questions requesting their contact details, including the participant's name, email address and school name. These questions were only to be completed by those who volunteered to participate in the second phase of the research in the form of qualitative interviews. In the analysis of the data provided in the surveys, the data analysed did not include participants' names or the names of schools, such that the results would not include any bias or weighting based on the identity of the school or the survey participant.

3.4.3.2 Confidentiality

Confidentiality was also seen as a critical issue, especially during the qualitative interview phase of the research. The nature of the research being undertaken was in relation to sensitive matters and behaviours in private meetings of the school board, and the disclosure of such information may cause distress and damage to the research participant and the school they represent (Nayak & Narayan, 2019).

All interview participants were provided with an information letter prior to them providing consent to take part in the interview stage of the research, in which specific

undertakings were provided in respect of the removal of identifying names from the data, instead numeric codes were used as identifiers of interviews and that "confidentiality of individual participants and organisations will be assured" (Campey, 2022, p. 2). Data from each research participant was coded as Respondent 1 through to Respondent 12 to ensure confidentiality. The interview audio files and electronic transcriptions of the interviews were saved in a private section of a secure, password-protected cloud server and only accessible to the researcher. All electronic data related to the research will be stored in electronic form for five years following the conclusion of the project. Any notes or hard copy documents such as interview transcripts will be scanned into electronic form and hard copies destroyed as the project is undertaken.

3.4.3.3 Validity

Validity is concerned with the accurate measurement of research and the ability for a measure to measure what it is meant to measure (Zikmund, 2003) or as Zohbrabi (2013, p. 258) states, "validity is a matter of trustworthiness, utility and dependability" (p. 258). The key element in determining validity depends on the quality of the research tool being utilised. By undertaking a mixed-method approach, validity was also strengthened compared to that in a single method approach, through the examination of practical questions from different perspectives and documentation of those differences (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006).

In the quantitative phase of the research, the use of construct validity via factor analysis (Roberts & Priest, 2006) was the approach taken; whereas in the qualitative phase, one challenge that needed to be overcome was in relation to the familiarity of the researcher with the setting, people and processes being researched. While Roberts and Priest (2006) see this familiarity as an advantage, there was a need to ensure analytical distance was maintained. Such analytical distance was maintained through the triangulation of data, whereby cross analysis and comparison of data between different groups was utilised.

Drawing on the literature of Tashakkorie (2003) Creswell (2009); Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006); Creswell (2009); Collingridge (2014) to ensure the validity of the data and analysis of this mixed method study, the following procedures were adopted:

1. The quantitative survey instrument was validated prior to its implementation.
2. The researcher's objectives and purpose for the study were communicated to all the potential research participants, in both the qualitative and quantitative phases of this study.
3. Care was taken to ensure that the data being sought addressed the four research questions.
4. The researcher made use of a mixed-method approach, which provided the complementary strengths from both quantitative and qualitative research methods.
5. The individual semi-structured interviews followed a strict and consistent protocol, which is outlined in the data collection area of this chapter.
6. The data analysis process adopted a constant comparative method approach, utilising the data collected in the qualitative phase to triangulate the data from the quantitative phase.

3.4.3.4 Reliability

Reliability is concerned with the consistency, dependability and replicability of the results from the research (Zohbrabi, 2013). In the quantitative phase, reliability is displayed through the ability for the results of the research tool to be replicable in terms of data being provided in numerical form when undertaken at different times or by different people (Roberts & Priest, 2006). For this research, the quantitative data was collected via an online survey administered over several weeks, and participants were able to complete the survey at a time and location of their choosing, with the nature of the questions asked being independent of the researcher administering the research tool. The results would not be

impacted by the time or location of the research participant providing the responses as they were able to choose when and where they completed the survey.

Consistency and dependability are key aspects of the qualitative phase, especially where the same research cannot easily be repeated, such as where data is collected through semi-structured interviews. To ensure the reliability of the data collected, the process of collecting the data needs to be shown as consistent and dependable. As highlighted by Roberts and Priest (2006), key steps to assist in the reliability of the qualitative data in this research undertaken included: (a) ensuring there was technical accuracy in the recording and transcribing of the interviews, (b) keeping detailed notes on the processes followed in collecting the data, (c) encoding results, and (d) highlighting example comments supporting the findings.

3.5 Participants

This research study is in relation to the boards of Christian schools in Australia and New Zealand. The significant majority of such schools are members of a number of school associations in both countries, and participants were contacted and invited to participate in the research via those Christian school associations. The associations utilised for this purpose were: (a) Adventist Schools Australia (ASA), (b) Associated Christian Schools (ACS), (c) Christian Education National (CEN), (d) Christian Schools Australia (CSA), and (e) New Zealand Association for Christian Schools (NZACS).

3.5.1 Participant Selection in Phase One (Quantitative)

The target participants for involvement in phase one of this study were the board chairs, board members and Principals of Christian schools in Australia and New Zealand that belong to the associations noted above. The researcher briefed the CEO of each association about the proposed research and requested their co-operation in endorsing the research to their member schools. Appendix B provides a copy of the email sent to the CEOs requesting

their assistance in distributing the survey to their member schools, along with the text of the initial email to be sent to each of their member schools. The CEOs sent the invitation from the researcher to participate in the research to each targeted participant via their organisation's own email distribution system and provided those people with a link to the survey instrument originally provided by the researcher.

The researcher was not able to access the mailing lists utilised in sending the invitations due to privacy issues and was not provided with data in respect of the total number of people to whom each association sent invitations to participate in the research, nor the number of potential participants to whom the schools may have forwarded the email, as schools may have sent the email individually to each board member. The researcher was therefore unable to calculate the % of survey participants compared to the total invitations sent nor determine what the response level was by the different roles surveyed compared to the invitation received by potential participants in those different roles. There were 124 participants who completed the survey instrument, coming from a cross-section of the three different roles that were targeted.

The survey has the potential for self-selection bias or voluntary response bias (Nikolopoulou, 2023) as the participants have a choice as to whether they participate in the survey or not and the responses obtained may be reflective of survey participants who have an interest in Christian spiritual discernment or actively practice it in their Board decision making. The potential for self-selection bias was unable to be avoided in this research due to the non-compulsory nature of the survey nor the ability for the researcher to randomly sample Christian School Boards. The impact of self-selection bias on the results is discussed in Chapter 4.

3.5.2 Participant Selection in Phase Two (Qualitative)

As part of the survey undertaken in research phase one, survey participants were invited to volunteer to participate in the phase two interviews of the research via question and to provide their contact details for follow up. Following the selection by the researcher of candidates from amongst the volunteers, an email was sent to interview candidates, inviting them to participate in the next phase and requesting them to book a suitable time via the Calendly software system. In total, 52 survey participants (41.9%) volunteered to take part in the phase two interviews. From this volunteer pool, 12 candidates were selected and interviewed via Zoom. Those participants interviewed represented 23% of the volunteers who offered to take part in phase two and 9.7% of the original survey participants in phase one.

The interview candidates were selected using a purposive sampling technique (Bekele & Ago, 2022) based on a range of criteria to ensure those interviewed included a mix of interviewees in the same proportion as those who completed the phase one survey, and therefore, the sample is representative of the population being studied (Boddy, 2016). There is significant debate among researchers in determining the sample size to be utilised in qualitative research (Bekele & Ago, 2022; Boddy, 2016) with many factors in relation to the research to be considered in determining when data saturation or data adequacy occurs (Morse, 1995) being “the point at which no new information or themes are observed in the data from the completion of additional interviews” (Boddy, 2016, p. 427). Bekele and Ago (2022) in their broad literature review in relation to determining the sample size required, identified the following key factors as determinants in selecting a sample size:

1. The composition of the sample: if the interviewees are more homogenous, then a smaller sample size may be used than if there is a wide range of types of participants, as the sample does not need to cover such a heterogeneous range before data saturation is reached.

2. The scope of the study: the broader the scope, the longer it will it take to reach data saturation.
3. The nature of the topic: if the topic being researched is relatively simple to understand and the information required is readily obtained in an interview, then a smaller sample size may be utilised in obtaining the data.
4. The quality of the data – whereby the data obtained is clear, empirical and have good quality, then the sample size may be smaller than a situation where participants are likely to be unclear in their answers and lack experience in relation to the questions being asked.
5. The research design: the nature of the research will impact on the sample size to be selected, narrative, ethnography, grounded theory, case studies, and phenomenological research (Bekele & Ago, 2022).

The nature of this study is phenomenological, being an examination of "human experiences about a phenomenon as described by the participants" (Bekele & Ago, 2022, p. 48). There is significant debate amongst researchers about the sample size that should be utilised in phenomenological research. Bernard (2013) indicates that there should be 10 to 20 research participants in phenomenological studies, Morse (1995) states there should be at least six participants, while Creswell (1998) recommends between 5 and 25 participants, Guest et al. (2006) believe that 6 to 12 interviews are sufficient for a qualitative research project and (Dovetail Editorial Team, 2023) indicate that between 9 and 17 interviews is sufficient to reach data saturation in qualitative research.

Examining the characteristics of this phenomenological research in being relatively narrow in scope, as it is in relation to Christian schools, a single type of organisation. The interviews are being conducted with knowledgeable and educated participants who are involved in the governance of those schools and the study is in relation to one aspect of board

activities. In taking into account the literature on sample sizes, the researcher believes that the proposed sample size of 12 participants provides sufficient information such that data saturation can be reached and conclusions may be drawn from the data analysis.

The criteria utilised in selecting respondents to interview included: (a) the school's association that the survey respondent's school is a member of, (b) the role that the survey respondent holds within the school (i.e., board chair, board member or Principal), (c) the enrolment size of the respondent's school, (d) the geographic location of the school, and (e) the age of the school in years.

In selecting the candidates for interview (see Table 3.1), the researcher sought to ensure there was a broad mix of people covering a variety of aspects across the different criteria. The names of the potential participants, and their schools were masked during the selection process to minimise researcher bias in the selection of interview candidates. The 12 interviewees were considered sufficient to cover the selection criterion, enable data saturation and provide an interview pool that was manageable for the researcher in terms of accessibility, timing, transcribing and data analysis.

Table 3.1

Summary of Criteria of Candidates for Interview

Criteria	Candidates												Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
School Association													
ACS					■							■	2
ASA													0
CEN			■					■		■			3
CSA	■			■		■	■		■				5
NZACS		■									■		2
Role													
Principal			■						■		■		3
Board Chair	■				■	■	■					■	5
Board Member		■		■				■		■			4

Criteria	Candidates												Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
Enrolment Size													
<100													1
101 to 300													2
301 to 600													0
601 to 900													5
901 to 1,200													3
1,201 to 1,500													0
1501 to 1,800													0
>1,800													1
Geographic Location													
Capital/Metro/Suburban													3
Regional City													6
Rural Country													3
Age of School													
< 6 years													0
6 to 10 years													0
11 to 20 years													1
21 to 30 years													1
31 to 40 years													5
41 to 50 years													5
> 50 years													0

3.6 Data Collection

The overall research problem directed the study to seek the perceptions and practices of those most closely involved in the decision making of Christian school boards, namely board chairs, board members and school Principals. The data was collected from these three groups of people in two phases. Phase one involved collecting quantitative data via an online survey using closed-ended questions. Phase two involved collecting data via a series of semi-structured interviews of volunteer participants from phase one. Two distinct research phases were used as many researchers have drawn attention to the challenges of using both open and closed-ended questions in the same phase of data collection (Covell et al., 2012).

3.6.1 Phase One: Online Survey

3.6.1.1 Online Survey: Development

Surveys can take on a number of different forms in the use of open-ended and closed-ended questions, with the majority of researchers using closed-ended questions to collect basic data, simple responses, and to measure attitudes (Baburajan et al., 2022). Due to their nature, open-ended questions tend to be used in the collection of qualitative data, while closed-ended questions are more suitable for quantitative research, as the responses can be more readily converted to numerical data for analysis.

A comprehensive search was undertaken by the researcher as part of the research proposal stage of this project, to determine whether similar research had been previously undertaken elsewhere in the world to consider whether another research tool could be used as the basis for this research. Only one similar research study could be found in relation to the role of Christian spiritual discernment in decision making by Christian boards, and this was research of boards of Christian higher education institutions in the United States of America (Barbee, 2019). The data collection tool used in that research was reviewed in detail, and only one question from the previous research was able to be used in this research work, as the remaining elements of the tool were not relevant to primary and secondary schools in Australia and New Zealand. Apart from the single question from Barbee's study, the survey questionnaire used in this research was developed by the researcher due to the unique nature of the research being undertaken. The survey tool developed was based upon the research questions being examined, the general principles of questionnaire development, ensuring that the questionnaire was internally consistent and could be easily administered. Finally, the questions needed to be framed to ensure that a statistical analysis could be readily undertaken on the data collected.

3.6.1.2 Online Survey: Validity

As included in 3.4.3.3, the survey instrument was validated prior to its utilisation in the research following the process set out by (Collingridge, 2014):

1. Establishing face validity of the survey by the researcher working through the questionnaire as would a participant to ensure it is understandable and usable;
2. Undertaking a pilot implementation of the survey. Briggs, Coleman and Morrison (2012) write, "The single most effective strategy to minimise problems is to make sure you pilot your instruments" (p. 152). A draft version of the survey was piloted with a small group of people who had a deep understanding of Christian School boards and their decision-making processes in order to test the instrument's reliability and validity. Current and former board members, as well as a current school Principal, were consulted in an effort to test and modify the draft survey so as to identify any potential problems in its administration and possible understanding of survey questions by participants. None of the people consulted took part in the subsequent research survey as they were not eligible to do so in their current roles. The pilot study resulted in a number of minor revisions in the wording of questions, as well as the method by which some of the Likert scale questions operated. These changes made the instrument more user-friendly, and the feedback aided in providing a more cohesive and concise instrument; and
3. The data resulting from the pilot survey was reviewed to ensure the questions were relevant and that the data that resulted was consistent and what might be reasonably expected;

The final survey was prepared for distribution to board chairs, board members and Principals via an email to be distributed by the CEOs of five Christian school associations,

along with instructions on its completion and statements regarding the guarantee of anonymity (see Appendix D).

3.6.1.3 Online Survey: Content

The online survey (see Appendix D) asked a series of quantitative questions in the following key sections:

1. Individual practices: spiritual and practical time spent by individuals prior to a board meeting; four and six elements in two questions, respectively, on six-point Likert scales.
2. Board practices: selection and qualification requirements of board members, the decision-making processes, Christian spiritual discernment practices used in board decision making and other practices, which may aid in the integration of Christian spiritual discernment in board decision making.
3. Board information: number of board members on the school board, the potential maximum number of board members, frequency and duration of board meetings and a single open-ended question asking for any comments about Christian spiritual discernment by Christian school boards.
4. General demographics: the respondent's position in the school, length of time in service at the school, age of the school, number of enrolments in the school, location and affiliations of the school.

3.6.1.4 Online Survey: Data Collection

The survey was distributed to the target participants via five key associations of Christian schools with membership across Australia and New Zealand, namely: Adventist Schools Australia (ASA), Associated Christian Schools (ACS), Christian Education National (CEN), Christian Schools Australia (CSA), and New Zealand Association for Christian Schools (NZACS). The associations sent an email to their members on October 13, 2021,

inviting them to participate in the research project along with an endorsement from each CEO, in addition to the forwarding of an introductory email from the researcher (see Appendix B). The email included the link to the online survey, which was conducted via SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com) and the information letter on the research prepared by the researcher (see Appendix E). The online survey closed on November 3, 2021, and at the time of closing, 124 participants had completed the survey.

The researcher was not provided with data on the total number of invitations that were ultimately sent by each of the associations due to privacy reasons. Due to the potentially cascading nature of the invitations sent, the researcher was unable to reliably measure who received an invitation to participate in the survey. For some schools, a school may have received a single invitation to participate in the online survey and that invitation in turn was distributed to that school's board members. Alternatively, a person at a school may have received an invitation directly from their Christian school association to participate in the survey. As a result, analysis of the percentage level of participation of respondents compared to survey invitations is unable to be performed.

3.6.2 Phase Two: Interviews

3.6.2.1 Interviews: Development

The focus of the interviews was to gather information from board chairs, board members and Principals of Christian schools as to their individual Christian spiritual practices prior to a board meeting, the Christian spiritual discernment practices of the board as a group, the impact and changes to these Christian spiritual discernment practices over time, and a more general question on what makes a good Christian school board. Interview candidates were chosen from the pool of quantitative survey respondents who indicated their willingness to take part in the interview phase, to intentionally reflect the proportional level of quantitative survey respondents along the lines of key demographic measures, including: the

affiliation of the school, the size of the school, the location of the school and the role of the respondent (see Table 3.1). The process of interviewee selection initially resulted in 15 candidates for interview being selected for participation in the second phase of research. The first step in the interview process was to contact those selected to confirm their willingness to take part in the interview phase of this research study. This initial contact took place via email and resulted in 12 candidates confirming their willingness to continue to the interview phase, the remaining three potential interviewees did not respond, or suitable interview arrangements could not be made. Those candidates willing to participate in the interviews were invited via the Calendly app to select a suitable date and time for a Zoom interview. All interviews were conducted via Zoom, given that the candidates were located across Australia and New Zealand, making face-to-face interviews cost-prohibitive for the researcher. In addition, the interviews were conducted during a period when travel between states and internationally was problematic due to the travel restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic that occurred between 2020 and 2022.

In preparing for the interviews, the researcher considered the four research questions and identified that the most appropriate interview type would be via semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews allowed interviewees to have the scope and time to outline their views and perceptions on individual and board practices and enabled further information to be obtained via an interactive conversation that explored issues in more depth or asked for more detail in relation to the responses provided. The overall structure ensured the interviews were organised and followed a similar format (Ahlin, 2019; Creswell, 2012).

In addition to developing a set of interview questions, a qualitative interview consent form (see Appendix F) was prepared in planning for these interviews. The qualitative interview consent form, along with a copy of the original research information statement, was

emailed to interviewees in advance of the interview for their consideration, signing, and return to the researcher.

3.6.2.2 Interviews: Content

All interviewees were asked eight main specific questions in addition to six demographic questions over the duration of each interview. The eight specific questions asked were directly linked to the four research questions. A brief overview of each of the specific questions asked and the research question it relates to are as follows:

- Question 1 (RQ1): interviewees were asked about their individual practices in preparing for a board meeting. It was clarified in asking this question that it was in respect of all the actions they take in preparing for meetings, not just spiritual matters.
- Question 2 (RQ2): whether the board had discussed about the spiritual development and well-being of its members, including expanding on the nature of these discussions.
- Question 3 (RQ2): what the spiritual practices undertaken by the board are whilst it is together. This question was not just restricted to Christian spiritual discernment practices specifically.
- Question 4 (RQ2): the opinion of the interviewee, as to whether the board's prayerfulness and seeking discernment in decision making have changed while the person has been involved in the board.
- Question 5 (RQ2): ideally, in the opinion of the interviewee, what the spiritual practices of a board should have in its decision making.
- Question 6 (RQ3): the opinion of the interviewee, as to whether the board's spiritual practices have changed while the person has been involved in the board.
- Question 7 (RQ3): the opinion of the interviewee, as to whether the board's spiritual discernment practices impact its decision making and how that happens.

- Question 8 (RQ4): the opinion of the interviewee as to the characteristics of a good Christian school board. This question was not restricted to spiritual issues only, but all aspects of a board could be included for consideration.

At the conclusion of each interview, the interviewee was asked to provide information as to their role in the school, the age of the school in years, the number of students in the school (school size), the location of the school (type of location and country) and the affiliation of the school.

The proforma used by the researcher during each of the qualitative interviews and the linkage of each question to the research questions is in Appendix G.

3.6.2.3 Interviews: Data Collection

All interviews took place via Zoom between April 7, 2022, and May 19, 2022. The duration of the interviews ranged from 19 minutes to 44 minutes, with a mean of 28 minutes and a median interview length of 26 minutes. Interviews were unable to be conducted face-to-face as interviewees came from five different Australian states and two interviewees were from New Zealand, with the timeframe that the interviews were conducted in coinciding with the travel and other restrictions arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The semi-structured interviews followed a consistent procedure: (a) greet the interviewee, (b) confirmation of and thank them for signing the interview consent form, (c) confirm their consent to the recording of the interview, (d) outline the nature of the study and purpose of the interview, (e) inform the interviewees that they could cease the interview or decline any questions that they do not wish to answer, (f) advise them to feel free to take their time, (g) ask the qualitative interview questions including seeking of clarification to answers as required, (h) ask the demographic related questions, (i) thank them for their time and input, reassuring them of confidentiality and anonymity of their answers, and (j) cease recording.

The interviews were recorded via the Zoom software. In addition, a portable digital recording device was used to provide an audio backup of the interview if access to this material was required due to any technical issues with the Zoom recordings. The recordings were transcribed using an independent commercial service engaged by the researcher in their entirety and not just focusing on the specific questions asked to assist the researcher in being able to analyse the overall data (Schilling, 2006). The results of the transcriptions were reviewed in detail to ensure that they were accurate and to correct errors, including inserting words or phrases where the transcriber had marked the section as being "inaudible" by relistening to relevant sections of the recordings. Any identifying references, such as people's names and schools, were removed prior to the data analysis being undertaken to ensure the preservation of anonymity (Schilling, 2006).

3.7 Summary

Chapter 3 explored the basis selected for this research being a pragmatic convergent mixed methods study that utilises a quantitative survey of board chairs, board members of Christian schools combined with a qualitative semi-structured interview of a smaller sample of board chairs and school Principals who volunteered to be interviewed during their completion of the survey phase of the research.

Chapter 4 examines the quantitative phase of this mixed methods research study, while Chapter 5 outlines the results and analysis arising from the qualitative phase of the research.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH PHASE ONE: QUANTITATIVE SURVEY RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This research employed a two-phase convergent mixed method that is being implemented concurrently and is designed to explore the nature and role that Christian spiritual discernment plays in the decision-making processes of boards of Christian schools in Australia and New Zealand. This chapter outlines the work undertaken in the first phase of the research, being quantitative in nature, and the analysis of the results from this phase. The chapter explores the frequency and relationships arising from the numerical data in the survey utilised, and outlines were there are variations or patterns across the various demographics of the survey participants. In this ex-post facto cross-sectional study, a survey instrument was employed to ascertain the type, frequency and perceived efficacy of Christian spiritual discernment in relation to Christian school boards. Insights from these results have the potential to gain a greater understanding of the functioning of Christian school boards and the integration of faith in their decision-making processes. The second phase of the research, the qualitative component, where data was collected through semi-structured interviews, will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Table 4.1 provides an overview of the alignment of the four research questions and the results of the survey instrument that are analysed within this chapter.

Table 4.1

Alignment of Research Questions with Results

Research Question	Focus	Relevant Sections in Chapter 4
RQ1: What Christian spiritual discernment practices do individuals (board chairs, board members and Principals) undertake in relation to the governance of Christian school boards?	Individual preparation and personal Christian spiritual discernment practices.	4.5.13 Individual preparation time for board meetings. 4.6.4 Pre-disposition towards board decisions. 4.7.3 Individual time spent on spiritual activities.
RQ2: What Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes do Christian school boards collectively undertake in relation to governance?	Board structure, processes, and collective Christian spiritual discernment practices.	4.5.12 Board policies. 4.5.14 Regular or annual board retreat. 4.5.15 Activities at a board retreat. 4.6.1 Process in reaching board decisions. 4.6.5 Discussions of significant board decisions. 4.6.6 Stopping and praying in the midst of board decisions. 4.7.1 Extent of using Christian spiritual discernment in board decision making. 4.7.2 Board meeting practices. 4.7.3 Time spent in board meetings on spiritual activities.
RQ3: How do Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes influence decision making in the governance of Christian school boards?	Perceived impact of Christian spiritual discernment on decision outcomes.	4.7 Christian spiritual discernment influence on decision making.
RQ4: What makes a good Christian school board?	Overall Christian school board.	Not asked in quantitative Survey.

4.2 The Survey Instrument

The survey instrument consisted of four sections: The first section contained two question sets relating to individual board member practices, including individual Christian spiritual discernment practices and the individual board members' preparations for board meetings. The second section comprised of 13 questions relating to board processes, including board Christian spiritual discernment practices. The third section included five questions relating to board structure, frequency and duration of board meetings. The fourth section contained seven questions relating to board and board member demographics. The

demographic questions related to the role of the person completing the survey included (a) the length of time in this role at the school, (b) the age of the school, (c) the size of the school, (d) the location of the school, and (e) the affiliation of the school. A copy of the survey is included in Appendix D.

The survey did not include a specific definition of discernment or Christian spiritual discernment, as it was identified during the literature review phase of this research that there was no common single definition for either term. Rather, authors and researchers described what discernment and Christian spiritual discernment are, as well as the types of activities and outcomes that constitute some form of discernment process instead of focusing on a single definition. Following the analysis of data arising from phase one and phase two of the research, in conjunction with the key elements described in the Literature Review, a simple definition of Christian spiritual discernment for Christian school boards arising from the research is set out in Section 6.2.

4.3 Data Collection

The aim was to collect data from a broad range of Christian schools in Australia and New Zealand. To assist in this process, key associations of Christian schools were requested to distribute invitations to participate in the research among their member schools, including the link to the online quantitative questionnaire in SurveyMonkey. The Christian school associations that participated in this process were (a) Adventist Schools Australia (ASA), (b) Associated Christian Schools (ACS), (c) Christian Education National (CEN), (d) Christian Schools Australia (CSA), and (e) New Zealand Association for Christian Schools (NZACS).

The researcher was not provided with the total number of survey invitations that were sent to member schools or potential survey participants. The survey instrument was left open for three weeks from the time of the initial invitation, and the researcher requested that a reminder email, to participate in the survey, be sent to member schools midway through the

survey period. At the end of the survey period, 124 surveys had been completed. The usable data from the 124 completed questionnaires was exported from SurveyMonkey and entered into the statistical software package IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 26. The quantitative data was then analysed using SPSS.

The survey data included a small number of "no answer" responses to the questions and these responses have been included in the data analysis for completeness. The researcher reviewed each survey individually to determine whether the "no answers" occurred due to the non-completion of a whole survey by a participant and found that this was not the case. The "no answer" responses were scattered throughout the surveys and did not represent participants not answering a whole survey, nor a significant number of survey respondents not responding to any one survey question. There was no discernible pattern among the "no answer" responses and, given the very small number of those responses, there was a negligible impact on the conclusions to be drawn from the data.

For the purposes of the analysis in Chapter 4 the following general terms are utilised (a) "Majority", refers to greater than 50% of respondents answering with a particular response of combination of responses, and (b) "Minority" refers to less than 50% of respondents answering with a particular response or combination of responses.

4.4 Survey Analysis: Demographic Data

The fourth section of the survey contained seven demographic questions: the first of these questions related to the current role of the respondent in the school, the second to the cumulative length of time the respondent has held this role, the third was in relation to the age of the school they are involved with, the fourth was in relation to the number of students in the school, the fifth related to the country the school is located in, the sixth was in relation to the type of geographic location of the school; and the seventh was in relation to the school association affiliation of the school. The responses to the demographic questions are utilised

as part of the data analysis process in determining if there are any patterns or statistical relationships that emerge from the survey data.

4.4.1 Position Currently Held (Question 21)

Survey respondents were asked to nominate their main role in relation to the school to which they were responding, with the choices offered being board chair, board member, Principal or other. Analysis of the data indicated that 48 respondents (39%) identified themselves as board members, 34 respondents (27%) identified themselves as a Principal or head of school, and 30 respondents (24%) identified themselves as board chairs, noting that they would also be board members; however, the instrument was developed such that respondents could only provide one response to their current position to ensure data was analysed on their dominant role only. Cumulatively, 63% of respondents serve on the board as board members (those who responded as board chairs plus those who responded as board members). Seven respondents (5%) identified as “other”, indicating that they attend board meetings due to other positions they hold within the school, but not as one of the identified roles listed as options in the question. These additional roles included the company secretary, school chaplain and representatives of other organisations that require them to attend school board meetings. Five respondents (4%) provided no answer to this question (see Table 4.2).

In reviewing the data from this question it was noted that the number of board chair and school Principal responses was similar to each other and given there is only one of each of these roles in a school this would indicate that there were approximately 30 to 34 separate schools that participated in the survey and therefore, on average there were approximately 1.5 board members per school who participated in the survey.

Table 4.2

Position Currently Held by Respondents

Position Held	Number of Respondents	Percent
Board Chair	30	24
Board Member	48	39
Principal/Head of School	34	27
Other	7	6
No Answer	5	4
Total	**124**	**100**

4.4.2 Time in Current Position (Question 22)

Survey respondents were asked to provide the cumulative amount of time they had spent in their current role in the school; seven time bands were nominated for respondents to choose from in the survey; being less than one year, one to five years, six to ten years, 11 to 20 years, 21 to 30 years, 31 to 40 years and greater than 40 years. Analysis of the data indicated that ten respondents (8%) were in their first year in their role. The most common response was that 57 respondents (46%) had been in their role for between one and five years, followed by 26 respondents (21%) who had been in their current role for between six and ten years. Nineteen respondents (15%) had been in their role for between 11 and 20 years, and five respondents (4%) were between 21 and 30 years. The least common response was from two survey respondents (2%) who had been in their current role for between 31 and 40 years, and five respondents (4%) did not nominate a time in their current role.

There was a range of respondents from across the time spans of service, with the majority of respondents (54%) being five years or less in their current role (see Table 4.3). When considering data in respect of the ages of the schools participating in the survey (see Table 4.4) where the largest group of respondents were from schools aged 31 to 40 years old, this indicates that the majority of respondents are relatively new to the roles they hold compared to the age of the school they serve in. As a result, survey participants may not have

a long-term view of the practices and processes of the board, however, it does also mean that they may have relatively fresh perspectives on the issues being examined in the survey. The data also indicated there were seven respondents with 27 or more years in their current role, which means they have more than likely been in their role for more than 50% of the life of the school given, as per Table 4.4, the older end of the age spectrum for schools has 30 schools in the 41 to 50 year age bracket and 12 schools that are 50 years or older.

Table 4.3

Cumulative Length of Time in Current Role Held by Respondents

Time	Number of Respondents	Percent	Cumulative Percent
< 1 year	10	8	8
1-5 years	57	46	54
6-10 years	26	21	75
11-20 years	19	15	90
21-30 years	5	4	94
31-40 years	2	2	96
> 40 years	0	0	96
No Answer	5	4	100
Total	**124**	**100**	**100**

4.4.3 Age of School (Question 23)

Survey respondents were asked to provide the age of the school to which they were responding. Eight time bands were nominated in the survey for participants to choose from, being less than one year, one to five years, six to ten years, 11 to 20 years, 21 to 30 years, 31 to 40 years, 41 to 50 years and greater than 50 years. Analysis of the data indicated that two respondents (2%) were from schools between six and ten years old, and four respondents (3%) were from schools between 11 and 12 years old. Twenty-five respondents (20%) came from schools between 21 and 30 years old. The most common response came from 41 respondents (33%) who were in schools between 31 and 40 years old, followed by 30 respondents (24%) serving in schools between 41 and 50 years old. Twelve respondents

(10%) were from schools that were older than 50 years. Four respondents (3%) were unsure of the age of their school, one respondent (1%) selected "Other," indicating they were from a board that governed three schools with an age range between 25 and 35 years old, and five respondents (4%) did not answer this question (see Table 4.4).

There were no responses from schools that were less than six years old, and only six schools that were between 6 and 20 years old, indicating that there was a maturity in the practices and processes of the school boards well-beyond the initial setup phase of the schools that took part in the survey. The majority of respondents were from schools between 6 and 40 years old (58%), with 34% of respondents coming from schools that were 41 years or older, and the majority of those coming from schools in the 41 to 50 years old bracket (30 of the 42 schools).

Table 4.4

Age of School

Time	Number of Respondents	Percent	Cumulative Percent
< 1 year	0	0	0
1-5 years	0	0	0
6-10 years	2	2	2
11-20 years	4	3	5
21-30 years	25	20	25
31-40 years	41	33	58
41-50 years	30	24	82
>50 years	12	10	92
Not Sure	4	3	95
Other	1	1	96
No Answer	5	4	100
Total	**124**	**100**	**100**

4.4.4 Size of School (Question 24)

Survey respondents were asked to provide information on the number of students enrolled in their school. Eight enrolment bands were nominated in the survey for respondents to select from, less than 100 students, 101 to 300 students, 301 to 600 students, 601 to 900 students,

901 to 1,200 students, 1,201 to 1,500 students, 1,501 to 1,800 students, and greater than 1,800 students. For the ease of data analysis, these were collapsed into four groups of less than 300 students, 301 to 600 students, 601 to 900 students and greater than 900 students, therefore creating enrolment groups respectively of small schools, small-medium schools, medium-large schools and large schools. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common group of respondents was 36 (29%) from schools with fewer than 300 students. The least common numeric response came from 21 respondents (17%), having between 300 and 600 students enrolled in their school, followed by 31 respondents (25%) who were from schools of between 600 and 900 students. The third most common level of response came from 29 respondents (23%) who were from schools with more than 900 students enrolled, and seven respondents (6%) did not answer the question as to how many students were enrolled in their school (see Table 4.5).

Based on the number of responses for each of the collapsed bands of enrolments in the respondents' schools, multiplied by the top and bottom of the respective range of school size in each of these bands, small schools (less than 300 students) enrol up to 10,800 students in total. Small-medium schools (301 to 600 students) have a total enrolment of between 6,321 and 12,600 students, medium-large schools (601 to 900 students) have a total enrolment of between 18,631 and 27,900 students, and large schools (greater than 900 students) have a total enrolment of in excess of 26,100 students. So, while the majority of respondents had less than 900 students in their school (71% of respondents), large schools of greater than 900 students, have the majority of the students in the schools that participated in the survey.

Table 4.5

Number of Students Enrolled in the School

Enrolments	Number of Respondents	Percent	Cumulative Percent
< 300 students	36	29	29
301 - 600 students	21	17	46
601-900 students	31	25	71
>900 students	29	23	94
No Answer	7	6	100
Total	**124**	**100**	**100**

4.4.5 Country in Which the School is Located (Question 25)

Based on the survey responses, the majority of survey responses, 101 respondents (81%) were from Australia, 18 respondents (15%) came from New Zealand, and five respondents (4%) did not answer the question as to the country in which their school was located. Further analyses of the individual survey response data for those that did not answer this question, it was identified that they had answered other questions on the survey. So, it is unclear as to why they would not have nominated the country their school is located in (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6

Country in Which the School is Located

Country	Number of Respondents	Percent
Australia	101	81
New Zealand	18	15
No Answer	5	4
Total	**124**	**100**

4.4.6 Location of the School (Question 26)

Respondents were asked to provide the type of location of their school. Four location options were provided in the survey: capital city/metropolitan/suburban, regional city, rural/country and other. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common response was 46

respondents (37%) who were from regional city-based schools, followed by 45 respondents (36%) who were from capital city/metropolitan/suburban based schools. The least common physical location response was from 27 respondents (22%) who were from rural/country-based schools. One respondent answered “other” and provided additional information that they were from a system of schools with multiple school location types for their schools, and five respondents (4%) did not answer the question as to the location type of their school (see Table 4.7).

In analysing the data further, the spread of small schools (less than 300 students) between the three physical location type options is equal. The small-medium sized schools (301 to 600 students) are predominantly in the capital city/metropolitan/suburban locations, though there are significant numbers in both regional city and rural/country locations. The medium-large sized schools (601 to 900 students) are predominantly regional city based, followed by capital city/metropolitan/suburban locations and they are in a lesser number of rural/country locations. The large schools (greater than 900 students) are predominantly located in capital city/metropolitan/suburban locations, with a lesser amount in regional cities, and there are no large schools located in rural/country locations who participated in the survey. As would be expected, large schools cluster in capital city/metropolitan/suburban areas given the larger population base compared to the other two alternative locations. This same pattern holds in respect of small-medium sized schools. However, for medium-large schools this pattern does not hold with more schools of this size being in regional cities than capital city/metropolitan/suburban locations. For survey participants, the number of small schools in the survey was the same, no matter the location of the school.

Table 4.7

Location of the School

Location	Number of Respondents	Percent
Capital City / Metropolitan / Suburban	45	36
Regional City	46	37
Rural / Country	27	22
Other	1	1
No Answer	5	4
Total	**124**	**100**

4.4.7 Affiliation of the School (Question 27)

Survey respondents were asked to provide details about the affiliation of their school, with the options provided being Adventist Schools Australia (ASA), Associated Christian Schools (ACS), Christian Education National (CEN), Christian Schools Australia (CSA), and New Zealand Association for Christian Schools (NZACS). In addition to these associations, Australian participants were able to also nominate if their school was also affiliated with the Association of Independent Schools (AIS) from their state. Fifteen respondents indicated that they were also affiliated with their local AIS in addition to at least one of the five other Christian-based associations. No further analysis was conducted in respect of AIS membership, as the schools treat this membership as supplementary to their prime affiliation with a faith-based group. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common responses came from CSA schools, with 45 respondents (36%). The second most common responses were from 29 respondents (23%) who were from schools affiliated with CEN, followed by 18 respondents (14.5%) from NZACS-affiliated schools. Fourteen respondents (11%) were from ACS-affiliated schools, while 10 respondents (8%) were from ASA-affiliated schools. Eight (6%) respondents did not provide an answer to the question regarding their school's association affiliation (see Table 4.8).

The school associations operate in separate countries; ASA, ACS, CEN and CSA all operate in Australia only, while NZACS operates only in New Zealand. The total of the survey respondents from Australian-based associations is 84%, while the respondents from the New Zealand based association is 16%. These results closely align with the country of operation for the schools, per the data from Table 4.6, which shows 81% of respondents from schools in Australia and 16% of respondents from schools in New Zealand. The minor difference between the two data sets results from the difference in the "no answer" responses to each question, where fewer respondents indicated which association their school is affiliated with, as opposed to those who provided the country in which their school is located.

Table 4.8

Affiliation of the School

Affiliation	Number of Respondents	Percent
Adventist Schools Australia (ASA)	10	8
Associated Christian Schools (ACS)	14	11
Christian Education National (CEN)	29	23
Christian Schools Australia (CSA)	45	36
New Zealand Association for Christian Schools (NZACS)	18	15
No Answer	8	7
Total	**124**	**100**

4.5 Survey Analysis: Board Structure and Processes

Questions related to board structure and processes were in the first and third sections of the survey and have been analysed together by the researcher in one section of this thesis. The questions in relation to information about the structure of the board included how many board members are currently on the Christian school board. The second question related to the maximum number of board members that can be on the Christian school board, the third question was in relation to the number of board meetings held in a year, and the fourth question asked about the duration of typical board meetings. The questions in relation to the

general policies and processes of the board included whether the board has an orientation process for new board members; whether the board has a range of policies, with a list of policies provided for participants to respond to; what is the amount of time spent on a range of specified individual preparation activities for board meetings. Survey participants were asked two additional questions as to whether the board has an annual or regular board retreat and, if the board did hold such a retreat, what the typical activities they undertook at that retreat based on a list provided in the survey.

4.5.1 Board Size (Question 16)

Survey respondents were asked to nominate how many board members they currently have on their Christian school board; survey respondents were provided with options to choose a number between 2 and 15 board members. To assist with data analysis, the responses were divided into four bands of number of board members being five or fewer board members; six to eight board members; nine to ten board members and greater than ten board members. Analysis of the data indicated that the most frequent response for the board size was six to eight members, with 52 respondents (42%), followed by five or fewer members, with 31 respondents (25%). Twenty-six respondents (21%) were involved in a Christian school board with nine to ten board members, while Christian School boards with more than ten members had nine respondents (7%). One respondent (1%) was not sure of the size of their Christian school board, and five respondents (4%) did not complete the question on how many board members were on their board. The majority of Christian school boards had eight or fewer board members (67%) (see Table 4.9).

Those boards with five or fewer members would have significant difficulty in covering the range of skills and experience required of a school board to effectively govern the school and deal with the variety of complex issues a school board is required to make decisions on (Krishnan et al., 2016; Loh et al., 2021; McCormick et al., 2006). Even those

schools with up to eight board members may also be challenged to provide the skills mix coverage required and deal with complex issues before the board, noting that boards of eight or fewer members represent the majority of respondents to the survey (67%). The second most common group of respondents (25%) were in the five board members or fewer category indicating that there may be some broader governance issues for many of the boards that participate in this research.

Table 4.9

Board Size

Number of Board Members	Number of Respondents	Percent	Cumulative Percent
5 or less members	31	25	25
6 – 8 members	52	42	67
9 – 10 members	26	21	88
>10 members	9	7	95
Not Sure	1	1	96
No Answer	5	4	100
Total	**124**	**100**	**100**

Analysing the data, where both the enrolment size of the school (based on the four enrolment bands in Table 4.5) and the current board membership size were provided by survey participants, shows that generally, the smaller a school is in terms of enrolments, the smaller the board that governs it. The difference across the bands of enrolments, though, is not significant, as there is only an 18% difference in the mean size of boards between small schools with less than 300 students, where the mean board size is 6.7 members, while large schools with more than 900 students had a mean board size of 7.9 members. Small-medium schools with 300 to 600 students have a mean board size of 7.1 members, while medium-large schools of 601 to 900 students have a mean board size of 6.9 students. Based on this analysis on the middle-sized schools, the mean size of boards does not increase as the school increases in size (see Table 4.10).

Table 4.10

Current Mean Board Size by Enrolments

Enrolments	Number of Respondents	Percent	Current Mean Board Size
<300 students	35	30	6.7
301-600 students	21	18	7.1
601-900 students	31	27	6.9
>900 students	28	24	7.9
Total	**115**	**100**	**7.1**

4.5.2 Maximum Board Size (Question 17)

Survey respondents were asked to nominate what the maximum number of board members that are permissible on their school board; survey respondents were provided with options to choose a number between 2 and 15 maximum board members. To assist with data analysis, the responses were divided into four bands of the maximum number of board members allowed being five or fewer board members, six to eight board members, nine to ten board members, and greater than ten board members. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common response was in the "not sure" category, with 37 respondents (30%), indicating that people involved in Christian school boards do not appear to be aware of their maximum allowable board size. Ten respondents (8%) did not complete the question. In respect of those respondents who provided numerical data, the most common response was for boards of nine to ten maximum members, with 33 respondents (27%), followed by 22 respondents (18%) who indicated that their maximum board size was six to eight members. Twenty respondents (16%) were from boards with a maximum allowed size of greater than ten members, and the least common response, with only two respondents (2%), were for those Christian school boards with a maximum of five or fewer members. (see Table 4.11).

The high number of respondents who provided a "not sure" response or did not answer the question was 38%, indicating that respondents appear to only have limited

knowledge of their organisation's constitution as it pertains to the maximum composition of the board.

Table 4.11

Maximum Board Size

Number of Board Members	Number of Respondents	Percent
5 or less	2	2
6 – 8	22	18
9 – 10	33	27
>10	20	16
Not Sure	37	30
No Answer	10	8
Total	**124**	**100**

4.5.3 Comparison of Current Board Size with Maximum Board Size

The data from Tables 4.9 and 4.11, in respect of the current and maximum board sizes, were compared, including the removal of the "not sure" and "no answer" responses, to determine the level of vacancies that exist for boards of various sizes. The results indicate that boards that currently have five or fewer members have the highest vacancy rate, with on average 3.0 vacancies per board. This was further supported by 95% of the boards with five or fewer current members having vacancies. The proportion of Christian school boards with vacancies declines as the current board size increases from six to eight members (85%). Fifty-eight percent of boards with nine to ten members have vacancies, while 67% of boards with more than ten members have a vacancy. In respect of all survey respondents with numerical values as to their current and maximum allowed board size, boards had an average of 1.9 vacancies. The number of vacancies declines as current board size increases: boards that have less than six board members have, on average, 3.0 vacancies; boards with six to eight members have an average vacancy rate of 2.5 board places; boards with nine to ten members have, on average, 0.9 vacancies; and Boards with more than ten members have an

average of zero vacancies. The result for boards with more than ten members is inconsistent with the data in Table 4.12, which indicates that four of the six responses in that category had vacancies. However one of the survey respondents indicated that they have more current board members than their allowable maximum, which in turn reduces the average for all school boards with more than ten members to a zero average vacancy rate. It is unclear whether this is a data entry error by the respondent and, if so, what the correct entry should be, or if indeed they do have more people on their board than their constitution allows. If this unusual response is removed from the data set, the average board vacancy level for the remaining schools with more than ten members is 1.3 board positions, per board (see Table 4.12).

Table 4.12

Comparison of Current versus Maximum Board Size

Number of Board Members	Current Board Size Number of Respondents	Maximum Board Size Number of Respondents	Number of respondents with Board Vacancies	% of Current Boards with Vacancies	Current Board Size Average number of Vacancies
< 6	19	2	18	95	3.0
6-8	33	22	28	85	2.5
9-10	19	33	11	58	0.9
>10	6	20	4	67	0.0
Total	**77**	**77**	**61**	**86**	**1.9**

In analysing the vacancy levels, per board data as provided by the survey respondents, the most common level of vacancy was three vacancies from 17 respondents (28% of the Boards with vacancies), followed by two vacancies from 16 respondents (26%). The third most common was one vacancy from 14 respondents (23%).

The survey results indicate that there were six Christian school boards that had vacancy levels of five or more board positions (10% of the respondents with vacancies). Overall, the survey respondents indicated that there was a total of 161 board vacancies from

the 60 responses who disclosed that they had vacancies on their board. The majority of these vacancies come from boards with three or more positions open (71%). Additionally, from the data it can also be seen that there were two respondents each (3% each) who had five, six and seven vacancies respectively on their board, which would leave any governing group of a school significantly short of members to make decisions and govern the school effectively (see Table 4.13).

Table 4.13

Vacancy Levels per Board

Number of Board Member Vacancies	Number of Respondents	Percent
1	14	23
2	16	26
3	17	28
4	7	12
5	2	3
6	2	3
7	2	3
Invalid Response	1	2
Total	**61**	**100**

4.5.4 Board Mean Vacancy by Enrolment Numbers

The data on board vacancies was analysed based on the number of enrolments in the school utilising the bands of small schools (less than 300 students), small-medium schools (301 to 600 students), medium-large schools (601 to 900 students), and large schools (greater than 900 students). Seventy-five participants who completed the survey provided responses regarding their maximum board size, their current board size and the enrolments for their school, enabling a mean board vacancy by enrolments measure to be calculated. The highest mean vacancy rate of 3.0 board members was for small schools with fewer than 300 students, with a pattern emerging. Whereby the mean vacancy rate reduced as the schools became larger, with boards of small-medium schools with 301 to 600 students having a mean vacancy

rate of 1.9 members, medium-large schools with 601 to 900 students having a mean board vacancy rate of 1.8, and large schools with greater than 900 students having a mean vacancy rate of 1.7 board members per board. The overall board mean vacancy level for all respondents was 2.1 board members per board (see Table 4.14).

Table 4.14

Mean Vacancy Levels by Enrolment Numbers in the School

Enrolments	Number of Respondents	Percent	Mean Board Vacancy Level
<300 students	16	21	3.0
300-600 students	16	21	1.9
601-900 students	21	28	1.8
>900 students	22	29	1.7
Total	**75**	**100**	**2.1**

4.5.5 Board Meeting Frequency (Question 18)

Survey respondents were asked how many board meetings took place in a typical year with the options to select a number between 2 and 15 times per annum. To assist with data analysis the responses were divided into four bands of the number of board meetings held in a typical year; being fewer than eight board meetings per annum; eight to nine board meetings per annum; ten to eleven board meetings per annum and greater than eleven board meetings in a typical year. Analysis of the data indicated that: the most common response was 10 to 11 meetings per annum, with 51 respondents (41%), followed by 34 respondents (27%) who indicated holding eight to nine meetings per annum. Less than eight meetings per annum, was the case for 21 respondents (17%). The lowest numerical result was from 12 respondents (10%), who indicated that their board meets more than eleven times per annum, and six respondents (5%) were either “not sure” (2%) or did not answer the question (3%) (see Table 4.15).

The most common board meeting frequency of 10 to 11 times per annum (41%), is effectively a monthly board meeting cycle while the school is in session. The schools being researched are located in the southern hemisphere, with their major holiday break being across the December to January period each year. In the researcher's experience it is not unusual for school boards to refrain from meeting during those two months, given that there is little activity at the school and often staff and board members are on annual leave for that same period.

Table 4.15

Board Meetings in a Typical Year

Number of Meetings	Number of Respondents	Percent
<8	21	17
8-9	34	27
10-11	51	41
>11	12	10
Not Sure	2	2
No Answer	4	3
Total	**124**	**100**

4.5.6 Board Meeting Frequency by Enrolments

The data on board meeting frequency arising from the survey was analysed by enrolment numbers for the respondent schools. There was no material difference identified in the mean number of board meetings held in a year by enrolment size, apart from large schools with greater than 900 students in the school. The respondents in the lower enrolment bands of small schools with fewer than 300 students, small-medium schools with 300 to 600 students, and medium-large school of 601 to 900 students had a mean frequency of board meetings in a year of 9.6, 9.4 and 9.7, respectively, with an overall mean of 9.6 for these three enrolment bands. Large schools with more than 900 students had a mean frequency of board meetings of 8.1 times per annum. Therefore, large schools have, on average, 1.5 fewer meetings than the smaller schools in a typical year (see Table 4.16).

Table 4.16

Board Meeting Frequency by Enrolments

Student Enrolments	Number of Respondents	Percent	Mean Number of Meetings per annum
<300 students	36	31	9.6
300-600 students	21	18	9.4
601-900 students	31	26	9.7
>900 students	29	25	8.1
Total	**117**	**100**	**9.2**

4.5.7 Board Meeting Duration (Question 19)

Survey respondents were asked in hours what the duration was of a typical school board meeting. The options provided for respondents to select from were: less than one hour, one hour, two hours, three hours, four hours, five hours and greater than five hours. Analysis of the data indicated that the most frequent response was board meetings of three hours' duration, with 59 respondents (48%), followed by board meetings of two hours' duration, with 34 respondents (27%). The third most frequent, with 15 respondents (12%), was four-hour board meetings. Five respondents (4%) stated that their board meetings typically ran for five hours or more. Six respondents (5%) selected the "other" response; their meeting durations were not in whole-hour increments and ranged from 1.5 to 3.5 hours per meeting. There were no responses in the survey for board meetings of less than or equal to one hour in duration (see Table 4.17).

The majority of responses (75%) indicated that their typical board meetings are two or three hours in duration, with the majority of the "other" responses of part-hour meetings being in that same two-to-three-hour duration time bracket.

Table 4.17

Duration of a Typical Board Meeting

Duration of Meeting (Hours)	Number of Respondents	Percent
< 1	0	0
1	0	0
2	34	27
3	59	48
4	15	12
5	4	3
>5	1	1
Other	6	5
Not Sure	1	1
No Answer	4	3
Total	**124**	**100**

4.5.8 Board Meeting Duration by Enrolments

The data on board meeting duration was analysed by enrolments in relation to the respondents' schools. There was no real apparent difference in the mean duration of meetings for boards who govern schools of fewer than 300 students, between 300 and 600 students and schools of 600 to 900 students, with a mean duration of board meetings being 2.6, 2.8 and 2.8 hours per typical meeting respectively. Large schools with more than 900 students had longer board meetings than those of small, small-medium and medium-large schools, with each large school board meeting being on average 30 to 45 minutes longer in duration than those of smaller schools (see Table 4.18).

The data in Table 4.16, indicates that large schools with more than 900 students, on average, met fewer times during the year than smaller schools with less than 900 students. However, the meetings in the larger schools on average were longer in duration than the board meetings in the smaller schools.

Table 4.18

Board Meeting Duration by Enrolments

Student Enrolments	Number of Respondents	Percent	Mean Duration of Meetings (hours)
<300 students	36	31	2.6
300-600 students	21	18	2.8
601-900 students	31	26	2.8
>900 students	29	25	3.3
Total	**117**	**100**	**2.9**

4.5.9 Average Total Time in Board Meetings

The data provided by respondents to the quantitative survey in respect of the typical frequency of meetings (see Table 4.15) and the typical duration of those meetings (see Table 4.17) were multiplied to create the average total amount of time spent in school board meetings in a typical year. From the data analysis the most common response of 30 to 39 hours spent in board meetings annually were from 40 respondents (32%), followed by 38 respondents (31%) indicating 20 to 29 hours in a year are spent in board meetings. The third most common response was less than 20 hours in board meetings each year from 28 respondents (23%). Twelve respondents (10%) spend 40 hours or more in board meetings in a typical year, and there were an additional six respondents who had answered questions as being “not sure” or had provided no responses, such that the hours for those boards that are spent in meetings in a year could not be calculated (see Table 4.19).

Table 4.19

Total Average Time Spent in Typical Board Meetings in a Year

Total Board Meeting time in year (Hours)	Number of Respondents	Percent
< 20	28	23
20-29	38	31
30-39	40	32
40 or more	12	10
Not Sure	2	2
No Answer	4	3
Total	**124**	**100**

4.5.10 Average Total Time in Board Meetings Per Annum by Enrolments

The data on the average total time spent in board meetings was analysed by the level of enrolments in the respondents' schools in the enrolment bands of small schools (less than 300 students), small-medium schools (300 to 600 students), medium-large schools (601 to 900 students) and large schools (greater than 900 students). There was little real variance as to the mean total time spent in board meetings over a year regardless of the enrolment size of the school. Analysis of the data indicated that the most amount of time spent in board meetings across a year was 28 hours for medium-large schools of between 601 and 900 students. The second most amount of time spent in board meetings annually was for large schools of greater than 900 students (27 hours), followed by small-medium schools with 301 to 600 students (26 hours). The least amount of time spent in board meetings in a year was for small schools of less than 300 students with 24 hours.

The range between the most average time spent in board meetings in a year and the least amount of time is only four hours over an entire year (being the difference between 28 hours for medium-large schools and 24 hours for small schools). This differential is relatively small given the wide range of the size of schools and the significant additional complexity that exists in schools as they become larger (see Table 4.20).

Table 4.20

Average Total Time Spent in Board Meetings by Enrolments in a Year

Student Enrolments	Number of Respondents	Percent	Mean Total time of Board Meetings (hours)
<300 students	36	31	24.3
300-600 students	21	18	26.0
601-900 students	31	26	27.9
>900 students	29	25	26.8
Total	**117**	**100**	**26.2**

4.5.11 Orientation Policy for New Board Members (Question 3)

Survey respondents were asked whether their board has an orientation process for new board members that addresses the spiritual aspects of their role and responsibilities. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common response came from 49 respondents (40%) who indicated that their board did have such a policy, followed by 40 respondents (32%) who indicated that their board did not have such an orientation policy. Thirty respondents (24%) were not sure whether there was such a policy, and five respondents (4%) answered with "other". The detailed responses in the "other" category indicated a reliance on church membership; that a policy was in development; that there is such a policy but it is informal; there is an orientation policy, although the spiritual aspect is not particularly well focused; and that there is no a written policy, but board member interviews are held that include the spiritual aspect of being a board member (see Table 4.21).

Whilst the highest response came from schools that include spiritual aspects of a board member's role and responsibilities in their new board member orientation processes, it was not the majority. There were a significant number of respondents who indicated that their board did not have such a process (32%), and those that were "not sure" that this was included in their new board member orientation process (24%). Per Table 4.3, the majority of respondents (54%) had been in their current role for less than five years, so the high "not

sure" response appears unusual for a relatively new set of respondents whose orientation will have been more recent. Further, there would be a reasonable expectation that they would recall what their own orientation process involved. The results in relation to the new board member orientation policy are a potential indication that boards are not as focused on the spiritual aspects of their board members' roles and responsibilities as might be expected of Christian schools where faith is central to their foundation and all aspects of their operations (Fisher, 2012).

Table 4.21

Orientation Policy for New Board Members

Orientation Policy	Number of Respondents	Percent
Yes	49	40
No	40	32
Not Sure	30	24
Other	5	4
Total	**124**	**100**

4.5.12 Board Policies (Question 4)

Survey respondents were asked to indicate if their Christian school board has a range of different board policies in place. Ten different polices were provided for participants to indicate their response to. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common board policy identified by respondents was a policy requiring board members to subscribe to a statement of faith with 109 respondents (88%). The equal second most common policies that boards have with 87 respondents each (68% each) were policies requiring new board members to meet spiritual requirement(s) as part of their selection, and policies in relation to the use of core values to guide the board's procedures and processes. The next most common board policy was requiring board members to confirm a biblically based lifestyle statement with 81 responses (65%). Seventy-four respondents (60%) indicated that their board has a policy

providing details on how they resolve conflicts within the board. The next most common board policy is having a group covenant that board members agree to, where biblical values and guiding principles governing the board's procedures, processes and behaviours are agreed to, with 67 respondents (54%).

The policies that exist in a minority of boards that responded to the survey include 46% of respondents who have a policy that provides for the removal of board members on the grounds of failing to meet spiritual requirements, 24% of boards have a policy requiring board members to be belong to the church that the school is a ministry of. Twelve percent of respondents indicated that they have a group covenant in relation to the spiritual activities of board members beyond their board meeting time together. Twenty respondents (16%) indicated that their Christian school board has not adopted any policies that address the spirituality of board members either individually or corporately. Conversely, 84% of respondents indicated that their Christian school board does have policies in respect of board member spirituality (see Table 4.22).

The highest response provided by 88% of respondents indicated that their board has a policy requiring board members to subscribe to the school's statement of faith. However, this conversely means that 12% of respondents indicated that their board does not have such a policy or they are unsure whether the school requires this or they did not answer the question. The next spiritually related board policies that boards have, as indicated by 68% of respondent boards, were in relation to the spiritual requirements for new board members and also the utilisation of core values in the board's work and therefore 32% of the boards do not have such policies or again respondents are unsure or did not answer the question. The other spiritual board policies inquired about had lower levels of positive responses, with the lowest one being in relation to a group covenant on spiritual practices beyond board meeting times with only 12% of respondents indicating that their board had such a policy. An overall view

of the responses to this series of questions indicates that having a range of spiritual policies in relation to the board and its members is not a current priority area of work for boards of Christian schools.

Table 4.22

Board Policies for the Board

Board Policy	Number of Respondents Yes	Total Survey	Percent
Board members must belong to the church that the school is a ministry of	30	124	24
Board members are required to subscribe to the school's statement of faith	109	124	88
Board members are required to confirm a lifestyle statement that is biblically based	81	124	65
New board member selection includes spiritual requirement(s) for prospective board members	84	124	68
Board member removal includes failure to meet spiritual requirement(s) as a reason	57	124	46
A group covenant exists that board members agree to that affirms the biblical values and guiding principles governing the board's procedures, processes and behaviours	67	124	54
A group covenant exists that board members agree to in relation to certain spiritual activities beyond their board meeting time together (e.g. individual prayer, Bible reading, etc)	15	124	12
There are a set of core values that guide the governing board's procedures and processes	84	124	68
A biblical means of resolving conflicts among board members	74	124	60
The board has not adopted any specific policies that address the spirituality of board members individually or corporately	20	124	16

4.5.13 Individual Time Spent Preparing for Board Meetings (Question 2)

Respondents were asked about how much time they individually spent on six different activities prior to a board meeting. The time options provided in the survey for each activity were: “no time”, 1 to 10 minutes, 11 to 30 minutes, 31 to 60 minutes, 61 to 90 minutes and greater than 90 minutes.

The first area examined was in respect of the time spent prior to a board meeting researching issues. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common response was 11 to 30 minutes from 38 respondents (31%), followed by 31 to 60 minutes from 31 respondents (25%). The third most common response was 61 to 90 minutes in individual pre-board meeting research from 18 survey participants (14%). Seventeen respondents (14%) selected one to ten minutes, while 14 respondents (11%) selected greater than 90 minutes, and six respondents (5%) indicated that they spend no time researching issues prior to a board meeting (see Table 4.23). The data indicates that the majority of survey participants (56%) spend between 11 and 60 minutes in researching issues prior to each board meeting.

Table 4.23

Time Spent on Researching Issues

Time Spent (Minutes)	**Number of Respondents**	**Percent**
No time	6	5
1-10	17	14
11-30	38	31
31-60	31	25
61-90	18	14
>90	14	11
Total	**124**	**100**

The next area survey participants were asked about was in respect of how much time they spend writing reports prior to each board meeting. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common response from 35 respondents (28%) was that no time is spent writing reports, followed by greater than 90 minutes from 23 respondents (18%). The third highest response on time spent was for one to ten minutes from 20 respondents (16%), while18 respondents (14%) indicated 31 to 60 minutes was spent writing reports. Seventeen respondents (14%) selected 61 to 90 minutes, and the least highest response for the amount of time spent writing reports was for 11 to 30 minutes from 11 respondents (9%) (see Table 4.24).

The majority of respondents (53%) indicated that they spend 30 minutes or less in writing reports prior to each board meeting, with the largest sub-set of this group spending no time writing reports. It would be expected that the typical board member (i.e. not the board chair) would spend no time in writing reports for a board meeting, but their main tasks would revolve around the reading of the board papers prior to a meeting and then discussing them and making decisions based upon these reports and papers in a board meeting.

Table 4.24

Writing Reports

Time Spent (Minutes)	**Number of Respondents**	**Percent**
No time	35	28
1-10	20	16
11-30	11	9
31-60	18	15
61-90	17	14
>90	23	18
Total	**124**	**100**

The third element that survey participants were asked about in terms of how much time they spend on activities prior to a board meeting was in respect of reading reports. Analysis of the data indicated that the highest response was from 40 respondents (32%) who spend 31 to 60 minutes reading reports before each board meeting, followed by 30 respondents (24%) for 11 to 30 minutes. The third highest response number was 27 respondents (22%) with 61 to 90 minutes spent reading reports, while the fourth most common was greater than 90 minutes spent reading reports prior to a board meeting from 18 respondents (14%). Eight respondents (7%) spend one to ten minutes reading reports prior to a meeting, and one respondent (1%) spends no time reading reports prior to a board meeting (see Table 4.25).

The majority of respondents (56%) spend between 11 and 60 minutes reading reports prior to each board meeting, which is the same proportion of respondents spending the same

amount of time in the research of issues prior to a board meeting. However, 36% of respondents spend more than 60 minutes reading reports as opposed to 25% who spend more than 60 minutes researching issues prior to each meeting. From the survey data it was seen that less than ten minutes per meeting is spent by 8% of respondents reading reports prior to a board meeting, which raises questions about how prepared those people are for board meetings and the decisions to be made, particularly in the light of Table 4.17, which shows that the mean duration of 75% of typical board meetings is two to three hours long. Spending less than ten minutes preparation would make it very difficult to be across all the issues to be discussed in a two to three hour board meeting.

Table 4.25

Reading Reports

Time Spent (Minutes)	**Number of Respondents**	**Percent**
No time	1	1
1-10	8	7
11-30	30	24
31-60	40	32
61-90	27	22
>90	18	14
Total	**124**	**100**

The fourth element that participants in the survey were asked about was how much time they spend prior to a board meeting in respect of praying about issues or decisions that will be discussed at the board meeting. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common response was for one to ten minutes spent individually praying about issues prior to a board meeting from 56 respondents (45%), followed by 11 to 30 minutes from 43 respondents (35%). The third most common was 31 to 60 minutes spent praying individually about matters prior to the board meeting from 18 respondents (14%), and three respondents (2%) spend no time prior to a board meeting praying about issues or decisions. The equal least

common responses came from two respondents each for 61 to 90 minutes and greater than 90 minutes praying about issues (see Table 4.26).

The survey data indicates that the majority of respondents (80%) spend between one and 30 minutes praying about issues individually prior to a board meeting, with the largest subset of this group being in the one-to-ten-minute bracket (45%). There is an equal number of respondents at each end of the time spectrum with 2% of respondents spending no time praying about issues or decisions prior to a board meeting and 2% of respondents spending more than 90 minutes praying about issues.

Table 4.26

Praying About Issues or Decisions

Time Spent (Minutes)	**Number of Respondents**	**Percent**
No time	3	2
1-10	56	45
11-30	43	35
31-60	18	14
61-90	2	2
>90	2	2
Total	**124**	**100**

The fifth element survey participants were asked about was how much time they spend talking to others about reports or issues prior to a board meeting. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common response was from 36 respondents (29%) with 31 to 60 minutes spent in discussions. The second highest response was for 11 to 30 minutes from 32 respondents (26%), followed by 28 respondents (23%) who spend one to ten minutes talking to others about the reports or issues prior to a meeting. Fourteen respondents (11%) nominated that they spend 61 to 90 minutes talking to others, while nine respondents (7%) spend no time speaking to others. The least common response was from five respondents

(4%) who spend greater than 90 minutes discussing issues with others prior to a board meeting (see Table 4.27).

The majority of respondents (55%) spend 11 to 60 minutes talking to others prior to a meeting about the reports or issues before the board, with 93% of respondents talking to others about the reports or issues prior to a board meetings to some degree, indicating that there is more than just individual consideration of the matters to be decided upon prior to the board meeting taking place.

Table 4.27

Talking to Others About the Reports or Issues

Time Spent (Minutes)	**Number of Respondents**	**Percent**
No time	9	7
1-10	28	23
11-30	32	26
31-60	36	29
61-90	14	11
>90	5	4
Total	**124**	**100**

The sixth and final element that participants were asked about in the survey was how much time they spend individually thinking about issues prior to a board meeting. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common response was from 36 respondents (29%) who spend 31 to 60 minutes thinking about issues prior to a board meeting, closely followed by 35 respondents (28%) who spend 11 to 30 minutes thinking about issues. Twenty-six respondents (21%) spend greater than 90 minutes thinking about issues prior to the meeting, while the fourth most common response was from 15 respondents (12%) who spend 61 to 90 minutes. The fifth highest response was from 11 respondents (9%) who spend one to ten minutes thinking about issues prior to the board meeting, and the least common response,

with one respondent (1%), who spends no time thinking about issues prior to the board meeting (see Table 4.28).

The majority of respondents (56%) spend between 11 and 60 minutes prior to a board meeting thinking about issues for the meeting. The outlier in this data set is that 21% of respondents spend more than 90 minutes prior to each board meeting thinking about issues for the meeting. A further analysis of the respondents with more than 90 minutes thinking about issues indicates that nearly all have either the role of board chair or Principal, who is deeply involved in the preparation of the agenda, board papers and issues to be discussed at the meeting. So, it is reasonable to expect that they would spend more time thinking about the issues prior to a board meeting.

Table 4.28

Thinking About Issues for the Meeting

Time Spent (Minutes)	**Number of Respondents**	**Percent**
No time	1	1
1-10	11	9
11-30	35	28
31-60	36	29
61-90	15	12
>90	26	21
Total	**124**	**100**

4.5.14 Board Holds a Regular or Annual Board Retreat (Question 10)

Survey participants were asked if their board holds a regular or annual board retreat. The purpose of this question was to determine the engagement of board members as a group beyond their regular board meetings. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common response was “no” with 81 respondents (65%) not having an annual or regular board retreat, followed by 25 respondents (20%) who selected “Yes”, indicating that their board has a regular or annual board retreat. The next most common response was “other”, with eight

respondents (7%); four of these hold irregular board retreats, two have discussed the idea or are planning to have a board retreat, and the other two answered “other” for other reasons. Seven respondents (6%) were “not sure” if they have a board retreat, and the least common response was “no answer” from three respondents (2%) (see Table 4.29).

The relatively low level of boards that do have an annual or regular board retreat (20%) indicates prima facie that there is low engagement for board members as a group beyond their regular board meeting cycle.

Table 4.29

Board Holds a Regular/Annual Board Retreat

Responses	Number of Respondents	Percent
Yes	25	20
No	81	65
Not Sure	7	6
Other	8	7
No Answer	3	2
Total	**124**	**100**

4.5.15 Activities at a Board Retreat (Question 11)

A logic step was used in the survey such that only those respondents who indicated that their board did have an annual or regular board retreat, were then asked what type of activities were undertaken at those retreats. Therefore, the 25 respondents who indicated that their board does have a regular or annual board retreat were asked what types of activities they undertook at those board retreats. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common activity undertaken at board retreats were discussions in relation to the school’s purpose, vision, or mission, with 23 respondents (92%). The second most common activity at board retreats was strategic planning, with 22 respondents (88%), followed by board training with 13 respondents (52%). The equal fourth most common response in respect of activities at a board retreat was having extended Bible reading/devotion time, as well as the undertaking of

board relationship building activities, with each having 12 respondents (48% each). The next most common activities were extended prayer time and team building activities, with eight respondents (32%) each, and the least common activity at a board retreat was holding a regular board meeting with four respondents (16%) (see Table 4.30).

The challenge comes for the 80% of respondents who indicated in the survey that their board does not have an annual or regular board retreat or did not provide an answer confirming that they do have such a retreat, to adequately address the various activities that those that do have a board retreat undertake at such retreats. Apart from the holding of a regular board meeting (which had the lowest response rate at 16%), all the other activities cited by respondents that they do at their board retreats take significant time, relationship building and focus on the bigger picture and purpose of the school, rather than tackling the issues related to the day-to-day operations and governance of the schools; activities and issues that are central to regular board meetings.

Table 4.30

Board Activities at a Regular or Annual Board Retreat

Board Activity	**Number of Respondents**	**Number of respondents with retreats**	**Percent**
Purpose/Vision/Mission discussions	23	25	92
Strategic planning	22	25	88
Board training	13	25	52
Extended Bible reading/devotions time	12	25	48
Extended prayer time	8	25	32
Board relationship building activities	12	25	48
Team building activities	8	25	32
A regular board meeting	4	25	16

4.5.16 Time Spent on Individual General Spiritual Activities (Question 1)

Respondents were asked about how much time they individually spent on four different spiritual activities during a typical month to collect data from participants regarding

the regular spiritual activities they undertake apart from the preparation for a specific board meeting. The time options provided in the survey for each activity were “no time”, one to ten minutes, 11 to 30 minutes, 31 to 60 minutes, 61 to 90 minutes and greater than 90 minutes.

The first area examined was the time spent in a typical month in relation to general Bible reading or devotional time. Analysis of the data indicated the most common response being greater than 90 minutes from 39 respondents (31%). The second most common amount of time spent in general Bible reading or devotions was 31 to 60 minutes from 38 respondents (31%), followed by 61 to 90 minutes in individual Bible reading or devotions from 25 survey participants (20%). The fourth most common amount of time was 11 to 30 minutes from 15 respondents (12 %), and the fifth most common amount of time was one to ten minutes from seven respondents (6%). There were no respondents (0%) who indicated that they spend no time in individual Bible reading or devotions (see Table 4.31).

The data indicates that the majority of survey participants (51%) spend more than 60 minutes in general Bible reading or devotions in a typical month.

Table 4.31

Time Spent in a Month on Bible Reading or Devotions

Time Spent (Minutes)	**Number of Respondents**	**Percent**
No time	0	0
1-10	7	6
11-30	15	12
31-60	38	31
61-90	25	20
>90	39	31
Total	**124**	**100**

The next area survey participants were asked about was in respect of how much time they spend in general prayer in a typical month. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common response from 43 respondents (35%) was that they spent 31 to 60 minutes in general

prayer in a month, followed by 11 to 30 minutes from 26 respondents (21%). The third highest response on time spent was for greater than 90 minutes from 25 respondents (20%), while the fourth most amount of time spent in general prayer came from 21 respondents (17%) being 61 to 90 minutes. The fifth highest was for one to ten minutes from nine respondents (7%), and the lowest response for the amount of time spent in general prayer in a typical month was for no time from no respondents (0%) (see Table 4.32).

The majority of respondents (56%) indicated that they spend between 11 and 60 minutes in general prayer in a month, with the largest sub-set of this group spending 31 to 60 minutes in general prayer. There are also 37% of respondents who spend more than 61 minutes in general prayer in a typical month.

Table 4.32

Time Spent in a Month in General Prayer

Time Spent (Minutes)	**Number of Respondents**	**Percent**
No time	0	0
1-10	9	7
11-30	26	21
31-60	43	35
61-90	21	17
>90	25	20
Total	**124**	**100**

The third element that survey participants were asked about, in terms of how much time they spend in a typical month, was in respect of specific Bible reading in relation to issues before the board. Analysis of the data indicated that the highest response was from 54 respondents (43%) who spend one to ten minutes in specific Bible reading in a typical month, followed by 35 respondents (28%) for no time spent on specific Bible reading. The third highest response number was 22 respondents (18%) with 11 to 30 minutes spent in specific Bible reading, while the fourth most common response was 31 to 60 minutes spent in specific

Bible reading in a typical month from 11 respondents (9%). There was one respondent (1%) each who indicated they spend 61 to 90 minutes and greater than 90 minutes in specific Bible reading in a month in relation to issues before the board (see Table 4.33).

The majority of respondents (71%) spend ten minutes or less in specific Bible reading in a typical month about issues before the board.

The data in relation to general Bible reading (see Table 4.31) was compared to the data in relation to Bible reading on specific issues before the board (see Table 4.33). The majority of respondents (51%) spend more than 60 minutes a month in general Bible reading and 31% of total respondents spending more than 90 minutes, while the majority (71%) of respondents in relation to specific Bible reading on the issues before the board, spend less than ten minutes, with 28% of total respondents spending no time on specific Bible reading. It appears that, for survey respondents, their general Bible reading does not focus strongly on issues before the board.

Table 4.33

Time Spent in a Month on Specific Bible Reading on Issues Before the Board

Time Spent (Minutes)	**Number of Respondents**	**Percent**
No time	35	28
1-10	54	43
11-30	22	18
31-60	11	9
61-90	1	1
>90	1	1
Total	**124**	**100**

The fourth element that participants in the survey were asked about was how much time they spend in a typical month in specific prayer about issues before the board. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common response was for one to ten minutes spent individually specifically praying about issues before the board in a typical month from 57

respondents (46%), followed by 11 to 30 minutes from 43 respondents (35%). The third most common response was 31 to 60 minutes spent each month specifically praying individually about issues before the board, in a typical month, from 14 respondents (11%). Five respondents (4%) spend no time specifically praying about issues before the board in a typical month, and the fifth most common response was from four respondents (3%) who spend 61 to 90 minutes. The least common response came from one respondent (1%) who spends greater than 90 minutes specifically praying about issues before the board in a typical month (see Table 4.34).

The survey data indicates that the majority of respondents (81%) spend between one and 30 minutes specifically praying about issues before the board in a typical month, with the largest subset of this group being in the one-to-ten-minute bracket (46% of total respondents).

The data in relation to general prayer (see Table 4.32) was compared to the data in relation to specific prayer on issues before the board (see Table 4.34). The majority of respondents (56%) spend 11 to 60 minutes a month in general prayer and 37% of total respondents spend more than 61 minutes, while the majority (81%) of respondents in relation to specific prayer on the issues before the board, spend less than 30 minutes, with 46% of total respondents spending one to ten minutes on specific prayer. It appears that for survey respondents, their general prayer does not focus strongly on issues before the board in a typical month.

Table 4.34

Time Spent in a Typical Month, Specifically Praying About Issues Before the Board

Time Spent (Minutes)	Number of Respondents	Percent
No time	5	4
1-10	57	46
11-30	43	35
31-60	14	11
61-90	4	3
>90	1	1
Total	**124**	**100**

4.6 Survey Analysis: Board Decision Making

The quantitative survey sought information from respondents on what were the main processes the board used in reaching decisions, and if the board utilised formal voting on those decisions, the general results of those votes. Survey participants were also asked a series of questions in respect of the spiritual activities in the context of a board meeting; whether the board had an intentional process in respect of Christian spiritual discernment that was applied in decision making; whether a variety of specified practices were incorporated in their normal board meetings; and, the amount of time spent in board meetings on specific spiritual activities.

A series of questions examined the details of the process of decision making in board meetings including asking respondents about their pre-disposition towards a particular outcome of a decision before a board meeting; as to whether they feel rushed in making decisions at board meetings; their overall feelings during a board meeting as significant decisions are discussed and debated; and, the final question in this area was in respect of what they perceive takes place if their school board stops and prays in the making of significant decisions.

4.6.1 Process in Reaching Board Decisions (Question 5)

Respondents were asked to indicate what is the main process their board uses in coming to a decision using options from a provided list including: that the board comes to a consensus on the matter being discussed, that a formal vote in favour of the decision by the majority of the board is used, that there is general agreement among board members on decisions, with the further option of "not sure". Analysis of the data indicated that the most common way for boards to make a decision arising from the survey was the forming of a consensus, with 55 respondents (44%). The second most common decision-making process was via a majority vote, with 45 respondents (36%), followed by general agreement, with 20 respondents (16%). The equal least common responses, from the survey with two respondents each, was not sure, and other. (see Table 4.35)

The two options of "form a consensus" and "general agreement" are very similar to each other in that the process of reaching a final outcome involves discussion and participation by many, if not all, of the board members. The reaching of a consensus is a more formal process where the board members craft an outcome together that they all agree to, while general agreement is a less formal process where decisions are more an acknowledgement of a path forward and the meeting moves along to the next agenda item. It is not unreasonable to expect, that for many survey respondents, they see the two responses as being the same thing. So, in reality, 60% of decisions in a board are reached by the group together being by consensus and in general agreement.

Table 4.35

Process in Reaching Board Decisions

Method	Number of Respondents	Percent
Form a Consensus	55	44
Majority Vote	45	36
General Agreement	20	16
Not Sure	2	2
Other	2	2
Total	**124**	**100**

4.6.2 Nature of Votes on Board Decisions (Question 6)

The 45 survey respondents who indicated that their board uses a majority vote to reach a decision were asked about the general nature of the results of those votes. Respondents had a choice of four options: the votes were nearly always unanimous, there are often one or two board members who vote against a decision, they are always unanimous, and the final option being that decisions are closely fought and they have had close votes on occasion. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common response was that the votes are nearly always unanimous, with 40 responses (89%). The equal next most common responses, with two respondents each (4%) were that their board often has one or two board members voting against a decision, and also that their board has closely fought votes and on occasion have had very close votes. The least common response, with only one respondent (2%) was that the votes are always unanimous (see Table 4.36).

The vast majority of respondents (89%) indicated that their votes are nearly always unanimous, whereby it is likely that in reaching a decision to vote on, a form of consensus-type process is utilised, such that various options are explored, and a common agreement is reached on the decision before a formal vote takes place, which is for the purposes of recording the final decision in the minutes of the meeting.

Table 4.36

Nature of Votes on Board Decisions

Method	Number of Respondents	Percent
Nearly always unanimous	40	89
Often have 1 or 2 board members voting against the decision	2	4
Always unanimous	1	2
Closely fought and we have on occasion had very close votes on decisions	2	4
Total	**45**	**100**

4.6.3 Rushed in Making Board Decisions (Question 13)

Survey participants were asked whether they feel rushed during the making of decisions in a board meeting. No indication in the survey was provided as to whether these were large or difficult decisions compared to the more straightforward and routine ones; it was left open for survey respondents to determine what type of decisions they would respond in relation to, though a reasonable interpretation would be that the question is examining the more difficult and complex decisions. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common response with 105 respondents (85%) was “no” in that the respondents did not feel rushed in making decisions. The next most common response being “other” with six respondents (5%), three of whom sometimes felt rushed and the other two survey participants indicated that they do not have a vote on decisions taken by the board. “Yes” was the third most common response with five respondents (4%), and the equal least common responses were “not sure” and “no answer” with four responses each (3% each) (see Table 4.37).

The data in Table 4.37, particularly where the significant majority do not feel rushed in making decisions, examined in the light of the data relating to the majority of decisions being made by boards through a means of consensus (see Table 4.35) and where a vote is taken by the board, that those decisions are nearly always unanimous (see Table 4.36), indicates that Christian school boards who participated in the survey take their time in

decision making, including many board members in discussing different options and ideas before they come to a decision as a group rather than utilising a formal, legal style decision-making process that is strongly focused on processes where business or corporate thinking prevails.

Table 4.37

Sense of Feeling Rushed in Making Decisions at a Board Meeting

Sense of Feeling Rushed	Number of Respondents	Percent
Yes	5	4
No	105	85
Not Sure	4	3
Other	6	5
No Answer	4	3
Total	124	100

4.6.4 Pre-disposition Towards Board Decisions at a Board Meeting (Question 12)

Participants were asked what their pre-disposition is generally on decisions as they come to board meetings. Respondents were provided with four options to choose from: that they come to meetings with a very clear sense of how they will vote on decisions, with no real sense of how they will vote and this will be shaped by what others say; they come to the meeting with questions, the answers to which will determine their vote; and, the desire to participate in spiritual discernment with other board members in reaching a decision together. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common response, with 51 respondents (41%) was that they come with a very clear sense of the way they will vote on decisions. The second most common, with 29 responses (23%), was that they want to participate in spiritual discernment with other board members before they decide how they will vote. The next most common response was that they nearly always have questions that will determine how they vote, with 21 responses (17%). The fourth most common, with 11 responses (9%), was that they come with no real sense of the way they will vote; they want to hear what others think.

The next most common response was “other”, with eight respondents (7%); three of whom indicated that they do not have a vote on decisions, four others indicated that they are able to be persuaded on how to vote based on discussions at the board meeting, especially by points raised by more experienced board members in having an influence on their final decision (see Table 4.38).

The highest response rate (41%) to this question was that board members come to meetings with their minds already made up on the decision they want to make. However, the majority of respondents actually come to meetings without fixed ideas on how they will vote on decisions. Instead, they make those decisions in the meeting itself based on a combination of listening to what others think, answers to the questions they come to the meeting with, and the largest subset of the group that has not already made their mind up, desiring to undertake spiritual discernment with other board members on reaching a decision together.

Table 4.38

Board Members’ Pre-Meeting Decision Dispositions

Pre-disposition on decisions to be made at a board meeting	**Number of Respondents**	**Percent**
I come with a very clear sense of the way I will vote on decisions	51	41
I come with no real sense of the way I will vote, I want to hear what others think	11	9
I nearly always having questions that will determine how I will vote	21	17
I want to participate in spiritual discernment with other board members before I decide how I will vote	29	23
Other	8	7
No Answer	4	3
Total	**124**	**100**

4.6.5 During Discussions of Significant Board Decisions (Question 14)

Survey participants were asked how they felt in the midst of discussions about significant board decisions and they were able to select multiple options provided in the

survey, with the choices of: feeling completely at ease in the process, wanting more time to reflect on the decision, wanting to pray about a decision in the meeting but the board does not do so, and wanting to pray about a decision in the meeting and the board does so. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common response, with 83 respondents (67%) was that they feel completely at ease in the process. The second most common, with 51 respondents (41%) was that they want to pray about a decision in the meeting, and the board does so. The next most common response was that they want to have more time to reflect on the decisions, with 29 respondents (23%), and the least common feeling during significant decision making was that they wanted to pray about the decision and the board does not do so, with 11 respondents (9%) (see Table 4.39).

The majority of survey respondents feel at ease with the processes used by their board (67%) and 41% indicated that their board stopped to pray about a decision. However, 23% of respondents wanted more time to reflect on decisions which is quite different to the data in Table 4.37, where only 4% of respondents indicated they felt rushed in making decisions. There was no additional information that could assist in a deeper understanding as to why such a significant difference exists.

Table 4.39

Board Members' In-Meeting Decision-Making Experience

In-Meeting Discussion of Significant Decision Disposition	**Number of Respondents Yes**	**Total Survey**	**Percent**
I often feel completely at ease in the process	83	124	67
I often want more time to reflect on the decision	29	124	23
I often want to pray about a decision in the meeting but we do not do so	11	124	9
I often want to pray about a decision in the meeting and we do so	51	124	41

4.6.6 Stopping and Praying in Midst of Board Decisions (Question 15)

Survey participants were asked what takes place when the board stops and prays in the midst of making decisions. They were able to select multiple options provided in the survey, with the choices being: the board makes the decision they were already headed for, new perspectives/ideas emerge from the time of prayer, the board completely changes the direction of their decisions, the nature of the decision improves after a time of prayer, that prayer provides greater unity about the decision it is making, the atmosphere of the board improves, and they do not stop to pray in the middle of making decisions. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common response was that stopping to pray helps unite the board around the decision it is making, with 72 respondents (58%), followed by the atmosphere of the board meeting changes for the better, with 52 respondents (42%). The third most common response, with 37 respondents (30%), was that the nature of the decision was clearly better than before they prayed, with the next most common response that they do not stop to pray in a meeting, 35 responses (28%). The fifth most common response was that new perspectives/ideas emerge after a time of prayer, with 27 respondents (22%). The next most common, with 16 respondents (13%), was that the board makes the same decision they were already heading for before they stopped and prayed, and the least common thing that happens when a board stops and prays is a complete change in direction by the board, with one respondent (1%) (see Table 4.40).

The data from this question indicates that stopping and praying in the midst of a meeting has a positive impact on the decision making of a Christian school board, with a range of outcomes including increasing board unity, improving the atmosphere in the board meeting, improving the nature of the decisions, and new ideas and perspectives emerging from a time of prayer. These results provide an insight into the answers to Research Question 3 that is explored in this thesis, with the link between the activity of stopping and praying

about decisions and Christian spiritual discernment being shown in the regression analysis in Section 4.8.2.

Table 4.40

Occurrence When Stopping to Pray in the Midst of Making a Board Decision

Occurrence	Number of Respondents Yes	Total Survey	Percent
We make the same decision we were already headed for	16	124	13
New perspectives/ideas emerge after a time of prayer	27	124	22
We completely change direction on the decision we were going to make	1	124	1
The nature of the decision is clearly better than before we prayed about it	37	124	30
It helps unite the board around the decision we are making	72	124	58
The atmosphere in the board meeting changes for the better	52	124	42
We do not stop to pray in the middle of decision making	35	124	28

4.7 Survey Analysis: Christian Spiritual Discernment

In order to measure Christian spiritual discernment usage by the board in its decision making and more broadly in its operations, survey questions are asked of participants in respect of the activities undertaken by individuals and the board as a group, as proxies in the determination of the integration of Christian spiritual discernment in Christian school board decision making. The survey instrument was unable to adequately measure the process of Christian spiritual discernment separately, as the Literature Review indicates, Christian spiritual discernment consists of a range of processes and practices, therefore the survey seeks to measure those practice and processes.

The first section of the survey contained two quantitative questions in relation to the preparation processes undertaken by individual survey respondents outside of board meetings. The first of these questions was about how much time respondents spent on a

specified list of spiritual activities; the second related to the amount of time spent on various specific activities individually prior to a typical board meeting. The survey then moved into a group based phase where respondents were asked to what extent their board had implemented Christian spiritual discernment in its meetings, using a provided list of activities, what Christian spiritual discernment practices they undertake together in a board meeting, and how much time they spend as a group undertaking those Christian spiritual discernment activities.

4.7.1 Christian Spiritual Discernment Intentional Process in Board Decision Making (Question 7)

Survey respondents were asked to what extent their board has implemented an intentional process for Christian spiritual discernment into its decision making on a scale of a great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, and none at all. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common response was a moderate amount with 37 respondents (30%). The second most common response was that a little Christian spiritual discernment has been implemented in board decision making, with 24 responses (19%). The next most common response, with 20 respondents (16%), was that a great deal of Christian spiritual discernment had been implemented in their board, while the fourth most common response was that a lot of Christian spiritual discernment had been implemented as part of their board's decision making, with 16 respondents (13%). Fourteen respondents (11.3%) were not sure, ten respondents (8%) indicated that Christian spiritual discernment had not been implemented at all, and the least common response was "no answer" with three (2%) (see Table 4.41).

There was a wide spread of answers across the spectrum as to the extent of Christian spiritual discernment implementation within board decision making with the most common response being a moderate amount of Christian spiritual discernment being utilised, though the responses of a great deal, a lot and a little Christian spiritual discernment were all relatively even to each other.

Table 4.41

Extent of Using Christian Spiritual Discernment in Board Decision Making

Extent	Number of Respondents	Percent
A great deal	20	16
A lot	16	13
A moderate amount	37	30
A little	24	19
None at all	10	8
Not Sure	14	11
No Answer	3	2
Total	**124**	**100**

4.7.2 Board Meeting Practices (Question 8)

Survey respondents were asked whether items from a list of Christian spiritual discernment practices were incorporated into their board's decision-making processes with participants able to choose multiple answers. The components for the listing of different Christian spiritual discernment activities used in this question was drawn from the books, journal articles and theses that formed part of the Literature Review in Chapter 2 of this thesis, with particular sources used in identifying the types of Christian spiritual discernment practices to be inquired about being Barbee (2019), Barton (2008, 2012b), Bieber (2010), Farnham et al. (1996), Fendall et al. (2007), Liebert (2015), and Morris and Olsen (1997). Analysis of the data indicated that the most common Christian spiritual discernment practice with 109 respondents (88%) was general prayer, followed by prayer for wisdom, with 100 respondents (81%). The next most common Christian spiritual discernment practice was Bible reading with 77 respondents (62%), while the fourth most common response was the prayer for indifference, with 19 respondents (15%). The fifth most common practice was "other", with seven respondents (10%); of these, seven (6%) were in relation to a form of devotions at the start of the meeting, with other responses including a brief prayer time at the end of the meeting, and prayers of praise and thanks during the meeting. The sixth most

common response was prophecy with seven respondents (6%). The next most common Christian spiritual discernment practice was utilising the examen with six respondents (5%). The equal next most common Christian spiritual discernment practices as a board with four respondents each (3%) were Lectio Divina (a method of Bible reading) and silence. The last four practices equal with two respondents each (2% each) were worship or singing, confession, consolation and desolation, and the board does not practise any of the listed Christian spiritual discernment related activities. There was one type of Christian spiritual discernment activity that yielded no responses as a practice of their board, and that was in relation to fasting (see Table 4.42). The spiritual discipline of fasting was commonplace in biblical times and in the early centuries of the Christian faith as a means to more clearly hear what God might be saying through the removal of the distraction of food. However, fasting is not commonly encouraged by churches in modern times, nor is it emphasised as part of most Western Christian traditions (Brillhart, 2025; Haverland, 2025). Therefore, the result of no respondents nominating fasting as a spiritual activity that their Christian school board undertakes, is in accordance with this activity not being currently common among Christians, such as those that would make up the board of a Christian school board and responded to this survey.

The overall result of this question indicates that there is an emphasis by Christian school boards on two key spiritual activities as a group: prayer (general, wisdom and indifference) and Bible or Scripture reading. Both of these activities are consistent with the two central aspects of spiritual discernment as being prayer and the Scriptures, as identified in Item 7 of Table 2.1 in the Literature Review that summarises and distils the key authors on the subject of spiritual discernment.

Table 4.42

Board Meeting Christian Spiritual Discernment Practices

Activity	Number of Respondents	Total Survey	Percent
General prayer (e.g., liturgical, spontaneous, intercession, quiet trust, etc.)	109	124	88
Prayer for indifference (i.e., a prayer focused on freedom from pre-set thoughts on an issue)	19	124	15
Prayer for wisdom (i.e., a prayer focused on seeking God's wisdom in decision making)	100	124	81
Bible reading	77	124	62
Lectio Divina (the process of Bible reading and listening to God's word in the present moment)	4	124	3
Fasting	0	124	0
Worship/singing	2	124	2
Silence	4	124	3
Examen of Consciousness (the practise of paying attention to God's presence in the circumstances of life)	6	124	5
Confession	2	124	2
Consolation and Desolation	2	124	2
Prophecy	7	124	6
We do not practice any of the activities listed	2	124	2
Other (please specify)	12	124	10

4.7.3 Time Spent in Board Meetings on Spiritual Activities (Question 9)

Survey participants were asked how much time is spent in a typical board meeting on a series of spiritual activities. The choice for respondents was on a scale including: no time, one to five minutes, six to ten minutes, 11 to 30 minutes, 31 to 60 minutes, 61 to 90 minutes, and greater than 90 minutes.

4.7.3.1 Opening Prayer

The first spiritual activity that respondents provided data on was the time spent in board meetings on an opening prayer. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common length of opening prayer in a meeting was one to five minutes from 99 respondents (80%), followed by six to ten minutes, with 16 respondents (13%). The third most common length was 11 to 30 minutes, with five respondents (4%). Three respondents (2%) gave no answer;

and one respondent (1%) indicated that no time was spent in opening prayer at board meetings (see Table 4.43).

Section 4.5.7 identified that the typical duration of a board meeting was between two and three hours and, given that prayer was identified by the literature as an important part of discernment and decision making for a Christian board, the significant majority of responses (80%) in relation to an opening prayer indicate that between 0.6% and 4% of a board meeting is spent on an opening prayer.

Table 4.43

Opening Prayer

Time Spent (Minutes)	Number of Respondents	Percent
No time	1	1
1-5	99	80
6-10	16	13
11-30	5	4
31-60	0	0
61-90	0	0
>90	0	0
No Answer	3	2
Total	**124**	**100**

4.7.3.2 Bible Reading or Sharing a Devotion

The second spiritual activity at board meetings that was surveyed was the time spent in relation to Bible reading or the sharing of a devotion. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common response for this activity was six to ten minutes spent in a board meeting on Bible reading by 58 respondents (47%). The second most common time spent on Bible reading was one to five minutes, with 32 respondents (26%), while the third most common response was that no time is spent on Bible reading in a meeting, with 17 respondents (14%). The next most common response was that 11 to 30 minutes was spent in Bible reading, with

14 respondents (11%), and three survey respondents (2%) had no answer to this question (see Table 4.44).

The majority of Christian school boards (73%) spend one to ten minutes on Bible reading and devotions as a group in a board meeting. As highlighted in the Literature Review, reading Scripture is seen as a central part of spiritual discernment, however, as per the survey, the proportion of meeting time for the majority of boards spent reading Scripture and discussing it in devotions is between 0.6% and 8.3% of the total meeting time.

Table 4.44

Time Spent on Bible Reading or Devotions

Time Spent (Minutes)	**Number of Respondents**	**Percent**
No time	17	14
1-5	32	26
6-10	58	47
11-30	14	11
31-60	0	0
61-90	0	0
>90	0	0
No Answer	3	2
Total	**124**	**100**

4.7.3.3 Praying on Specific Decisions

The third spiritual activity question was in respect of the amount of time spent praying on specific decisions during a board meeting. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common response was between one and five minutes in time being spent on specific prayer with 59 respondents (48%). The second most common time span spent praying on specific decisions was six to ten minutes, with 32 respondents (26%), followed by no time spent praying on specific decisions, with 25 respondents (20%). The next most common response was by five respondents (4%), who indicated that their Christian school board spends 11 to 30 minutes in board meetings on specific prayer. The least common response with responses

from three respondents (2%) provided no answer, and the other options included in the survey of 31 to 60 minutes, 61 to 90 minutes, and greater than 90 minutes all had no responses (see Table 4.45).

The majority of Christian school boards (74%) spend one to ten minutes praying about specific decisions as a group in a board meeting and a significant portion of 20% of respondents do not spend and time praying about specific decisions. As highlighted in the Literature Review, prayer is seen as a central part of spiritual discernment, however, as per the survey, the proportion of meeting time for the majority of boards spent praying about specific decisions is between 0.6% and 8.3% of the total meeting time.

Table 4.45

Prayer on Specific Decisions

Time Spent (Minutes)	**Number of Respondents**	**Percent**
No time	25	20
1-5	59	48
6-10	32	26
11-30	5	4
31-60	0	0
61-90	0	0
>90	0	0
No Answer	3	2
Total	**124**	**100**

4.7.3.4 Closing Prayer

The final question in the survey in relation to spiritual activities in a board meeting was the amount of time spent on the closing prayer. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common response was one to five minutes being spent on closing prayer, with 106 respondents (86%). The second most common response was that no time is spent in board meetings on closing prayer from eight respondents (6%), with the next most common response, with five respondents (4%), indicating that their Christian school board spends six

to ten minutes in closing prayer. The fourth most common equal response was no answer from two respondents (2%), and also 11 to 30 minutes spent in closing prayer from two respondents (2%). The other options included in the survey of 31 to 60 minutes, 61 to 90 minutes, and greater than 90 minutes all had no responses (see Table 4.46).

It would appear from these results that closing prayer is a fairly limited part of the board meetings processes with the significant majority (80%) in the one-to-five-minute time bracket.

Table 4.46

Closing Prayer

Time Spent (Minutes)	Number of Respondents	Percent
No time	8	6
1-5	106	86
6-10	5	4
11-30	2	2
31-60	0	0
61-90	0	0
>90	0	0
No Answer	3	2
Total	**124**	**100**

4.7.4 Individual Time Spent on Spiritual Activities

Respondents were asked how much time they spend in a typical week undertaking individually a series of spiritual activities. The choice for respondents was on a scale including: no time, one to five minutes, six to ten minutes, 11 to 30 minutes, 31 to 60 minutes, 61 to 90 minutes, and greater than 90 minutes.

4.7.4.1 General Bible Reading or Devotions

The first individual spiritual activity question was in respect of general Bible reading or devotional time per week. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common response in time spent on this activity individually in a typical week was greater than 90 minutes, with 39

respondents (31%), followed by 31 to 60 minutes, with 38 responses (31%). The third most common time spent on general Bible reading was 61 to 90 minutes, with 25 respondents (20%), with the next most common response being 11 to 30 minutes, with 15 respondents (12%). Seven responses (6%) spent one to ten minutes per week in general Bible reading, and no survey respondents indicated that they spent "no time" in general Bible reading or devotional time (see Table 4.47).

The majority (51%) of survey respondents spend on average 31 to 90 minutes, or 61 minutes or greater on general Bible reading or devotional time per week, indicating that survey participants prioritise Scripture reading and devotional time at a personal level to a greater extent than the time spent in such activities as a group in board meetings.

Table 4.47

General Bible Reading/Devotional Time per week

Time Spent (Minutes)	Number of Respondents	Percent
No time	0	0
1-10	7	6
11-30	15	12
31-60	38	31
61-90	25	20
>90	39	31
Total	**124**	**100**

4.7.4.2 General Prayer

The second question with respect to individual spiritual activities was how much time survey participants spend on general prayer in a week. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common response was 31 to 60 minutes per week, with 43 responses (35%). The second most common time spent on general prayer was 11 to 30 minutes per week, with 26 responses (21%), with the next most common response being greater than 90 minutes per week, with 25 respondents (20%). The fourth most common time spent in general prayer was

61 to 90 minutes per week, with 21 responses (17%), while the fifth most common response was one to ten minutes, with nine respondents (7%), and no survey respondents indicated that they spent no time in general prayer in a week (see Table 4.48).

The majority (56%) of respondents spend 11 to 60 minutes per week in general prayer, and the results indicate that there is a fairly even spread of respondents at a relatively high level as to the time they spend on general prayer above 60 minutes per week. Similar to the time spent by respondents on individual Bible reading and devotions (4.7.5.1), the amount of time spent in a week on individual general prayer is not insignificant.

Table 4.48

General Prayer Time Per Week

Time Spent (Minutes)	Number of Respondents	Percent
No time	0	0
1-10	9	7
11-30	26	21
31-60	43	35
61-90	21	17
>90	25	20
Total	**124**	**100**

4.7.4.3 Specific Bible Reading

The third question on individual spiritual activities asked survey participants how much time they spend on specific Bible reading in relation to issues before the board prior to a board meeting. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common response was one to ten minutes from 54 respondents (43%). The second most common response in relation to time spent on specific bible reading was no time from 35 respondents (28%), while the next most common response from 22 respondents (18%) was 11 to 30 minutes. The fourth most common response was 31 to 60 minutes with 11 respondents (9%), and the equal least

common response was from one person (1%) each in relation to 61 to 90 minutes and greater than 90 minutes spent on specific Bible reading on issues before the board (see Table 4.49).

The majority (71%) of respondents spend less than ten minutes in specific Bible reading on issues before the board prior to each board meeting and a significant proportion of these (28% of the total respondents) spend no time in specific Bible reading. Bringing together this data and that provided in Section 4.7.4.1 it appears that most survey respondents spend general time reading the Bible but are more limited when it comes to applying it to decisions and issues facing the board.

Table 4.49

Specific Bible Reading in Relation to Issues Before the Board

Time Spent (Minutes)	Number of Respondents	Percent
No time	35	28
1-10	54	43
11-30	22	18
31-60	11	9
61-90	1	1
>90	1	1
Total	**124**	**100**

4.7.4.4 Specific Prayer

The final survey question in respect of how much time was spent in individual spiritual activities was specific prayer in relation to issues before the board. Analysis of the data indicated that the most common response was one to ten minutes from 57 respondents (46%). The second most common time spent on specific prayer prior to a board meeting was 11 to 30 minutes from 43 respondents (35%), followed by 14 respondents (11%) who spent 61 to 90 minutes specifically praying about issues before the board. The fourth most common response was that the person spent no time in specific prayer from five respondents (4%), while the next most frequent response was from four respondents (3%) with 61 to 90 minutes

spent in specific prayer. The least common response was for greater than 90 minutes from one respondent (1%) (see Table 4.50).

The majority (81%) of respondents spend one to 30 minutes praying specifically about matters before the board prior to each board meeting, with the largest group in the one-to-ten-minute bracket (46%). Similar to the difference between general bible reading (see Section 4.7.4.1) and specific Bible reading on issues before the board (see Section 4.7.4.3), there is a difference between general prayer amount of time in a week (see Section 4.7.4.2) and specific prayer on issues before the board, whereby less time is spent praying about board issues as opposed to the time spent in general prayer.

Table 4.50

Specific Prayer in Relation to Issues Before the Board

Time Spent (Minutes)	Number of Respondents	Percent
No time	5	4
1-10	57	46
11-30	43	35
31-60	14	11
61-90	4	3
>90	1	1
Total	**124**	**100**

4.8 Survey Analysis: Factors with Potential Influence

Statistical analysis was undertaken on the results of the quantitative survey to determine the differences in inter-relationships between variables using an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test and the relationship between a dependent variable and a number of independent variables using regression analysis. The definitions of these statistical tests, the testing undertaken and the results of these tests is outlined in Sections 4.8.1 and 4.8.2.

4.8.1 Differences in Inter-relationships

The impact of various demographics on views of Christian spiritual discernment was explored using the statistical technique of ANOVA. ANOVA determines whether there are statistically significant differences among the means of two or more independent groups (Field, 2018; Montgomery, 2017) by examining how variance is distributed within and between the groups (Kutner et al., 2005).

For this research, the responses for Question 7 of the survey, “To what extent has your board implemented an intentional process for Christian spiritual discernment into its decision making?”, was used for the ANOVA test whereby the F statistic was calculated as the ratio of the mean square between groups to the mean square within groups. The variables used were the demographics of the schools in the quantitative survey being the: age of the school, size of school, size of board, and affiliation of the school.

The result of the ANOVA test examining Question 7 yielded only one result of statistical significance and this was in relation to the size of the school and the likelihood that this variable impacts on a positive result to Question 7.

The formula result was [$F(3,99)=3.879$, $p=0.011$] the meaning of which is: there were four groups compared (i.e. 3 degrees of freedom), the sample examined was 99 (being the number of measurable responses to Question 7), the F result as 3.879, being greater than 1, which suggests that the differences among group means was larger than chance alone would produce, and the p score of 0.011 as being less than 0.05 means that the result is statistically significant.

In running the ANOVA test across all the demographic variables, the only demographic variable that returned a significant response to the ANOVA test was in relation to school size, whereby larger schools have implemented Christian spiritual discernment to a

greater extent than smaller schools. No other variables returned a significant difference in responses to Question 7 depending on their responses within those variable questions.

4.8.2 Regression Analysis

The extent to which changes in an independent variable (the predictor) is associated with changes to a dependent (outcome) variable is most commonly examined in research through the statistical technique of a regression analysis (Kutner et al., 2005; Montgomery et al., 2021). A simple linear regression model can be used where to examine the relationship between one independent variable and one dependent variable, or as is the case with this research, a multiple regression analysis has been used to enable 15 predictors to be assessed as to each of their unique contributions to the outcome while controlling for the other independent variables (Field, 2018).

The statistical results of undertaking a regression model on the survey data are:

1. Significance: determining whether a regression coefficient is significantly different from zero via a t-test for each predictor which yields a p-value that represents the probability of observing the estimated effect if the null hypothesis (that the co-efficient equals zero) were true (Kutner et al., 2005). A result of less than 0.05 indicates a certainty of more than 95% that the independent variable (predictor) has a significant impact on the outcome.
2. Beta Coefficient: determining the strength and direction of the relationship between a predictor variable and the dependent variable (outcome). A positive beta value indicates a positive relationship, whereas a negative beta value indicates and inverse relationship between the predictor and the variable outcome.
3. R Square: represents the proportion of variance in the dependent variable (outcome) that is explained by the independent variable in the regression model (Montgomery et

al., 2021). The higher the R Square result in the range of 0 to 1, the greater the explanatory power of the model.

A regression analysis was undertaken using Question 7 of the survey as the dependent variable (the outcome) to determine influences on the responses in relation to the extent of utilising Christian spiritual discernment in board decision making. Question 7 asked survey respondents to identify "to what extent your board implemented an intentional process for Christian spiritual discernment into its decision making". The responses to this question were inverted to enable a range of 15 independent variables to be assessed as to whether they were predictors of the response to the dependent variable and to what extent they influenced that response.

The 15 independent variables used in the analysis were:

1. The age of the school
2. The size of the board
3. The number of meetings held each year by the board
4. The size of the school
5. Practical activities in preparation for a board meeting (Question 2)
6. Spiritual activities in preparation for a board meeting (Question 1)
7. Prayer on specific decisions
8. Specific prayer in relation to issues before the board
9. General prayer
10. Thinking about issues for the board meeting
11. Talking to others about the reports or issues
12. Praying about issues or decisions
13. Reading reports
14. Writing reports
15. Time spent on specific activities in a board meeting (Question 9).

Following the submission of the 15 variables to a regression analysis, Table 4.51 shows that three of the independent variables were identified with a 95% certainty as having a significant impact on the dependent variable, of implementing an intentional process of Christian spiritual discernment, as they each had a significance score of less than 0.05.

Table 4.51

Regression Table of Significant Independent Variables

Variable	Beta	Significance
Size of the board	0.224	0.019
Size of the school	0.236	0.018
Prayer on specific decisions	0.271	0.007

The key findings of the regression analysis in Table 4.51 show that the degree to which the board prays on specific matters has the greatest influence on Christian spiritual discernment (0.007), followed by the size of the school, whereby the larger the school, the greater the likelihood for Christian spiritual discernment to be implemented (0.018). The third most influential variable with a significant impact is the size of the board, in that the larger the school board, the more likely that Christian spiritual discernment will take place (0.019). The Beta coefficients for the three variables indicate that there is a positive relationship between each of them and the outcome variable of implementing Christian spiritual discernment, where undertaking prayer of specific decisions has the strongest relationship (0.271) followed by the larger the size of the school (0.236) and the third strongest relationship is the larger the size of the board (0.224).

The three factors that were found as being significant were then placed in a model with the result of an R Square score of 0.226, meaning that these three factors together account for 22.6% of the variance in responses to Question 7 in relation to the extent of the use of Christian spiritual discernment by the board.

4.9 Summary

The quantitative survey undertaken for this research had 124 respondents, being board chairs, board members and Principals from a broad range of schools, including small to large schools, small to large boards, young schools through to older schools, boards that meet frequently and less frequently in the year, and those that hold shorter meetings and those that hold longer meetings on average. Survey participants on average spent 30 to 39 hours per annum in board meetings with the majority of respondents spending 31 to 40 minutes preparing for each meeting on each of the following activities: reading reports, talking to others about the board meeting and thinking about the issues to be discussed at the meeting. The majority of survey participants spend one to ten minutes praying about the issues to be discussed at a meeting prior to the meeting.

For most research participants, their boards made decisions by consensus, with nearly always a unanimous vote on issues and in doing so, they did not feel rushed in making those decisions and while most indicated that they came to the meetings with their minds made up on the decisions they would make, the actual majority of respondents have their decisions shaped by combination of what others say, responses to the questions they have coming to the meeting and also in the undertaking of Christian spiritual discernment with their fellow board members.

As to spiritual activities during a board meeting, the majority spent one to five minutes in opening prayer, the largest proportion of respondents spent six to ten minutes in bible reading or devotions, the largest proportion spent one to five minutes praying on specific decisions, and the majority spent one to five minutes on a closing prayer. The boards that did stop and pray on specific decisions in a meeting found that 58% of the time it united the board around the decision that was being made, with 42% of the time the atmosphere in the board meeting changing for the better than from before they prayed, and 30% of

respondents indicated that the decision the board made was clearly better than before they prayed.

Self-selection bias (Nikolopoulou, 2023) was identified in 3.5.1 as a potential issue in respect of the quantitative survey that may mean that identifying generalisations among Christian School boards may be difficult, as the respondents to the survey may not be representative of boards more generally, but only from those boards who engage in Christian Spiritual Discernment. A review of the results would indicate that this bias is not strong and that survey results can be relied upon as a general view of Christian School Boards. Survey respondents indicated that their board did not focus strongly on many of the common practices of Christian Spiritual Discernment with key data from the survey supporting this conclusion:

1. 71% of respondents indicated that as a Board they spend a moderate amount of time or less in Board Meetings on Christian Spiritual Discernment (Table 4.41);
2. Only 15% of respondents indicated that their Board practiced the Prayer of Indifference; which is a very specific Christian Spiritual Discernment practice (Table 4.42);
3. 40% of the Boards of survey participants spend less than 5 minutes in a Board Meeting on Bible Reading and Prayer (Table 4.44); and
4. 68% of the Boards of survey participants spend less than 5 minutes in a Board Meeting praying about specific decisions (Table 4.45).

The key indicators that were found to make a significant impact on the extent of implementing Christian spiritual discernment in board decision making were:

1. The size of the board: the larger the board, the more likely the board is to implement Christian spiritual discernment in decision making

2. The size of the school: the larger the school, the more likely the board is to implement Christian spiritual discernment in decision making
3. Prayer on Specific Decisions: the most significant impact on the implementation of Christian spiritual discernment is stopping in the midst of a board meeting and praying about a specific decision.

Chapter 5 contains the results and analysis of the qualitative phase of the research.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH PHASE TWO: QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

As noted in Chapter 3, this study employs a two-phase convergent mixed method research approach. Phase two, the focus of this chapter, is in relation to a series of qualitative questions asked of a selection of volunteer participants from the phase one quantitative survey. The qualitative responses allow a more in depth discussion with participants on issues relating to Christian spiritual discernment, board practices and decision making beyond the data that was obtained from the quantitative phase as analysed in Chapter 4. Chapter 6 will outline the bringing together of the quantitative and qualitative phase analyses to synthesise key findings of the research.

The run sheet for the interviews is included as Appendix G. Table 5.1 further outlines the eight questions, along with their links to the four research questions. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format via Zoom with each interview lasting 30 to 45 minutes in duration.

Table 5.1

Interview Questions by Research Question

Research Question	Interview Questions
RQ1. What Christian spiritual discernment practices do individuals (board chair, board members and Principals) undertake in relation to the governance of Christian school boards in Australia and New Zealand?	1. Tell me about the practices you individually undertake in preparation for a board meeting.
RQ2. What Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes do Christian school boards collectively undertake in relation to the governance of schools in Australia and New Zealand?	2. Has there been discussion amongst the board about individual spiritual development including the spiritual wellbeing of board members? Please explain your answer.
	3. What are the main spiritual practices that you undertake together as a board during a meeting?
	4. Do you think the board has changed its prayerfulness and seeking of discernment in your time on the board? If so, how?

Research Question	Interview Questions
	5. What are the spiritual practices that you think should be included in the board's decision making, if any?
RQ3. How do Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes influence the decision making in the governance of Christian schools in Australia and New Zealand?	6. Have your board's spiritual practices changed over the time you have been involved in the board? If so, how?
	7. Do you believe that spiritual discernment practices have an impact on your board's decision making? If so, how?
RQ4. What makes a good Christian school board?	8. What do you think characterises a good Christian school board? Please explain your answer.

It is important to note that interview participant responses in the qualitative phase may replicate those that were provided by the same participants in the phase one survey, and these responses will not be excluded in the phase two analysis. The findings of the two phases are not mutually exclusive, but rather, elements within the two phases may overlap and inform the other. The researcher was also conscious of preserving the anonymity of survey respondents by not linking their identity as to their phase one responses and the phase two interview responses.

5.2 Sample

Section 3.5.2 explains that the sample was selected via a purposive sampling technique (Bekele & Ago, 2022) and consisted of 12 semi-structured interviews selected across the three main roles taking part in the phase one survey, being board chairs, board members and Principals of Christian schools. Each of the three distinct groups have differing roles when it comes to board decision making, in that the board chair runs the meeting while leading discussions and decision making, the board member is a participant in discussions and decision making, and the Principal tends to provide the key inputs for a decision, is a participant in discussions but not necessarily a final decision maker at board meetings. These three different groups of people will often have different perceptions on discussions, processes and actions in a board meeting due to their distinct roles.

The interviewees were selected to maintain representation (Boddy, 2016) in proportion to the level of participants in the phase one survey based on the following key attributes:

1. Role of survey participant
2. Enrolment size of the school
3. Geographic location of the school
4. Affiliation of the school
5. Age of the school in years.

There were no interviews conducted with people from schools affiliated with Adventist Schools Australia (ASA) due to the very low number of respondents to the survey compared to respondents from schools with other affiliations.

Section 3.5.2 describes the process for recording, transcription and analysis of the interviews.

5.3 Analysis Overview

Data for this phase of the study was obtained from the transcribed semi-structured interviews, with analysis being undertaken using Excel spreadsheets to manage the data. The transcriptions were reviewed by the researcher, and initial key themes were identified for each question asked. These initial key themes and a respondent number with an attributed associated quote for each theme were logged on an Excel spreadsheet with a tab for each of the questions being asked of participants. The tentative themes were then explored in detail from an overall perspective, and then utilising the following key characteristics to determine if patterns or differences exist for schools or respondents with different attributes:

1. Role of the respondent
2. Age of the school
3. Enrolment size of the school

4. Country in which the school is located
5. Geographic location of the school
6. Affiliation of the school.

5.4 Question Analysis

This section examines each of the eight questions individually, the key themes that emerged from the overall responses to the question and then analysis by the six different characteristics listed in Section 5.3, to determine if there are any patterns or differences that can be observed based on these different characteristics. For the purposes of the analysis in Chapter 5, the following general terms are utilised in the commenting on the responses provided: “some” between 25% and 33% of respondents, “many” between 33% and 50% of respondents, “majority” greater than 50% of respondents, and “most” greater than 75% of respondents.

5.4.1 Individual Practices in Preparation for a Board Meeting (Question 1)

5.4.1.1 Overall Themes

The overall thematic responses saw the majority of interviewees indicate for individual preparation for the meeting, the importance that the board papers were sent out in advance of a board meeting so as to enable pre-reading by board members.

“I also ensure that all members have the papers because my expectation is that they will have read them and understand them before the meeting starts” (Respondent 7).

Many interviewees commented that they received their papers on the Friday before the week of the meeting, enabling them to read the papers and prepare over a weekend, plus any weekdays prior to the meeting.

Prayer about the board meeting and specific issues to be discussed at the meeting was also seen as a major theme by individuals in preparing for a board meeting.

"A time of real prayer and soul-searching to really get God's mind on the way we move forward" (Respondent 5).

"Plenty of prayer is time into that, I suppose recognising that I am probably underqualified for my role, so realising that actually I'm probably dependent on God's wisdom in leading the school board" (Respondent 12).

Analysis of the quotations for the overall themes arising from Question 1, individual practices in preparation for a board meeting, are ensuring board papers are sent out well in advance of board meetings so as to enable sufficient time for board members to read, consider and prepare for the meeting, and board members acknowledged at the outset their dependence on God to deal with the sometimes complex issues they are facing and the importance of prayer prior to a board meeting about that meeting and also the specific issues to which they need to respond.

5.4.1.2 Themes by Role

The board member and Principals' responses were along similar lines as the overall themes identified in Section 5.4.1.1. Board chairs commented about the importance of having a meeting between themselves and the Principal prior to the board meeting.

One board chair provided a deep insight as to what is important in holding a pre-meeting between the board chair and Principal, in spending time in prayer and inviting God into the process of setting the meeting agenda and ensuring the board meeting agenda covers the appropriate issues:

> Preparation for me as the chair usually involves – well, not usually, always involves meeting with the Principal prior to, spending some time with him. We usually start that time with a word of prayer. As we prepare, we go through the agenda together, try to earmark the different areas of the agenda that we feel need to be prioritised and will need digging into a little deeper. And as we do that, if we come across something

> that we think could be a challenge, it's not unusual for us to just pray over those individual items as well as we start to prepare, so just thinking along the lines of including God in the actual setting of the final agenda for the board meeting. (Respondent 6)

5.4.1.3 Themes by Age of School

Most interviewees of different age schools responded along the same overall themes identified above, though it appeared that individuals from schools that are older (41-50 years) focus more strongly on prayer as part of their preparation for board meetings than schools of other ages.

"'Hands-up, hands-down', which ties in with the prayer of indifference. So just by yourself coming and laying down my own thoughts and my own agenda, plus it's a hands-down, hands-up, is then inviting God's wisdom and discernment in the process" (Respondent 12).

5.4.1.4 Themes by Size of School

There were no apparent differences in steps taken by respondents based on schools of different sizes in their individual preparation for board meetings, compared to the overall themes identified. The size of the school did not appear to make an impact on the individual preparation undertaken prior to a meeting.

5.4.1.5 Themes by Country

Australian school responses were in line with the overall themes identified above. Individuals from schools in New Zealand appeared to undertake deeper spiritual preparation for board meetings, citing the importance of their overall spiritual health, meditation on the matters for decision by the board and reflection on the school's vision.

> When you come to the meeting, you've got an understanding of what the whole agenda is all about, you've got an understanding of the people and your motivations,

> you're in complete trust in them and the Lord, you've prayed up, you're all ready, and you're ready to go, and so all of the things are important. (Respondent 2)
>
> There will be times when there's a complex issue. And my usual way of resolving that is to go for a walk and just meditate on the issue. It will sometimes just pull-on experience, sometimes pull out a Scripture verse story that I know from my bible readings, and what it was involved, there were short prayers being shown up here and there at all times. So, the meditative process includes all of those things, and that's how I would resolve more complex things. (Respondent 11)

"I do always pause to think, and I have in the process, how does this advance the vision, of the school and its motto Soli deo Gloria [Glory to God alone]" (Respondent 11).

5.4.1.6 Themes by Geographic Location

There was no apparent difference in steps taken by respondents based on schools with different geographic locations in their individual preparation for board meetings compared to the overall themes. The geographic location of the school did not appear to make an impact on the individual preparation undertaken prior to a meeting.

5.4.1.7 Themes by Affiliation

There were differences that emerged in the preparation of individuals for the board meeting based on their school's affiliation: Christian Schools Australia (CSA) schools reflected the overall themes identified above, while Christian Education National (CEN) schools tended to be more focused on the practicality of writing and sending out papers before the meeting, and New Zealand Association for Christian Schools (NZACS) schools and Associated Christian Schools (ACS) schools both tended to focus more on spiritual preparation such as prayer, Scripture and meditation.

5.4.2 Board Discussion About Individual Spiritual Development or Well-being (Question 2)

5.4.2.1 Overall Themes

The overall theme that emerged from the interviews was that for most boards they did not undertake any significant dialogue in board meetings about the spiritual development or wellbeing of individual board members, though a number indicated that a personal reflection forms part of the devotions provided by board members on a rotational basis, and that may provide some insight into a person's spirituality.

"We don't talk about our personal experience except during – my first answer is no, but then during devotions, we might share a personal reflection that we've had, that's for the benefit of the board" (Respondent 10).

"Only devotions that might raise ad-hoc but it's never a deliberate attempt" (Respondent 11).

Interview respondents indicated that their board relied on the code of conduct for board members, declarations made at the start of the board meeting or other discussions outside of the board meeting itself, in relation to the spiritual well-being of board members rather than any specific discussion within a meeting.

"There's general encouragement to each of the board members about their own walk. Obviously, we – being a Christian school and all our board members being Christian, I guess there's almost an assumed walk" (Respondent 4).

"I think the constitution, and the board code of conduct, and a number of other policies all have written into them expectations for board members to hold a certain moral standard" (Respondent 6).

"More to do outside of the meeting part" (Respondent 3).

Analysis of the quotations for the overall themes arising from Question 2, board discussion about individual spiritual development or wellbeing, indicates that Christian school boards do not discuss as a group the spiritual development or wellbeing of individual board members, instead they rely on more formal policies, written declarations and documents. The lack of regular discussion and personal transparency is likely to work against the development of strong relationships and trust between, which according to the literature on group spiritual discernment is an important aspect of a group being able to undertake Christian spiritual development together. Further in the interviews, as described in Section 5.4.5.1, interviewees expressed a desire to see a greater unity in the making of decisions, as well as more time in fellowship and the building of relationships between board members, which is made more difficult with a lack of transparency and discussions about personal spiritual wellbeing and mutual accountability.

5.4.2.2 Themes by Role

Board chairs focused on the structural ways of monitoring Christian development or wellbeing via processes such as board member selection criteria, board member codes of conduct and declarations at the start of the board meeting. There was also a general assumption that board members were growing in their faith as part of being a Christian.

"They [board members] have to be committed Christians" (Respondent 1).

Board member interviewees provided themes that reflected the overall themes outlined in Section 5.4.2.1. While Principals focused more on the conversations that happen outside of board meetings about Christian development and the spiritual well-being of the board members.

More to do outside of the meeting part. So, it's more to do when they are – when they're gathering together, we're reflecting on maybe a sermon at church that went

> well or that encouraged or challenged them, or a book or a song they've been listening to that's been challenging for them, or an experience. (Respondent 3)

5.4.2.3 Themes by Age of School

There was no difference in themes in relation to discussions on individual Christian development or wellbeing from schools of different ages compared to the overall themes identified above. The age of the school did not appear to make an impact on the board's discussions about individual Christian development of wellbeing.

5.4.2.4 Themes by Size of School

Schools of all sizes aligned with the overall themes identified above, though larger schools identified a number of more sophisticated and creative means for discussing board member Christian development and wellbeing, including a spiritual health check and having guest speakers at board meetings on Christian topics, which were then subsequently discussed.

> Each year we pass out a questionnaire. I think it's about 12 questions asking about, "How you're going spiritually? How you're coping with the challenges? How you're coping with the time commitments? How you're coping with your own personal development? Are there any things that we should know about? How's your warmth to your commitment? Is it still hot or is it cold? Is it time to review? Are you as excited as you were last year?" That type of thing, "What's the Lord spoken to you about? Give us an example of how God has spoken to you on an important issue in the last month. (Respondent 2)

"Guest speakers who'll come and talk about various aspects of wellbeing" (Respondent 5).

Smaller schools focused more on outside of meeting discussions and personal relationships to understand individual board member Christian development and wellbeing.

5.4.2.5 Themes by Country

There was no difference in themes in relation to discussions on individual Christian development or wellbeing between Australian and New Zealand schools compared to the overall themes identified above. The country the school is located in did not appear to make an impact on the board's discussions about individual Christian development of wellbeing.

5.4.2.6 Themes by Geographic Location

There was no difference in themes in relation to discussions on individual Christian development or wellbeing between schools based on their geographic location compared to the overall themes identified above. The geographic location of the school did not appear to make an impact on the board's discussions about individual Christian development of wellbeing.

5.4.2.7 Themes by Affiliation

Most association affiliation themes were aligned with the overall themes identified in 5.4.2.1, however, schools from Associated Christian Schools (ACS) were more creative in addressing their individual board member Christian development and wellbeing, including guest speakers and also reading a book together.

"What we have done is purchased and given out Ruth Barton's book, Pursuing God's Will Together, to each of the school board members" (Respondent 12).

5.4.3 Spiritual Practices at a Board Meeting (Question 3)

5.4.3.1 Overall Themes

There were three main themes emerging from the question on spiritual practices undertaken during board meetings. The first theme identified by the majority of respondents was "prayer". Many schools indicated that their board meetings open and close in prayer.

"Every board meeting, we'll start and end with prayer" (Respondent 8).

Some respondents indicated that their board meetings open and close in prayer as well as pausing during the meeting for a major decision to stop and pray.

"Prayer at the beginning and end. And during if there's a specific issue that someone senses that we should stop and pray for on numerous occasions" (Respondent 12).

While other respondents indicated that their board currently does not fully stop in the midst of a meeting to pray, they want to do more of this or have recently changed to doing so during a meeting.

"We don't wait long enough, but we do wait to see if the Lord wanted to add anything" (Respondent 2).

> But what we did do, after your survey I talked to our board chair and said, "Why don't we pray throughout the meeting as well when an issue arises or whatever, something that we need to just – we should –" we pray before the meeting, we have a devotion before the meeting as a board, but then that's it and then we pray to finish off. So, we book end prayers, as what you mentioned before, but now she's put in place a mid-meeting prayer time, and that came as a result of your survey, which I raised with her and said, "Why aren't we doing this more often?" That's for our board meetings. And the new thing is we pray at the start, the middle, and the end. So, we have a half-time break in our board meetings. So, we pray at the start, we'll pray just before we break for a supper, and then we pray again at the end. (Respondent 3)

The second major theme to emerge was "devotions". Most of the devotional times in board meetings are general in nature and undertaken at the commencement of each meeting. Devotional times usually involve reading a section of Scripture from the Bible, providing a reflection or comment on this Scripture and normally involves a brief prayer.

"Each director takes turns and executive to open with a devotion. So, a small thought, a reflection and something from the Scriptures… that goes for about five to seven minutes" (Respondent 1).

"Devotion, so reflection on a biblical Scripture, class, whatever, revelation, that person has of that Scripture, so we take turns in doing that" (Respondent 10).

While other devotional times are more specific to the school, drawing on its values or other key statements.

> A devotional time at the start, and that reflects in one of our core values or areas of governance. So, we [have] got six areas of governance, and there's time spent unpacking that from a spiritual perspective and then how that implicates the practical outworkings of that area. There's a devotion at the start too, which is to do with one of the core values of the school. And so, they'll unpack that and do a five to ten-minute devotion and then allow other people to feedback or contribute to what they had shared, and then we would pray together. (Respondent 3)

"Theme Scripture for the year, and that is the basis for devotions" (Respondent 5).

The final theme to emerge was the use of "Scriptures", not only as a basis for the devotional time, but also as a tool in making decisions.

"We do reflect on Scripture throughout the board meeting if it's relevant to the topic, if it's ethical or moral or creating policy, so we'd be referring to the Bible" (Respondent 10).

Analysis of the quotations for the overall themes arising from Question 3, spiritual practices at a board meeting, are: opening and closing prayer is a very common practice in board meetings, devotional readings are commonly part of the commencement of a meeting with some devotions being fairly general in nature, while some boards focused their devotions on matters before the board, prayer takes place during discussions in the midst of making decisions at some board meetings, however, this is not the case in the majority of

boards, and there is a varying depth of spiritual engagement and practice during the course of meetings for different boards. The practice of prayer, devotions and Scripture reading were all highlighted as important aspects to do group Christian spiritual development well.

5.4.3.2 Themes by Role

There was no difference in themes in relation to spiritual practices undertaken at board meetings between schools based on the role of the respondent, compared to the overall themes identified in Section 5.4.3.1. The role of the respondent did not appear to make an impact on their responses in relation to spiritual practices at a board meeting.

5.4.3.3 Themes by Age of School

Schools that are older appear to focus more on the importance of a devotional time

"Always start with a devotional time" (Respondent 7).

While younger schools have a range of themes more in line with the overall themes identified above.

5.4.3.4 Themes by Size of School

The majority of respondents were in line with the overall themes identified above, though for schools in the mid to larger enrolment range (600-1200 students) there appeared to be a greater focus on prayer than in the broader response set.

"Our meetings are bookended with a prayer and are often punctuated with prayer throughout" (Respondent 6).

"There's a sense in which the whole meeting is a meeting in prayer" (Respondent 7).

5.4.3.5 Themes by Country

Australian school responses were in line with the overall themes identified in Section 5.4.3.1. Interviewees from schools in New Zealand appeared to spend longer on devotions than those from Australia.

"Every meeting would start probably 20 minutes dedicated to our devotion" (Respondent 2).

5.4.3.6 Themes by Geographic Location

The majority of respondents were in line with the overall themes identified above, though for schools located in regional cities there appeared to be a greater focus on prayer than in the broader response set.

> We open in prayer, we close in prayer. During specific issues that are of concern, whether it's to do with a staffing matter or a parent body matter that's been raised or escalated to board level… but we've often paused to pray in the midst of that. (Respondent 1)

"Prayer at the beginning and end. And during if there's a specific issue that someone senses that we should stop and pray for on numerous occasions" (Respondent 12).

5.4.3.7 Themes by Affiliation

The majority of respondents were in line with the overall themes identified above, though for schools affiliated with Christian Education National (CEN) there appeared to be more slowing of the meeting tempo and a more contemplative approach to decisions than in the broader response set. This would mean the CEN schools are more likely to be setting the conditions to practice Christian spiritual discernment more easily.

> The new thing is we pray at the start, the middle, and the end. So, we have a half-time break in our board meetings. So, we pray at the start, we'll pray just before we break for a supper, and then we pray again at the end. (Respondent 3)

"We have stopped for prayer in the midst of the meeting when an issue has been particularly difficult or something personal is going on with a board member" (Respondent 8).

"We do reflect on Scripture throughout the board meeting if it's relevant to the topic, if it's ethical or moral or creating policy, so we'd be referring to the Bible" (Respondent 10).

"Occasionally, when I've had a sense of spiritual discernment, sometimes I get a picture in my mind, and so I might say, "Oh, I just feel like this situation or the sense I'm getting is – whatever" (Respondent 10).

5.4.4 Change in Board Prayerfulness or Seeking Discernment (Question 4)

5.4.4.1 Overall Themes

There were three main themes that were spread equally among interviewees with respect to whether they had seen a change in the board's prayerfulness in seeking discernment over their time involved with the board. The first theme identified was that there had been an increase in compliance and business work for the board, which resulted in less time for mission and ministry.

> So, the challenge that I've found in terms of addressing to the school is the bigger the scope, the bigger the budget, the more important pressing issues that come to the board table and a shorter amount of time because everyone's busy. How do you tie those things together well? So often, the (spiritual) practices get shoved out the door as they don't seem as valuable or as important because we need to make a decision about this budget item or whatever else. (Respondent 12)
>
> I've certainly found that our emphasis on the board is far more now about compliance, responsibilities, policy in terms of NESA [New South Wales Education Standards Authority] or AIS [Association of Independent Schools] advice. We're probably finding we're relying more on more secular bodies, I suppose, to actually comply with and then now even to get professionally trained by it. (Respondent 1)

The second overall theme identified is in contrast to the first theme of increased time on business and compliance matters at the expense of time spent in prayer and other spiritual related practices, being that the board has become more prayerful over time.

> The school has always been big on prayer and knowing that what we have is from God and only through God's enabling. As we've continued to grow, as we've gone through different challenges and even crises, there's certainly been a lot of prayer that's gone into the board meetings, but I think it has continued to grow, and I think it's moved further to the front. we will actually stop in the middle of the meeting and say, "No, we actually need to pray about this now," rather than just forging ahead through the meeting. (Respondent 4)

"I think over that time, prayer has become more of a focus because of those difficulties and challenges" (Respondent 3).

The third overall theme that was significantly represented in the interviews was that the board had not really changed over time in its approach to prayerfulness or seeking discernment in decision making.

"No, it's been pretty steady" (Respondent 11).

Analysis of the quotations for the overall themes arising from Question 4, changes in board prayerfulness or in seeking discernment, indicates that there has been an increase in the compliance and business workload of the board and to accommodate this, there has been less time for boards to spend on the mission and ministry aspects of the school. It would appear that rather than expanding the amount of time the board meets, there has instead been an adjustment to meeting agendas whereby the time allocation for business and compliance has increased and less time is spent on mission and ministry. The quotes provided indicate that this has been to the detriment of spending time in prayer and undertaking Christian spiritual discernment.

Respondents to the interview questions were divided between those that believed that their board has become more prayerful and by extension more discerning based on their observations, while many others stated that there had been no change in the prayerfulness and the seeking of discernment in their boards. The latter group did not indicate whether or not their board had been prayerful or discerning in the past and, therefore, whether or not Christian spiritual discernment was part of their decision-making processes.

5.4.4.2 Themes by Role

In a review of the interview comments made on changes to prayerfulness and seeking discernment in decision making, all the board chairs that were interviewed indicated that there had been a greater emphasis over time on compliance and business issues as distinct from prayerfulness. In contrast, the majority of the Principals that were interviewed believed their board had become more prayerful and spent more time on discerning issues and decisions than they had previously.

5.4.4.3 Themes by Age of School

In analysing the overall pattern of comments based on the age of the school, it appears that the older in age the school, the more prayerful the board has become, whereas for younger schools, the board is changing more in terms of additional time spent addressing compliance matters over mission and ministry related issues.

5.4.4.4 Themes by Size of School

Most schools of varying sizes were aligned with the overall themes identified in Section 5.4.4.1, however, larger schools (more 900 students) recognised that the amount of prayerfulness in the board "ebbed and flowed" as the people on the board changed over time rather than remaining constant. This indicates that the practices undertaken in a board meeting can change based on the composition of that board rather than being fixed within a particular Christian school board.

"I think it depends on their busyness and on the degree of – yeah, the way they outwork their relationship with the Lord… it ebbs and flows a bit" (Respondent 5).

> I've noticed it ebb and flow. I noticed our board went through a fairly difficult time with interpersonal relationships on the board where there were some strained relationships, and that did, not surprisingly, lead to – not as much emphasis on prayer. Too busy arguing, I think, and that's a sad indictment on us as believers. And then I saw it flow back the other way, too, probably more in the last six months, even. There's been a greater emphasis on spending time together praying over different things in the meeting. (Respondent 6)

5.4.4.5 Themes by Country

There was no difference in themes in relation to changes in board prayerfulness or seeking discernment between schools based on the country they are located in, compared to the overall themes identified in Section 5.4.4.1. The country the school is located in did not appear to make an impact on the board's change in prayerfulness or seeking discernment.

5.4.4.6 Themes by Geographic Location

There was no difference in themes in relation to changes in board prayerfulness or seeking discernment between schools based on their geographic location, compared to the overall themes identified in Section 5.4.4.1. The geographic location of the school did not appear to make an impact on the board's change in prayerfulness or seeking discernment.

5.4.4.7 Themes by Affiliation

There was no difference in themes in relation to changes in board prayerfulness or seeking discernment between schools based on their affiliation, compared to the overall themes identified in Section 5.4.4.1. The affiliation of the school did not appear to make an impact on the board's change in prayerfulness or seeking discernment.

5.4.5 Spiritual Practices that Should be Included in the Board's Decision Making (Question 5)

5.4.5.1 Overall Themes

The interviewees provided a broad range of responses to the question of the spiritual practices that should be included in the board's decision making with a number of key themes emerging. First, interviewees indicated that the board should stop in the middle of decision making to pray. Many of the respondents indicated that they would like to see this happen more in their current board.

"Perhaps more attention to pausing and praying rather than just doing that at a point of desperation or the last thing to try and bring back control to the meeting or send to the meeting" (Respondent 1).

"I think what I'd like to see is that we actually stop and pray as part of our practice. We've got a major decision that we take more time to simply pray before we make that decision" (Respondent 5).

"Let's just stop and pray for them right now," and that's something that I really want to organically bring up" (Respondent 9).

A second overall theme was the use of Scripture in making decisions. As in the previous theme, a number of respondents indicated that they would like to see this better integrated in their current decision-making practices.

> Scripture as a principle of decision making, for example, a Scripture that quickly comes to mind is act justly, love mercy and walk humbly, and when it comes to all matters, we need to know what's on the table, what's a key purpose, what's the decision, what's the outcome, who's gonna be impacted, where will the mission be because of those decisions. (Respondent 2)

"I would love us to have the ability to draw on biblical wisdom in a much more sophisticated way" (Respondent 10).

A third theme was that the board should seek out more unity in the making of its decisions.

"There needs to be that sense of tenderness and humility before God to work together, there's always compromise, and we've got to find that in unity without compromising the baseline" (Respondent 2).

The final theme from respondents was that there is a need for boards to create time before or during the meeting to share a meal and fellowship together to better know one another and be more sensitive through this process in hearing where God might be guiding the board as a group.

> We have a time to fellowship. We often will actually have a meal together while we're having a board meeting, and so there's that extra 20 minutes to half an hour where we can really talk about what God's doing in our lives and all that sort of thing, which is good. But it's really that more being sensitive to the Holy Spirit throughout the meeting and then how we respond to that, that I'd like to really see that grow. (Respondent 9)

Analysis of the quotations for the overall themes arising from Question 5, spiritual practices that should be included in a board's decision making, indicated commonality with the responses in Section 5.4.3 of what the board's current spiritual practices are, specifically stopping in the midst of decision making to pray and in using Scripture to assist in making decisions (though there was a desire to increase this). The respondents also correctly identified that Christian spiritual discernment by their boards would be enhanced by spending time seeking more unity within the board in the making of decisions and also ensuring there was more time for the fellowship and building relationships and trust between board

members, so listening well to each other was better and a greater understanding of how each other think per the literature on group spiritual discernment.

5.4.5.2 Themes by Role

There was no difference in themes in relation to spiritual practices that should be in a board's decision making between schools based on the role of the respondent compared to the overall themes identified in Section 5.4.5.1. The role of the respondent did not appear to make an impact on what spiritual practices they believe should be included in the board's decision making.

5.4.5.3 Themes by Age of School

There was no difference in themes in relation to spiritual practices that should be included in a board's decision-making processes between schools based on the age of the school compared to the overall themes identified in Section 5.4.5.1. The age of the school did not appear to make an impact on what spiritual practices should be included in the board's decision making.

5.4.5.4 Themes by Size of School

There was no difference in themes in relation to spiritual practices that should be in a board's decision-making processes between schools based on their size compared to the overall themes identified in Section 5.4.5.1. The size of the school did not appear to make an impact on what spiritual practices should be included in the board's decision making.

5.4.5.5 Themes by Country

There was no difference in themes in relation to spiritual practices that should be in a board's decision-making processes between schools based on the country they are located in, compared to the overall themes identified in Section 5.4.5.1. The country the school is located in did not appear to make an impact on what spiritual practices should be included in the board's decision making.

5.4.5.6 Themes by Geographic Location

There was no difference in themes in relation to spiritual practices that should be in a board's decision-making processes between schools based on their geographic location, compared to the overall themes identified in Section 5.4.5.1. The geographic location of the school did not appear to make an impact on what spiritual practices should be included in the board's decision making.

5.4.5.7 Themes by Affiliation

There was no difference in themes in relation to spiritual practices that should be in a board's decision-making processes between schools based on their affiliation, compared to the overall themes identified in Section 5.4.5.1. The affiliation of the school did not appear to make an impact on what spiritual practices should be included in the board's decision making.

5.4.6 Change in Board's Spiritual Practices (Question 6)

5.4.6.1 Overall Themes

Interviewees provided a number of overall themes as to the changes in the spiritual practices of the board in their time serving the board. The most common theme identified was that there had been an increase in the focus on prayer, both in stopping and praying in the midst of making decisions in the meeting, but also in having clear issues and topics to pray about which were supplied by management.

"The only thing that's really changed in terms of our practice is that mid-meeting prayer" (Respondent 3).

> The big change is the willingness or preparedness or not being afraid to basically stop the board meeting and pray for something specifically at that time. I think all board members, and in fact, we have had board members who've instigated that apart from

the chair, interestingly enough, and suggested that that's something we should pray about straightaway. (Respondent 4)

"Probably, we've changed to having a list of prayers, prayer needs that the heads of business units have given us" (Respondent 5).

Another theme emerging from the interviews was an increased focus on devotions during board meetings.

"One positive is, I think, over time, the importance of starting with devotions and having that shared equally amongst directors and executives here in the board meeting, I think that's kind of deepened a bit over time" (Respondent 1).

The final theme for many interviewed was that there had been no real change in the spiritual practices of the board in their time attending board meetings.

Analysis of the quotations for the overall themes arising from Question 6, changes in spiritual practices at board meeting, indicate that there have been improvements in two of the three main spiritual activities of a board identified in Section 5.4.3.1, being an increasing focus on prayer and also an increasing focus on devotions. The third element of reading Scripture was not specifically mentioned a theme in the qualitative interviews, though reading Scripture is often a key component in the undertaking of devotions. As identified in Section 5.4.4.1 in relation to changes in board prayerfulness or seeking discernment, many of the respondents indicated that there had been no real change in the spiritual activities of the board during their time.

5.4.6.2 Themes by Role

There was no difference in themes in relation to changes in the board's spiritual practices over time between schools based on the role of the respondent compared to the overall themes identified in Section 5.4.6.1. The role of the respondent did not appear to make an impact on their responses on changes to the board's spiritual practices.

5.4.6.3 Themes by Age of School

In reviewing the responses, older schools (41-50 years) as opposed to younger schools, indicated that the spiritual practices of the board had changed over time to include more prayer, otherwise there was no difference in themes in relation to changes in the board's spiritual practices over time between schools based on their age compared to the overall themes identified in Section 5.4.6.1.

5.4.6.4 Themes by Size of School

There was no difference in themes in relation to changes in the board's spiritual practices over time between schools based on the size of the school compared to the overall themes identified in Section 5.4.6.1. The size of the school did not appear to make an impact on changes to the board's spiritual practices.

5.4.6.5 Themes by Country

In reviewing the responses, only schools located in Australia indicated that the spiritual practices of the board had not changed over time, otherwise, there were no differences in themes in relation to changes in the board's spiritual practices over time between schools based on the country they are located in, compared to the overall themes identified in Section 5.4.6.1.

5.4.6.6 Themes by Geographic Location

There was no difference in themes in relation to changes in the board's spiritual practices over time between schools based on their geographic location, compared to the overall themes identified in Section 5.4.6.1. The geographic location of the school did not appear to make an impact on changes to the board's spiritual practices.

5.4.6.7 Themes by Affiliation

There was no difference in themes in relation to changes in the board's spiritual practices over time between schools based on their affiliation, compared to the overall themes

identified in Section 5.4.6.1. The affiliation of the school did not appear to make an impact on changes to the board's spiritual practices.

5.4.7 Impact of Spiritual Discernment Practices on Board Decision Making (Question 7)

5.4.7.1 Overall Themes

The major overall theme provided in interviews was that there was an identifiable impact on, and actual changes in, the decisions made by the board due to the undertaking of Christian spiritual discernment practices in a board meeting. Respondents recalled instances where board members came to a board meeting with their personal decision already determined, yet their decision was changed after listening to others, undertaking Christian spiritual discernment practices and discerning a better way forward than they had originally intended. Respondents provided a number of real examples including enrolment decisions for students as to whether they would be accepted into the school or where the continuation of their enrolment would be determined. Another interviewee provided an example in relation to the appointment of a Principal, where the decision was changed after undertaking Christian spiritual discernment practices from a strongly preferred candidate to an alternate appointment being made to the position.

"It's definitely had an impact. And in fact, it's even changed the decision that we might have been getting towards in the middle of a meeting" (Respondent 4).

> I've walked into a board meeting knowing that a decision was needed to be made and being fairly certain about what decision it was that I was going to make in relation to that. Only after having heard my other directors speak into the matter and paused for a prayer, a time of prayer, as we went around the board room and each board member prayed, then having my decision changed. And I have no doubt that that was God just confirming, "No, you're making the right decision. I'm for this decision." And I

> won't go into the details of that decision, but it was just a blessing to know that I felt that I had confirmation from God that it was the right thing to do. (Respondent 6)

Respondents also indicated that, in their opinion, their decisions as a board were better and clearer because of the impact of Christian spiritual discernment practices during a board meeting.

"The integrity of getting the outcome right has got sharper and sharper and I think people are more discerning also as we go on in the years" (Respondent 2).

A contrasting theme that emerged from the interviews was that interviewees indicated that their board decision making was of a lower quality and perhaps incorrect when the board did not engage in Christian spiritual discernment and instead pushed ahead with making a decision without taking time, stopping, praying or consulting the Scriptures on the issue.

> I can think of one particular instance recently where I felt that strong personalities drove a particular decision, and I've had to fix that. I've had to heal some of the fallout from that. So, for me, particularly, I think yes, that we really need to make sure that doesn't happen again. (Respondent 5)

Analysis of the quotations for the overall themes arising from Question 7, the impact of Christian spiritual discernment on board decision making, indicates that the use of Christian spiritual discernment improves the perceived quality of the decisions the board makes and the absence of Christian spiritual discernment practices has led to lower quality of decision or even an incorrect decision. Some illustrations of the improvement and detriment in the quality of outcomes was made by interviewees, but no real details were provided as case studies.

5.4.7.2 Themes by Role

Those respondents in the board chair role indicated to a greater extent than the other two roles, a theme from observing the impact by Christian spiritual discernment in having the

board change a decision due to Christian spiritual discernment being practised. The other interviewee roles included the other main themes identified in Section 5.4.7.1, without any other real differences due to their role.

5.4.7.3 Themes by Age of School

Older schools appeared to indicate that they were more likely to be willing to change their decisions after undertaking Christian spiritual discernment, including major issues such as changing the decision on who the next Principal should be, compared to schools that were younger.

5.4.7.4 Themes by Size of School

Larger schools (more than 900 students) appeared to indicate that they were more likely to be willing to change their decisions after undertaking Christian spiritual discernment compared to schools that were smaller in size.

5.4.7.5 Themes by Country

There was no difference in themes in relation to the impact of Christian spiritual discernment on board decision making between schools based on their country of location, compared to the overall themes identified in Section 5.4.7.1. The country the school is located in did not appear to make an impact on the impact of Christian spiritual discernment practices on board decision making.

5.4.7.6 Themes by Geographic Location

Schools located in capital cities or suburbs appeared to indicate that they were more likely to be willing to change their decisions after undertaking Christian spiritual discernment compared to schools that were located in regional or rural areas.

5.4.7.7 Themes by Affiliation

There was no difference in themes in relation to the impact of Christian spiritual discernment on board decision making between schools based on their affiliation compared to

the overall themes identified in Section 5.4.7.1. The affiliation of the school did not appear to make an impact on the impact of Christian spiritual discernment practices on board decision making.

5.4.8 Characteristics of a Good Christian School Board (Question 8)

5.4.8.1 Overall Themes

There were three overall themes identified by interviewees in relation to what they considered to be key characteristics of a good Christian school board. The largest response related to the character of board members, with the main requirements for an ideal board member character of being Godly in nature and also displaying humility.

"The character, faithfulness, loyalty, hard work, integrity that's been demonstrated by experience in one of the situations in a lower level. So there's a sense of call, there's a sense of character" (Respondent 2).

"An understanding of Christian leadership; so, a service mentality rather than ruling and lording it over others, a sacrificial sort of framework, of servant heartedness for the ministry, seeking the common good… mission mindset" (Respondent 1).

"One of the most important things I think is prayerful wise people. I don't mind passion, but I really don't like reactionary things, so very godly people, wise and full of spirit" (Respondent 11).

"So the individual characteristics I think that makes a successful school board is humility, first and foremost" (Respondent 10).

"Willingness to listen, which is a humility thing, I think, and willingness to be presented with ideas that maybe are not yours, that you then have to decide what you think about them. Do I even like what that person is saying?" (Respondent 10).

The second most common theme was having a clear purpose for the school and what the school is trying to achieve, joined to the calling that board members had to serve in their role on the board in the fulfillment of that purpose.

"What they are making are board decisions, and then the enterprise that they're responsible for is part of the ongoing kingdom of God, for His purposes. It's not an end in itself" (Respondent 7).

> Understand the identity of the school that you're leading. The purpose of God actually shaped and called that school to be. So really coming back to 1 Corinthians space between the difference between human wisdom and God's wisdom, how do you actually hold those together, and fall on the side of God's wisdom, I think that's what's critical, recognising that a school can be large or can be small, but either way, if it's not doing what God what you're called to do, it's actually missing the mark. (Respondent 12)

An additional theme from interviewees in response to what makes a good Christian school board was for the board to have a good mix of skills and experience amongst board members, including a diversity of gender, age and backgrounds.

"A mixture of skill sets in terms of what they bring to a school community" (Respondent 3).

"I think it's necessary to have a mix of people, both of gender, and age and backgrounds, and no tokenism, nobody is on there because you have a certain number of women or whatever" (Respondent 7).

Analysis of the quotations for the overall themes arising from Question 8, characteristics of a good Christian school board, are: the character of the individual board members is particularly relevant to the way the board makes decisions and the implementation of Christian spiritual discernment in the making of those decisions and

spiritual practices as they “ebb and flow” as the composition of the board changes (See Section 5.4.4.4), there needs to be a clear purpose the school, the why the school exists and this then acts as the key to focus on in the making of decisions by the board and what it sees as success by the school, and the skills and experience of each board member need to mix well as a group, to enable them to govern well and deal with the variety of complex issues and matters on which they are required to make decisions.

5.4.8.2 Themes by Role

There were some differing focuses on what the characteristics of a good Christian school board are depending on the role of the respondent. Board chairs indicated that having a good skill mix of board members and there being clarity of purpose for the school were important characteristics to have. The board member respondents focused more on the character of board members and especially approaching the work and decisions of the board with humility. Though it was identified that all groups had all the main themes outlined in Section 5.4.8.1.

5.4.8.3 Themes by Age of School

There was no difference in themes in relation to the characteristics of a good Christian school board between schools based on the age of the school, compared to the overall themes identified in Section 5.4.8.1. The age of the school did not appear to make an impact on the characteristics of a good Christian school board.

5.4.8.4 Themes by Size of School

There was no difference in themes in relation to the characteristics of a good Christian school board between schools based on the size of the school compared to the overall themes identified in Section 5.4.8.1. The size of the school did not appear to make an impact on the characteristics of a good Christian school board.

5.4.8.5 Themes by Country

There was no difference in themes in relation to the characteristics of a good Christian school board between schools based on their country of location, compared to the overall themes identified in Section 5.4.8.1. The country the school is located in did not appear to make an impact on the characteristics of a good Christian school board.

5.4.8.6 Themes by Geographic Location

There was no difference in themes in relation to the characteristics of a good Christian school board between schools based on their geographic location compared to the overall themes identified in Section 5.4.8.1. The geographic location of the school did not appear to make an impact on the characteristics of a good Christian school board.

5.4.8.7 Themes by Affiliation

Schools that are affiliated with Christian Schools Australia (CSA) were more likely to see clarity of purpose of the school as a key characteristic for board members to have.

"Having board members who are hungry for the cause of Christian education" (Respondent 6).

There was a spread of the other main themes identified in Section 5.4.8.1 among respondents from schools with different affiliations.

5.5 Compilation of Themes by Research Question

5.5.1 Introduction

This discussion will collate the themes identified in the qualitative interviews, utilising a framework based on the four research questions being: the individual Christian spiritual discernment practices undertaken by respondents in their preparation for board meetings:, the Christian spiritual discernment practices undertaken by boards in relation to their decision making in board meetings, the influence on decision making in undertaking

Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes in a board meeting, and respondents' perceptions as to what characterises a good Christian school board.

The discussion will consider the perceptions of the respondents, being board chairs, board members and school Principals and the major commonalities and differences between these roles and also considering the differing characteristics of the schools with which they are involved. The differing characteristics include the age and size of the school, the country the school is located in, the geographic location of the school, and the school's affiliation.

5.5.2 Individual Christian Spiritual Discernment Practices and Processes

The themes identified in relation to the individual Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes undertaken by interviewees in their preparation for board meetings are summarised in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2

Christian Spiritual Discernment Practices and Processes Undertaken by Individuals in Preparation for Board Meetings

Framework Category	Themes of Christian Spiritual Discernment Practices and Processes by Individuals
Overall	• Board papers being provided in advance of meetings to allow for consideration. • Variability among interviewees in how they prepare for board meetings – some just pre-read, others utilise extensive Christian spiritual discernment processes (reading Scripture, prayer, meditation on issues) in their preparation for meetings. • No training provided to board members or a standard approach utilised in how to prepare for Christian school board meetings.
By Role	• Board chairs emphasised the importance of a pre-board meeting between the board chair and Principal to discuss issues, develop the board agenda and pray together as well as joining in Christian spiritual discernment processes.
Age of School	• Interviewees from schools that are older, placed a greater emphasis on prayer in preparation for board meetings than those from younger schools.
Size of School	• Individuals from schools of all sizes reflected the same themes as the overall themes.
Country	• Individuals from schools in New Zealand as compared to those from Australia focused more on Christian spiritual discernment practices in their preparation for meetings.
Geographic Location	• Individuals from schools of all geographic locations reflected the same themes as the overall themes.

Framework Category	Themes of Christian Spiritual Discernment Practices and Processes by Individuals
Affiliation of School	• Individuals from schools affiliated with CSA reflected the same themes as the overall themes. • Individuals from schools affiliated with CEN tended to focus more on the practicality of sending papers out prior to the meeting than spiritual preparation for the meeting. • Individuals from schools affiliated with NZACS and ACS tended to focus more on spiritual preparation for Christian school board meetings: prayer, Scripture, and meditation.

The preparation for board meetings by individuals was quite varied, with many different ways that people approached this; from very detailed and lengthy time spent reading, reflecting and praying about the issues in the board papers, while some respondents appeared to just read over the papers factually in preparation for the meeting. None of the respondents indicated that they had received any training in how to prepare for board meetings and what key practices they should implement in board meeting preparation. The common theme that all types of respondents and from all types and sizes of schools had, was the importance of receiving the board papers in advance of the meeting to enable prior reading and general preparation to take place.

Board members from older schools emphasised the importance of prayer in preparation for meetings as did those schools that were affiliated with NZACS and ACS, though there were no specific reasons provided why these types of schools may have a greater degree of spiritual emphasis on preparing for board meetings than those with other affiliations, who in contrast placed a greater emphasis on the practical issues of allowing individuals time in advance of the meeting to read the board papers and prepare.

The board chairs stressed the importance of having a meeting with the Principal prior to the Christian school board meeting, to plan for the meeting, work through the issues and also pray for the meeting. It is reasonable that general board members did not emphasise this pre-meeting as an important part of their preparation for board meetings, as they do not have visibility of this meeting or participate in it. However, it was observed that the Principals, as

the other participant in the pre-meetings, did not raise the pre-meeting as an important part of their preparation including spiritual preparation for board meetings.

5.5.3 Board Christian Spiritual Discernment Practices and Processes

The themes identified in relation to the collective Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes undertaken by the board in a board meeting are summarised in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3

Christian Spiritual Discernment Practices and Processes undertaken in Board Meetings

Framework Category	Themes of Christian spiritual discernment Practices and Processes in Board Meetings
Overall	• The most common theme for board Christian spiritual discernment practices was prayer. All interviewees included mention of opening and closing the meeting with prayer; many also indicated that the board meetings they are in stop in the midst of making a decision to pray about the matter being discussed. • Nearly all interviewees indicated that the boards should be stopping and praying in the midst of decisions as a good Christian spiritual discernment practice. • Meetings commence with a time of devotions which is usually general in nature and provides a platform for spiritual discernment in decision making during the meeting to come. • Scriptures are used by a number of interviewee's boards as a tool to help them in making decisions as a Christian spiritual discernment practice. Interviewees indicated that they would like to see a greater use of Scripture in board meetings. • An equal number of respondents indicated that their board spent more time on business issues at the expense of time on mission and ministry, as those boards that had an increase in prayerfulness by the board over time, as those boards that had seen no change over time. • Interviewees indicated that it was important to seek unity through discernment in the making of decisions by the board, to ensure there was a common way forward that everyone agreed to. • A theme that also emerged was the importance of building personal relationships between board members including activities such as sharing a meal together and creating space on the agenda to enable social interaction.
By Role	• Board chairs indicated that their board had a greater emphasis on compliance compared to mission and ministry, while Principals indicated that they believed that their board had become more prayerful.
Age of School	• Boards from schools that are older focused more on devotional times and prayer as key spiritual practices in decision making than boards from younger schools.

Framework Category	Themes of Christian spiritual discernment Practices and Processes in Board Meetings
Size of School	• Most Christian school boards appear to implement the same overall practices, however, schools in the mid to large size range appear to focus more prayer than schools of other sizes. • Interviewees from larger schools observed that the use of Christian spiritual discernment "ebbed and flowed" over time as people on the board changed.
Country	• Schools located in New Zealand indicated that they spend longer doing devotions in a board meeting than Australian schools. The other themes were the same as the overall themes regardless of country.
Geographic Location	• Boards from schools located in regional cities have a greater emphasis on prayer than schools from other locations.
Affiliation of School	• Boards from schools affiliated with CEN indicated that they have a slower tempo in their meetings and allow more time to make considered decisions than schools with other affiliations.

The range of Christian spiritual discernment practices undertaken by different boards was quite extensive, with prayer being the most common practice among all schools, especially at the commencement and conclusion of meetings, while for many, there was an emphasis on stopping and praying about decisions in the midst of discussions about the matters to be decided upon. There also appears to be a general trend amongst boards over time to increase their prayerfulness in meetings, especially for older and mid-size to larger schools. It was noted that many respondents indicated a tension between "mission and ministry" and "business and compliance issues", with the latter area gaining more attention and time in Christian school board meetings in more recent times. It would be reasonable to expect that in larger and older schools, which are generally more complex, have more issues to deal with, larger finances to manage, and overall more business issues before them, would see a greater emphasis on the business side of governance work and less spiritual emphasis in meetings. However, the interviews would indicate that the opposite is true, whereby the larger and older a school gets, the greater the spiritual emphasis of the board. The researcher believes that a key reason for this is that in larger and older schools, they tend to have a more experienced and larger management team to support the board and undertake the day-to-day operational management of the school, enabling the board to focus on higher-level school

purpose, governance, strategy and spiritual issues. In contrast, smaller and younger schools require the board to be a more “hands-on” management committee involved in the day-to-day operations of the school and therefore having less time available for the higher order and spiritual matters. Renz (2016) in his Board Development Cycle, supports this outcome, as newly formed and less mature not-for-profit boards are more likely to have not clearly defined the work of the board, have not created and sustained a strategic focus for the board and are less likely to conduct effective meetings.

Organisational Maturity Theory (OMT) (Crosby, 1979), which maps an organisation’s processes and practices over time against a series of maturity stages, is relevant in considering the practices and processes of a Christian school board. (Clapham, 2024), in expanding on OMT, states that the organisation’s maturity in terms of practices and processes does not necessarily correlate with the age of the organisation, such that “young” organisations may have mature practices and processes; similarly, “old” organisations may have immature practices and processes. It is possible for boards to display both mature and immature processes at the same time in different aspects of their governance duties. Therefore, in accordance with OMT, even a small or young Christian school board can be mature in its practices and processes, including the use of Christian spiritual discernment. It would appear, however, from this research that there is a link in terms of age and size of a school to the maturity of its board’s practices and processes, including the use of Christian spiritual discernment and maintaining a greater governance focus as opposed to being only operationally and compliance-focused, which results in a less mature board (Clapham, 2024).

A time of devotions, which normally includes a reading of scripture from the Bible and a reflection on this reading, was seen by many interviewees as key at the commencement of a meeting in setting the tone, as well as providing an overall sense that the board is to follow discernment practices in seeking the decisions they are about to make in the board

meeting that is being commenced. The use of the Bible and its teachings was also commented on by interviewees as being of significant use in the provision of guidance to board members in dealing with specific matters, though this was a less common practice than the use of Scripture in devotional times at the start of a board meeting.

5.5.4 Impact on Decisions of Christian Spiritual Discernment Practices and Processes

The themes identified in relation to the impact on decisions of Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes undertaken during a board meeting, as observed by interviewees, are summarised in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4

Impact of Christian Spiritual Discernment Practices and Processes on Decisions in Board Meetings

Framework Category	Themes of Impacts Christian spiritual discernment Practices and Processes in decision making
Overall	• Boards saw an impact and identifiable changes in their decisions due to using Christian spiritual discernment practices in their decision making. • In using Christian spiritual discernment, board decisions were observed by interviewees to be better and clearer. • In the absence of Christian spiritual discernment, board decisions were observed by interviewees as being of lower quality or incorrect in their outcome.
By Role	• Board chairs were more likely to observe that the board will change its decisions due to undertaking Christian spiritual discernment than the other roles (board member and Principal).
Age of School	• Older schools were more likely to observe that the board will change its decisions due to undertaking Christian spiritual discernment than in younger schools.
Size of School	• Larger schools were more likely to observe that the board will change its decisions due to undertaking Christian spiritual discernment than in smaller schools.
Country	• There appeared to be no difference between countries on the impact of Christian spiritual discernment on Christian school board decision making.
Geographic Location	• Schools located in capital cities or suburbs were more likely to observe that the board will change its decisions due to undertaking Christian spiritual discernment than in other locations.
Affiliation of School	• There appeared to be no difference between the schools with differing affiliations on the impact of Christian spiritual discernment on Christian school board decision making.

There was significant agreement amongst those interviewed that the use of Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes during a board meeting has an observable positive impact on the decisions made by the board, especially in terms of the quality and clarity of decisions. Similarly, it was commented by a number of respondents that an absence of Christian spiritual discernment practices led to a deterioration in the quality of the decisions made and also whether the decisions were actually correct.

Boards of older and larger schools indicated that they were more likely to change a decision or a path they were moving down after stopping and spending time on seeking discernment and direction through Christian spiritual discernment practices. As commented in Section 5.5.3, the researcher expected boards of larger schools to have larger meeting agendas, with more issues to address and be more focused on progressing through the business of governing a school, rather than being willing to slow down the meeting pace, undertake Christian spiritual discernment and be prepared to change a decision towards which they were heading. It appears, however, that this is not the case with boards of larger and older schools being more likely to practice Christian spiritual discernment and change decisions than those of smaller and younger schools.

5.5.5 Characteristics of a Good Christian School Board

The themes identified during interviews in relation to the characteristics of a good Christian school board are summarised in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5

Characteristics of a Good Christian School Board

Framework Category	Themes of Characteristics of a good Christian school Board
Overall	• The character of board members was seen as key, with a particular focus on their character being Godly in nature and displaying humility. • Ensuring the school has a clear purpose and board members know their calling in achieving that purpose. • A good mix among board members in terms of skills, experience, gender, age and backgrounds.
By Role	• Board chairs placed a greater emphasis on having a good mix of board members and the school having a clear purpose. • Board members focused more on the character of board members, especially having a strong sense of humility.
Age of School	• There appeared to be no difference between different aged schools on what the characteristics of a good Christian school board are.
Size of School	• There appeared to be no difference between different size schools on what the characteristics of a good Christian school board are.
Country	• There appeared to be no difference between countries on what the characteristics of a good Christian school board are.
Geographic Location	• There appeared to be no difference between geographic locations on what the characteristics of a good Christian school board are.
Affiliation of School	• Board members from CSA affiliated schools had a great focus on there being a clear purpose for the school compared to other affiliations, otherwise there was no difference between schools with different affiliations.

The additional question on the characteristics of a good Christian school board provided three clear and distinct common responses that came from interviewees of all types, sizes and ages of schools. Nearly all respondents spoke to the importance of the character of individual board members, and in particular, the need for them to have a sense of humility about them in their service to others, and board members also needed to be Godly in character. Dickson (2011, p. 24) defines humility as "the noble choice to forego your status, deploy your resources or use your influence for the good of others before yourself" (p. 24). He simplifies this further as a "willingness to hold power in the service of others" (p. 24). As a collective, the board holds the ultimate power in an organisation, and respondents indicated that this power is best used to the benefit of others rather than for the interest of the board members themselves. The second character trait of being Godly in character was not

expanded upon by the interviewees and is similar to having a sense of humility. Christians will often describe a Godly character referring to a teaching from the book of Galatians 5:22-23 in the Bible as being a person who exhibits “love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control” (Holy Bible: New Living Translation, 2015). These key elements were seen as important by interviewees for the board members in their decision making and governance as a good Christian school board.

As a second major theme in respect of being a good Christian school board, interviewees highlighted the importance of the school having a clear purpose for why the school exists and what it is seeking to achieve. Additionally, interviewees indicated that board members ideally will have a good understanding of the part they play in seeing the school’s purpose achieved. This focus on the school's purpose helps keep the board and management on target in their operations and decision making, as well as ensuring they remain in service of others rather than seeing their position as a board member as being in their own self-interest.

Interviewees indicated a third theme, as the importance of having a good mix of board members on the board with a variety of skills, experience, gender, age and backgrounds. These differences assist in decision making through the bringing of different perspectives and ideas to discussions, which in turn assists in the discernment process in working through decisions and listening to others as a key Christian spiritual discernment practice.

A stand-out comment was made by one of the interviewees (Respondent 10) that brought together the importance of having discernment in decision making by a board and being a good Christian school board member.

“I always think that it’s almost a requisite for being a board member in having discernment, because anyone can have an opinion. Plenty of Christians have opinions” (Respondent 10).

This comment indicates that just having opinions or ideas about an issue is insufficient in being a good Christian school board member, but instead, discernment needs to be a key ingredient in making those decisions, and this discernment needs to be based initially on the individual's character and what they bring in terms of skills and experience to the board. It is the interaction of such discerning individuals and the implementation of Christian spiritual discernment practices as a group that enables the board to make quality decisions as a whole to further the purpose of the school and as a basis of the philosophy of the school, in following God's will.

5.5.6 Summary of Overall Themes

As discussed in Sections 5.5.1 to 5.5.5, there were several overall themes that related directly to the four research questions. The themes that emerged from Research Question 4 provide a foundation for the board to operate from in considering the three Christian spiritual discernment-focused research questions. Table 5.6 provides a summary of these overall themes and how they relate to the research questions:

RQ1. What Christian spiritual discernment practices do individuals (board chair, board members and Principals) undertake in relation to the governance of Christian school boards in Australia and New Zealand?

RQ2. What Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes do Christian school boards collectively undertake in relation to the governance of schools in Australia and New Zealand?

RQ3. How do Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes influence the decision making in the governance of Christian schools in Australia and New Zealand?

RQ4. What makes a good Christian school board?

Table 5.6

Summary of Overall Themes Linked to the Research Questions

Overall Themes	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3	RQ4
Papers in advance				
Prayer				
Scripture reading				
Devotional time				
Fellowship				
Formal spiritual well-being processes				
Changes to decisions				
Improved decisions				
No Christian spiritual discernment leads to poor decisions				
Clear Purpose for the school				
Character of board members				
Mix of skills and experience of board members				

5.6 Synopsis of Qualitative Results

5.6.1 Introduction

This section summarises the perceptions of board chairs, board members and Principals into meta-themes that reflect what they see in relation to Christian spiritual discernment and its nature and role in the preparation by individuals for board meetings, the practices and processes within board meetings and Christian spiritual discernment's impact on decision making in board meetings. In addition, this section includes a summary of what interviewees identified as the characteristics of a good Christian school board.

The commonality of themes and concepts in the responses of the interviewees indicated that data saturation (Dovetail Editorial Team, 2023) had been reached through undertaking the twelve interviews and there was no need to expand the sample size and increase the number of interviews, as it would appear unlikely that new themes, concepts or perspectives would be obtained.

5.6.2 Individual Preparation for meetings

The interviewees indicated, through talking about their own individual practices in preparing for board meetings, and also what they perceived as being the ideal preparation for board meetings, that board members should spend a significant amount of time reading the board papers in preparing for meetings, and spend a significant amount of time praying for the issues that are in the board papers and the decisions that they are being asked to make, as well as the matters to be discussed at the board meeting.

5.6.3 Characteristics of Schools (Age and Size)

Interviewees indicated that larger schools, rather than smaller schools, as well as older schools, rather than younger schools, are: more likely to spend more time in prayer in board meetings; this includes opening and closing in prayer as well as stopping in the midst of discussions to pray in seeking guidance for the decisions they are making, undertake Christian spiritual discernment practices more generally as a board during board meetings, and change their decisions during the course of a meeting or make a different decision than what was expected going into a meeting.

5.6.4 Christian Spiritual Discernment Practices in Board Meetings

Interviewees indicated that their boards felt tension between spending more time on business-related matters rather than spiritual matters. They deliberately had to work to include Christian spiritual discernment practices in their board meetings by intentionally managing their meeting agendas to include time for prayer at the start and end of meetings, as well as in the midst of meetings, and ensuring that the reading of Scripture was also prominent in their meetings.

5.6.5 Impact of Christian Spiritual Discernment Practices

Interviewees indicated that they could tell from their decision making in terms of quality and unity in their decisions, where the board had implemented Christian spiritual

discernment practices. The interviewees could also tell when a board decision had been made not utilising Christian spiritual discernment, and in fact, there was discord around the decision, and often it was actually the incorrect decision.

5.6.6 A Good Christian School Board

Interviewees provided four characteristics for what, in their opinion, were requisites for a good Christian school board: the character of individual board members needed to include being discerning people, having a sense of humility and also being Godly in character, the board needed a mix of skills and experience among its members, the school needed to have a clear purpose and the board understood that clear purpose or mission, and the board members understood their role in achieving the school's purpose.

5.7 Summary

This chapter documented the analysis of the interviews of board chairs, board members and Principals in respect of their perspectives on Christian spiritual discernment, both for individuals in their preparation for board meetings and also what Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes the board undertakes collectively as part of its decision-making process. The interviewees provided different perceptions from the different roles they hold in a board meeting: running the meeting (board chair), participating in the decision making (board members) and providing input into the decision-making process (Principal). In addition, the nature of the school (age of the school and number of enrolments) the interviewees were drawn from provided insights on the practices, processes and perceptions from different types of schools.

A key finding identified from the research has been that boards from larger and older schools tend to focus, to a greater degree, on prayer and Christian spiritual discernment more generally than those from younger and smaller schools. Larger and older schools are more intentional in respect of stopping to pray during meetings and the use of devotional times and

Bible scriptures in a Christian school board meeting. Additionally, there appeared to be significant variability between boards in the preparation processes of individuals leading into a board meeting, and the focus by different boards on the spiritual well-being of its members, whilst variable between schools, there was an overall lack of focus by boards as a group on these two aspects.

Chapter 6 integrates the findings of the quantitative analysis of Chapter 4 and the qualitative analysis in Chapter 5. The chapter brings together both forms of research and synthesises actual practice with what, in the opinion of the respondents, is seen as the ideal Christian spiritual discernment practices a Christian school board should undertake.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 integrates the key findings both phases undertaken in this research, being a quantitative survey outlined in Chapter 4 and qualitative semi-structured interviews outlined in Chapter 5. The integration of the findings from both phases provides significant original contributions to the practice of governance in the making of decisions by Christian school boards including the development of a number of models to enable the application of the findings by Christian school boards.

This chapter begins with a brief description of the research exploring the nature and role of Christian spiritual discernment in the decision making by Christian school boards and links to literature in relation to board governance and spiritual discernment, particularly in a group setting. The study undertaken is unique in that it is in relation to K-12 Christian schools in Australia and New Zealand. The only similar research identified on the use of spiritual discernment by boards in the education space was a study in relation to Christian higher education boards in the United States of America (Barbee, 2019), which suggested that Christian governing board members could greatly benefit from formally assessing their process and skills for Christian spiritual discernment.

This research identified the key Christian spiritual discernment practices that individual board members use in their preparation for board meetings, the Christian spiritual discernment practices employed during decision-making in board meetings, and the impact these practices have on the decisions made. Research subjects also responded as to what they thought a board should ideally do in relation to Christian spiritual discernment and they provided reflections on what they saw as necessary characteristics to have in being a good

Christian school board from a broader view and not just limited to Christian spiritual discernment practices.

6.2 Study Orientation

Based on the theory of pragmatism, this research employed convergent mixed methods consisting of a quantitative focus in research phase one and a qualitative focus in research phase two. These two phases aimed to address the following four research questions in relation to Christian school boards and Christian spiritual discernment:

RQ 1. What Christian spiritual discernment practices do individuals (board chair, board members and Principals) undertake in relation to the governance of Christian school boards in Australia and New Zealand?

RQ 2. What Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes do Christian school boards collectively undertake in relation to the governance of schools in Australia and New Zealand?

RQ 3. How do Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes influence the decision making in the governance of Christian schools in Australia and New Zealand?

RQ 4. What makes a good Christian school board?

In both the quantitative and qualitative phases, the researcher deliberately did not specifically provide an explicit definition of Christian spiritual discernment to survey participants or interviewees, instead a list of potential Christian spiritual discernment activities and practices were provided for participants to select from and therefore respondents would not exhibit unconscious bias through confirmation bias (Suveren, 2022) that a focus on a specific definition of Christian spiritual discernment may cause. The respondents were all individuals involved in the leadership and governance of a Christian organisation and there will be a social desirability (Zikmund, 2003) that they exhibit Christian spiritual discernment in their decision making and anything to the contrary could

cause them discomfort and bias in their responses (Suveren, 2022). Many of the candidates participating in the research may not necessarily have equated the listed practices with spiritual discernment or may have a theological or historical perception on the phrase "Christian spiritual discernment" which may have introduced response bias (Zikmund, 2003) in the data they provided in relation to their individual practices and those of the boards they are part of. In addition, as was highlighted during the Literature Review in Chapter 2 of this research, that there was no common single definition for either "discernment" or "Christian spiritual discernment", rather, authors and researchers described what discernment and Christian spiritual discernment are and the types of activities and outcomes that constitute some form of discernment process rather than trying to focus on a single definition.

Based on the outcomes of the research and the various definitions of spiritual discernment in the literature, a simple working definition of Christian spiritual discernment to be adopted is "As a group, utilising practice and processes, identifying where God is already at work and joining in". This simple definition for Christian spiritual discernment acknowledges that discerning God's will is not something that just happens, but is the result of a series of practices and processes that enable board members to put aside their own thoughts and agendas and to listen to God and each other in the process of making a decision together that is following God's lead, rather than as individuals doing what we decide to do separately from God's will.

6.3 Research Findings

6.3.1 Integration

The following research findings are derived from the integration of the data analysis of the results from the research phase one quantitative survey, and the research phase two qualitative interviews, addressed in Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation. These findings address the research questions in relation to the nature and role of Christian spiritual

discernment in Christian school board decision making. The research encompassed both the activities and discussions in board meetings, in addition to the preparation for meetings undertaken by individuals; the impact Christian spiritual discernment has on decision making by the board and also the overall nature of the board.

6.3.2 Individuals' Preparation for Board Meetings

The research indicated a wide range of practices being undertaken in preparation prior to a board meeting, including both the practical activities of preparing agendas and reports, in addition to reading the materials.

There was an overall agreement by research participants that board papers needed to be provided in advance of a meeting to enable pre-reading and consideration of the decisions to be determined at the meeting. While survey participants were not asked how often they read through the papers, they were asked how long they typically spend reading the papers, with the majority indicating that they spend less than one hour on reading the papers. Cossin (2024) found that the majority of board members they surveyed estimated that they spend one to three hours preparing for board meetings. In this research on Christian school boards, as outlined in Section 4.5.13, when the data is combined in respect of the time spent by the majority of board members in preparation for each meeting in reading the reports, praying about issues, thinking about issues and talking to others prior to the meeting, Table 6.1 was developed:

Table 6.1

Total Time Spent in Board Meeting Preparation by the Majority of Board Members

Activity	**Minimum Time (Minutes)**	**Maximum Time (Minutes)**
Reading reports	11	60
Praying about issues	1	30
Talking to others	11	60
Thinking about issues	11	60
Total Time	**34**	**210**

The results outlined in Table 6.1, indicated that the majority of Christian school board members spend between 34 and 210 minutes (0.5 hours and 3.5 hours) in preparation for a meeting, which is a wide time range. The research result, however, is similar to the one to three hours in board member preparation time in the findings of the Cossin (2024) study.

Geyer (2020) contended that board members should read their board papers at least three times prior to a meeting. However, based on his research on Australian Public Company Directors, he found that 30% of directors read their board papers once prior to a meeting and over 40% read them multiple times. From Table 6.1, the majority of Christian school board members in this research read their board papers for between 11 and 60 minutes in their preparation for a board meeting. Given that the majority of Christian school board members read their board papers for less than one hour prior to a meeting, it is unlikely for them to have read the papers multiple times prior to a meeting along the lines of the practice of their for-profit counterparts. Apart from being time poor or not prioritising the reading of the papers, a contributing factor to the relatively poor result of Christian school board members' pre-reading is that they do not receive the papers sufficiently in advance of the meeting. Geyer, in his study, found that 32% of for-profit board members receive their board papers too close to the meeting to have sufficient time to read them, with 38% of board members receiving them three days or less prior to a meeting. Therefore, the lack of sufficient time for preparation prior to a meeting is quite likely to be the cause for Christian school board members to not examine the board papers as much as they should prior to a meeting, therefore limiting their ability to undertake individual discernment practices prior to a Board meeting.

Many respondents to both the quantitative and qualitative questions identified prayer and thinking about the matters to be decided upon as key Christian spiritual discernment activities they used as they considered the board papers provided prior to a board meeting. In

reality, there was a smaller number of respondents who actually prayed specifically about the matters before the board meeting and consulted Scriptures to gather guidance as to the principles that their decision should be based upon. The quantitative research results (see Section 4.5.13) provided that 47% of respondents spend 10 minutes or less in prayer in preparation for the meeting. However, in contrast, the qualitative research results (see Section 5.4.1) presented an overall major theme by respondents of the importance of spending a significant amount of time in prayer in preparation for the meeting. This contrast highlights the inconsistency between practice and the perceived importance by board members of praying about issues prior to a board meeting. Many respondents did not appear to take a spiritual approach in their individual preparation for board meetings and the matters they were to consider; instead, they relied solely upon analytical processes in their preparation to make decisions (Miller, 2020) rather than seeking spiritual discernment in their decision making..

The research indicated that there is little real training or induction for new board members in respect of how to individually prepare for board meetings generally, and how Christian spiritual discernment practices are to be integrated into the preparation process by board members. This issue presents a weakness for Christian school boards where they desire to utilise group discernment in their decision making, as this can only really take place where board members “have nurtured their individual discernment skills” (Fendall et al., 2007, p. 38), and, without focused training, this is unlikely to be consistent based on the research results. In the case of most Christian school boards, there appeared to be no clear discussions in respect of Christian spiritual discernment practices for when the board is gathered together and in the process of making decisions, nor what the expectations were for the board and its members as they come to a meeting and therefore Christian Spiritual Discernment is difficult to fully implement.

6.3.3 Christian Spiritual Discernment Practices in Board Meetings

The data analysis indicated the following practices as the most common Christian spiritual discernment practices undertaken by Christian school boards during board meetings.

6.3.3.1 Prayer

Christian school boards utilise a variety of different types of prayer, including in the opening of and closing of the meeting, praying for wisdom, praying for indifference, plus stopping in the midst of a meeting when considering a decision, to specifically pray about the matter. The quantitative phase showed that 88% of respondents' boards spent time in general prayer in a board meeting, while 81% of respondents indicated that their board specifically prayed for wisdom during meetings. However, 68% of respondents indicated that their board only spends 5 minutes or less praying about specific issues. A key theme that emerged from the qualitative phase was the importance of spending a significant amount of time in prayer in board meetings, so while boards do pray at a consistently high frequency in the board meetings, the length of those prayer times is relatively short and therefore may limit the depth of prayer due to a lack of time. The centrality of prayer as a tool for guidance in decision making was highlighted by Froese and Uecker (2022) in their extensive quantitative study on prayer, as the seeking of guidance being the most common reason (64% of respondents) why people pray.

6.3.3.2 Devotions

This is typically held at the commencement of a board meeting and often involves a reading from Scripture, a reflection on the reading from Scripture and its application to the school generally or for the specific board meeting that is about to commence. Most commonly, the devotion is provided by different board members on a roster basis and not just by one specific person at all the meetings of the board.

6.3.3.3 Scripture Reading

Most commonly this was as part of the devotions at the commencement of the meeting, but in some cases, Scripture was also read or reflected upon during the course of the meeting as part of deliberations on a decision. Sixty-two percent of respondents to the quantitative survey indicated that the Christian school board they were involved with read the Bible at some point during meetings.

The implementation of the three main group Christian spiritual discernment activities is consistent with the literature (Barton, 2012b; Farnham et al., 1996; Skoog et al., 2024; Stob, 2015) as being key components in utilising spiritual discernment in the making of decisions corporately. The Christian spiritual discernment activities combine together with a clearly articulated and well-known purpose for the school to provide focus to the board in making decision that "integrates prayer and knowledge of the Bible with decision making" (Mellon & Kroth, 2013, p. 74).

In entering into this study, the researcher held a belief that younger and smaller schools were more likely to undertake Christian spiritual discernment than larger and older schools, as they were less corporately focused, were less complex, and had fewer resources to govern. The research, however, suggests that the opposite is true, whereby following the completion of a regression analysis on the data provided in the quantitative phase, there was a correlation between the larger the size of the schools board, the greater a board's devotional focus (including Scripture reading) and also the larger the school's enrolment the more likely the board was to have a greater emphasis on prayer. The qualitative phase supported these findings and added that the older the school in age, the more likely the board is to utilise Christian spiritual discernment. From the literature review, it is seen that devotions, Scripture reading and prayer are integral components of Christian spiritual discernment, and so the presence of these activities as part of a board meeting would indicate that the board is

undertaking Christian spiritual discernment even if they do not articulate that this is what they are doing as a core process in decision making. A key finding of this research is that the larger and older a school and the larger the board, the more likely it is that the board will undertake Christian spiritual discernment.

The data gathered in the research and following a regression analysis, provided an even more significant correlation, such that where a board stops and prays about a specific decision in the midst of a meeting, there exists a very high correlation of 99.3% between that practice and the undertaking of Christian spiritual discernment as a board (see Table 4.51), once more underlining the integral part of prayer as a Christian spiritual discernment activity in the board's decision making.

6.3.4 Ideal Christian Spiritual Discernment Practices in Board Meetings

The research indicated that there were three main Christian spiritual discernment practices considered ideal by research participants for a board. The key practices identified as being desirable for a board to undertake were prayer, devotions, and scripture; which completely aligns with the three main practices identified in Section 6.3.3 as being the main Christian spiritual discernment activities undertaken by the Christian school boards participating in the research. The researcher did note that a number of research participants indicated that their board did not spend any time on specific prayer (20%), and also 28% of respondents indicated that their board did not read Scripture during a board meeting. In a number of cases, there appears to be a gap between what is considered to be ideal in a Christian school board in relation to prayer and Scripture reading and the actual praxis of Christian school boards. Contributing factors to the challenges experienced by Christian school boards in the implementation of Christian spiritual discernment activities, such as prayer and scripture reading are set out in Section 6.3.5.

The research indicated that there were two key aims for boards in the undertaking of Christian spiritual discernment as part of their decision making:

1. Assisting the board with making better quality decisions and the quality of the organisation's work (Farnham et al., 1996), and
2. Creating better unity in the board in the making of such decisions, especially when the matter being considered is a difficult decision.

Barton (2012b); Hare (1973) indicate that group unity is best achieved through the consideration of divergent opinions and in reaching consensus together, whereby there is a shared agreement on a way forward, rather than a simple majority vote. Where just a majority vote is used in making decisions rather than discussions and Christian spiritual discernment processes, concerns may not be fully explored and board members may not feel sufficiently heard on an issue such that there is no real sense of unity achieved (Farnham et al., 1996). Collective unity (Burton et al., 2023) amongst the board members can be seen as the key marker that the group has indeed correctly discerned God's will or direction on an issue (Barton, 2012b) and the correct course of action has therefore been decided upon. The quantitative research supported this with 91% of respondents indicating the decisions by their board were either always unanimous or nearly always unanimous.

6.3.5 Challenges in Implementing Christian Spiritual Discernment in Board Meetings

The research identified four main challenges in implementing Christian spiritual discernment in board meetings:

6.3.5.1 Overall Time Constraints

Board members are volunteers who have limited time to provide to their governance work for a school. The quantitative phase identified that most commonly, boards spend between 30 and 39 hours per annum in board meetings. In addition to this, board members would add individual preparation time for meetings and potentially other committee work and other meetings. For volunteer board members, this time is an addition to their normal lives of

work, family and other commitments. The capacity for them to spend additional time on school board related activities, such as Christian spiritual discernment, is limited both individually and corporately.

6.3.5.2 Meeting Agenda Time Constraints

Related to the first challenge of overall time constraints, is the time available within meetings. The research indicated that school boards most commonly meet 10 to 11 times per annum, with each meeting lasting three hours. Within those meetings, board members need to ensure they fulfill their responsibilities in terms of accountability, strategy, resourcing, advocacy, and monitoring (Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, 2025c), in addition to ensuring that the organisation operates in accordance with its Christian ethos (Christian Ministry Advancement Standards Council, 2025). To fit all this into the constrained time available and spend significant time on Christian spiritual discernment activities is a challenge for many boards, with 27% of survey respondents indicating their board undertakes Christian spiritual discernment activities only a little or not at all in decision making which indicates the potential for time pressures.

6.3.5.3 Business versus Mission

The research indicated that boards face an ongoing tension in focusing on the business requirements of the school while at the same time not losing sight of ensuring the mission of the school is fulfilled. The tension in this area is linked to not only having limited time within board meetings to address all the issues before the board, but also to an additional overlay in how the board defines success for the school, whether it be by achieving its mission as defined by ministry goals, or whether the board uses a business lens only in the seeking of financial strength for the school (Stob, 2011) to determine whether the school is succeeding or not.

6.3.5.4 Purpose versus Compliance

The research indicated that board members believe they face an ever-increasing compliance workload and that this consumes meeting time that might otherwise be spent on focusing on the fulfillment of the purpose of the school. Board chairs in the development of meeting agendas particularly highlighted the need to ensure there was balance here, such that the board does not focus solely on compliance and regulations issues at the expense of the board discussing, monitoring and making decisions in accordance with the school's purpose.

The ability for Christian school boards to implement Christian spiritual discernment in their decision making in board meetings was determined by this research as being linked to the overall time availability of the board and the other competing time priorities before the board, including focusing on the business and compliance requirements of the school. While all schools face the same pressures given the regulatory and competitive environment schools operate in, it was apparent from the research that some boards managed their meeting agendas and board business in such a way as to ensure that the board spends its time on the most critical issues (Cossin, 2024) and most important tasks (Ramesh, 2021), and in so doing make space for Christian spiritual discernment activities as a priority, while other boards had not done so.

6.3.6 Impact of Christian Spiritual Discernment in Board Decisions

The research indicated that there were positive impacts from the utilisation of Christian spiritual discernment activities in the board's decision making. In contrast, the research also found that participants were able to identify negative outcomes when their board had not utilised Christian spiritual discernment in reaching a decision.

6.3.6.1 Impact From Using Christian Spiritual Discernment in Decision Making

The research revealed that there were a number of key benefits in utilising Christian spiritual discernment activities, including creating more unity for the board in the making of a

decision, which according to Quaker tradition, which is deeply embedded with Christian spiritual discernment practices in the making of decisions as a group, is "the fundamental marker that God's direction has been discerned" (Barton, 2012b, p. 219). Additionally, the overall atmosphere in board meetings, particularly when the board stopped and prayed specifically about a decision in the midst of a meeting, improved. When the board utilised Christian spiritual discernment in its decision making there were some cases of changing the direction of a decision, and the research indicated that from the perspective of participants, the decisions made were better and clearer, with an improvement in the quality of the board's work (Farnham et al., 1996), particularly following a time of prayer. The Christian school board becomes a discerning board, as it utilises the identified Christian spiritual discernment activities in its decision making processes with a positive impact on the decisions that are made by the board (Skoog et al., 2024).

6.3.6.2 Impact from not using Christian Spiritual Discernment in Decision Making

In contrast to the positive impact from utilising Christian spiritual discernment in decision making, the data indicated that, when Christian spiritual discernment was not utilised in decision making, due to time limits or not following their normal board processes in situations where a board would usually utilise Christian spiritual discernment, the board would make incorrect decisions, or there would be a sense of discord, or a lack of unity around the decision made. In the qualitative phase, the research participants displayed a sense of regret when they did not follow Christian spiritual discernment processes for decisions when they knew it was important for their board to do so, and where they had previously experienced a positive impact from utilising Christian spiritual discernment.

6.3.7 A Good Christian School Board

The additional question that was asked during the qualitative phase to capture any additional concepts that had not been covered in the prior specific questions was in respect of

participants being able to outline what elements they saw as important to have in a good Christian school board. The research identified four key elements that characterise a good Christian school board.

1. The good character of the individual members who make up the board (Cossin, 2024). Participants identified several key characteristics that each board member should possess, including being Godly in nature in possessing the "Fruits of the Spirit" as outlined in the Bible as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). These attributes of board members are seen as critical in their ability to be part of a team and listen to one another actively (Miller, 2020). Another key characteristic identified by participants was showing humility in the way they act, make decisions and seek to govern the school. Humility was seen as important in the discernment process in listening to God (Skoog et al., 2024) and the words of others, including the ideas behind those words (Fendall et al., 2007). In the event of board members not displaying the described characteristics, there is the potential for the board to make decisions that are harsh and do not consider the interests of others, while a Christian organisation is commonly expected to care for others as they carry out their purpose to the benefit of other people. Similarly, if there is a lack of humility in the board, board members believe that they have all the knowledge necessary as individuals in making a decision and are therefore unlikely to stop and listen to others who may have an alternative perspective on an issue before the board. As has been demonstrated in this research, the capacity to listen to God and others is a key component in discerning a way forward on a decision.
2. The school has a clear purpose driving its strategic operations and decisions that the board and its members know well and understand (Fisman et al., 2009). The

organisational clarity that comes from an articulation of the reason why the school exists helps provide direction for the board and school leadership in its decision making, as well as being a key to organisational health (Lencioni, 2012). The purpose of the school enables a determination as to what success looks like for the school in the accomplishment of its mission (Fisman et al., 2009), and is the foundation for all the school board's actions, policies and decisions (Contant & Noot, 2021).

3. The board members' own understanding of expectations of them (Reardon, 2023), their role in the fulfilment of the school's purpose, and the influence these understandings have on their role in the decision making by the board. Aulgur (2016) suggested in his research that there is often a gap between what board members think their role is, compared to what management believes the role of board members is, in contrast to what the actual role of the board is. Where such gaps exist, it is important to have a good induction program for incoming board members and constant ongoing training for board members to assist them in their role and practices in board meetings.
4. Ensuring the Christian school board has amongst its members a good mix of representatives from across a range of skills, experience, age and gender (Bartlett & Campey, 2008; Clapham, 2024; Contant & Noot, 2021; Cossin, 2024). The research indicated that having a mix of board members assists in better decision making and brings a better balance to the board as a range of different perspectives and a wider range of stakeholders and constituencies are factored into the decisions (Kugel & Mercado, 2024).

6.4 Towards Greater Usage of Christian Spiritual Discernment in Christian School Board Decision Making

Section 6.3 in this thesis outlined key research findings that have resulted from this study, taking these findings from the complex environment of a school board (Ford & Ihrke, 2016) and utilising the research methodology as selected in Chapter 3, whereby a pragmatic approach provides useful actionable knowledge (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020) that makes a positive difference and contributes to better practice (Kelemen & Rumens, 2012) through the transformation of such knowledge into the creation of resources, tools and training materials for Christian school boards. Barbee (2019) indicated that Christian boards would greatly benefit from tools that could synthesise the findings of research on spiritual discernment and increase its usage in Christian school boards. Therefore, as an outcome of this research, a number of research-based models and tools have been developed to assist Christian school boards to formally assess their Christian spiritual discernment processes and their skills in group spiritual discernment. The preliminary tools have been designed to enable the identification of what the active steps boards could take to improve their practices and use of Christian spiritual discernment in decision making. Three tools have been developed by the researcher to enable the application of the research findings:

"The Tree of Discernment" (see Section 6.4.1) provides a single diagram that is a graphical analogy that consolidates together the key themes that have emerged from the integration of both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the research, as well as concepts from the Literature Review to enable Christian school boards to gain an overview of the required ideal elements necessary for being a discerning board. The diagram provides an easy-to-remember theoretical model as to what the key attributes and components are for a Christian school board to utilise as they seek greater integration of their faith into their decision making through Christian spiritual discernment. The diagram is also designed to be a

teaching tool that can be used in providing training to Christian school boards about Christian spiritual discernment at both a theoretical and practical level.

The "Christian Spiritual Discernment Decision Framework" (see Section 6.4.2) is for the use of Christian school boards developing an overall approach to group discernment decision making and also in addressing a specific issue that requires a formal discernment process by the board in reaching a decision. This framework has been developed based on the Literature Review and the findings of the quantitative and qualitative phases of this research. The Christian Spiritual Discernment Decision Framework provides detailed steps for a school board to implement in carrying out Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes from the initial establishment of an agreed approach to Christian spiritual discernment, to making an actual decision, through to implementing its outcome. The Christian Spiritual Discernment Decision Framework complements the Tree of Discernment because the board is more likely to be a growing and fruitful tree when following the steps.

The "Christian Spiritual Discernment Assessment Tool" (see Section 6.4.5) is a series of four, quadrant-based frameworks that together provide an initial assessment tool for Christian school boards to utilise in measuring their overall implementation of Christian spiritual discernment processes and practices. The Christian Spiritual Discernment Assessment Tool allows for the identification of aspects of Christian spiritual discernment practices that require further development by the board as it seeks to become more discerning and provides a description of the type of board they are based on their use of Christian spiritual discernment practices in each of the four frameworks. In relation to the Tree of Discernment, the Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes described in the four models are the "branches" of the tree from which the decisions made by the board (the "fruit") come.

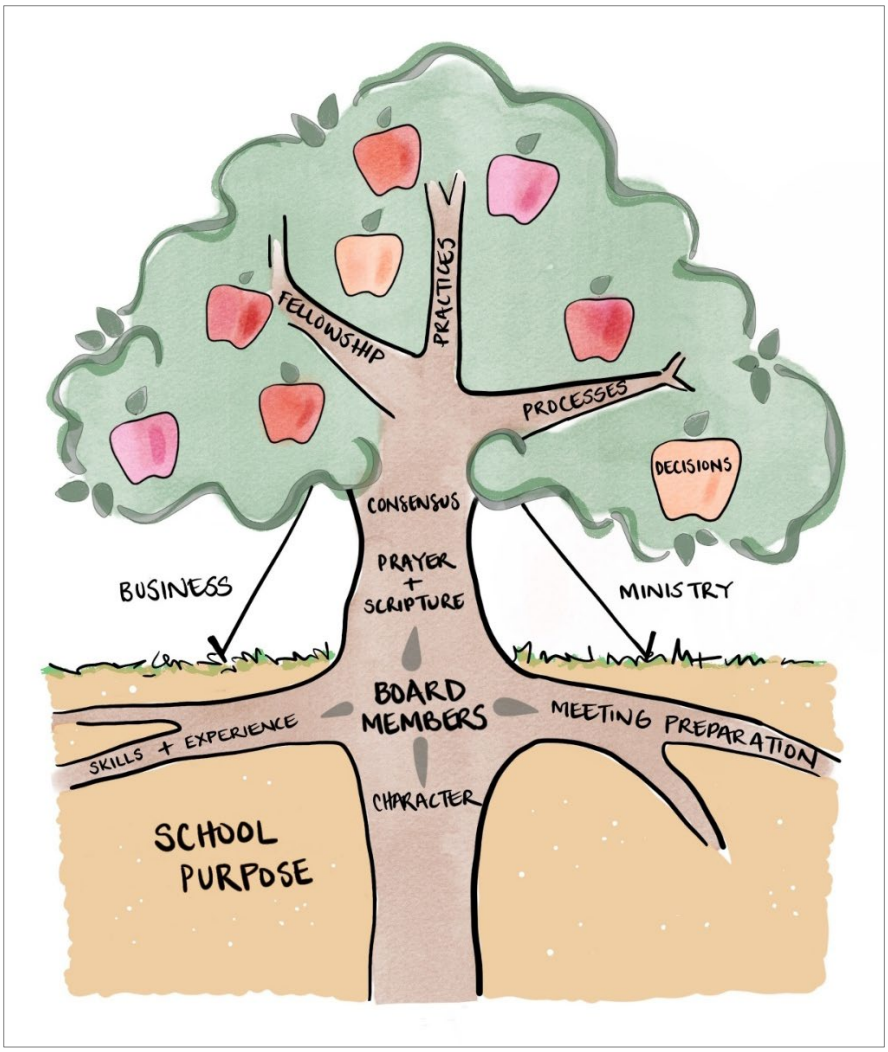
6.4.1 Tree of Discernment

Figure 6.1 provides a graphical analogy that synthesises the key themes that have been identified in the Literature Review along with the quantitative and qualitative phases of this research in answering the research questions as to the ideal elements for a Christian school board and the individual members of the board to exhibit in seeking God's will in their decision making as a group through the implementation of Christian spiritual discernment. The concept of the Tree of Discernment illustration and its components was developed by the researcher, and the artwork was provided by Meredith Harmer.

The Christian school board is symbolised as a tree; an organic, growing, living and flourishing group; one that can change as needed, as the circumstances around it change; it remains strong and can flex but not break in storms or difficult times. In contrast, a board that is fixed, rigid and not growing can quickly become ineffective and is unable to perform its duties well. A stale board lacks innovation, as it is unable to be agile and adapt to the constant changes in the environment it operates in, and may become a monument to past events and board decisions (Cope, 2019). It is easy for schools as they age, to become fixed and rigid institutions with their boards bound by heritage and tradition losing their edge and innovation in governance, education and operation.

Figure 6.1

The Tree of Discernment



6.4.2 Elements of the Tree of Discernment

The Tree of Discernment requires a number of key elements to be working together to assist it to be a healthy and growing tree as it bears fruit, in the same way that a natural fruit tree does. The outline of key elements for the Tree of Discernment is provided in the following sub-sections.

6.4.2.1 The Soil

The soil the tree is planted in. The soil is the school's purpose, the reason for the school being and the core driver as to why it exists (Bartlett & Campey, 2008). The school's purpose is the critical point to start every decision with and to consider any issue in the context of why the school exists (i.e. school purpose), especially in situations when the decision being considered is in relation to the leadership and direction of an organisation

(Sinek, 2009). Being a Christian school, this purpose is foundational to the existence of the school and this is commonly in response to a calling by God over the founders of the school and according to the concept of putting God first (Christian Ministry Advancement Standards Council, 2025). The policy governance model, a popular not-for-profit governance philosophy from the United States of America, requires boards to ensure that clear ends statements are in place for the organisation, which set out the organisation's purpose and are then used as a basis for all decisions (Carver, 2006). Christian spiritual discernment grows out of the purpose or vision of an organisation and operates best in the context where a clear understanding of the purpose exists (Liebert, 2015; Morris & Olsen, 1997). The purpose of the school must be clear and life-giving to the organisation and the entire school community, a vision that sets out what organisational success looks like and provides a sense of direction (Daniel et al., 2024).

A board that is not planted in the good soil of a clear purpose will find it difficult to make decisions without a shared vision (The Diligent Team, 2023). The soil must be clear of weeds, rocks and distractions, while being clean and full of nutrients to allow the tree to grow strong and, in that, make decisions that have a positive impact on the well-being and sustainability of the overall school. While many boards will have a purpose statement that was established at the commencement of the school, or they have inherited one that was developed as the school developed, it is a responsibility of the current-day board to make sure the purpose statement is clear and relevant, as well as being reflective of the true purpose of the school and not a statement that just reflects current thinking or the latest fad or pressure. It is worth the board revisiting the purpose statement on a periodic basis, not only to make sure the purpose statement is clear and life-giving to the school, but also to ensure that the policies and activities of the school reflect the purpose of the school; if this is not done regularly, a school may easily set-off on the trajectory of mission drift. (Greer et al., 2015). The process

of developing a clear purpose statement is best done collaboratively by the board, Principal and staff to ensure it is not just a top-down exercise, but one that engages the whole school community (Daniel et al., 2024).

The importance of a school having a clear purpose statement was supported through the qualitative phase of the research, where interviewees reiterated the importance of having a clear school purpose as a key component of being a good Christian school board (see Section 5.5.5).

6.4.2.2 The Roots

The roots of a natural tree are largely below ground and unseen; they need to efficiently adapt to changes quickly and form a stable base for the tree. At the same time, the roots draw water and nutrients from the soil for the good growth of the tree and its fruit (Bowen, 1985). Similarly, in the Tree of Discernment, where the "roots of the tree" secure the Christian school board into place, keeping it grounded and deeply embedded in the purpose of the school. The roots of the Tree of Discernment are the school's board members, largely unseen by those in the broader school community, yet they fulfil a vital role in anchoring the tree, tapping into the nutrients that the "soil" provides through having a clear school purpose. The school board members need to be deeply rooted in the school's purpose, having a clear understanding of what the purpose means and what their role is in fulfilling that purpose. If the roots of a natural tree are cut off from the life-giving nutrients of the soil, or are removed in some way, the tree ultimately dies or, in some cases, becomes completely disfigured and unrecognisable as it takes a different shape. Similarly, if the board members are cut off or remove themselves from sinking into the school's purpose, the Christian school may ultimately die or become unrecognisable to what it was originally established to be. The roots represent the school board members, who they are and what they bring to the board, as well as the actions and work they do beyond the immediate view of other board members and

the school community as a whole. The three main aspects, or roots of the tree, identified in the research for board members as individuals are:

1. Skills and Experience

   Each board member comes with their own abilities and knowledge, drawing from their professional and other roles, experience, and qualifications. Those individual skills and experience combined with those of the other board members creates a skills matrix, as they work together to provide deep insights into the problems and issues before the board on an everyday basis, and also in the more challenging times. The skills and experience possessed by board members enable them to analyse the data presented to the board for decisions, draw on their own knowledge, and provide a platform for discussing issues that other board members can benefit from as they listen to each other in the making of a decision (Cossin, 2024).

   The process of seeking out and selecting board members to ensure there is an appropriate mix of skills and experience on the board is one of the key long-term tasks of a board. If the board does not pay attention to the need for ongoing board renewal, whether it be via a constitutional requirement based on term limits, where board members are required to retire after a certain amount of time on the board, or they step off the board to pursue other interests, a board can dwindle in size and effectiveness over time, as was found in the quantitative data on board vacancy levels (See Section 4.5.3).

   Individual skills and experience or size of a Christian school board alone are not sufficient for the board to be effective in their role and mission. The board needs to be embedded within, and be aligned with, the school's purpose. A board, without this sense of being embedded within the school's purpose, results in board decisions being made in a vacuum or what the current board feels is the correct decision, with no

sense of anchoring that decision in why the school exists or clarity as to why such a decision should be made a particular way.

2. Character

Who the board members are, and their nature, is the central and primary source from which the tree draws the most nutrients and, therefore, it has a significant impact on the health of a Christian school and its board. In the same way that many natural trees have a taproot that grows directly down anchoring the tree to the soil as the central axis for the whole root system of the tree to develop from (Science Facts, 2023), so too it is with the character of board members. Their character is the key anchorage means for the board and school to the school's purpose and is the primary means for nutrients to pass in to the rest of the tree.

The qualitative phase of the research study clearly showed that the character of board members was central to the board being considered a good Christian school board. The interviewees highlighted two specific characteristics for board members to have a positive impact on a Christian school board and its effectiveness, as well as the board members to actively and appropriately participate in the board, utilising Christian spiritual discernment in its decision making. The first characteristics identified as one that board members need to possess was humility, which is shown in the way they can put others first in truly listening to them as they seek answers to issues with their fellow board members in seeking to reach a common understanding of a way forward with a sense of greater unity (See Section 5.4.5.1). The second characteristic seen as vital for individual board members to possess, even before stepping into a board environment, was displaying the Christian "Fruits of the Spirit" (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control).

The character of board members needs to be embedded in, and aligned with, the organisation's purpose (Hunter, 2024), so the "taproot" of board member character needs to sink deeply into the soil of the school's purpose. The critical nature of the character of board members and the role it plays as being central to the ongoing growth of the tree and its capacity to seek, identify and follow God's will in the board's decision making, points to the critical importance of the selection and orientation of new board members beyond just technical skills and knowledge as part of the organisation's policies and processes.

3. Meeting Preparation

The preparation work performed by each individual board member, prior to a board meeting, considerably shapes their ability to discern the decisions to be made when they come together as a group (Barton, 2012b; Butts, 2019; Liebert, 2015). If a board member comes to a meeting without significant time spent in good preparation, including prayer, reading over the papers and seeking God's will in going into a meeting about the decisions to be made, the board member arrives at the meeting with minimal understanding of the issues before the board and no real concept of where God's leading may be in the making of a decision as they seek to make contributions to the board's discussions (Anderson, 2006). Their ability to effectively participate in group discernment, and discussions more generally, as part of the making of board decisions will be at a surface level at best, with no real consideration or insight into the decisions to be made.

The qualitative phase of the research included a key theme being identified from the interviews of needing to make sure the board papers were out in advance of the meeting enabling good preparation for the meeting by board members. It was apparent from the quantitative survey data that some board members take very

seriously their personal board meeting preparation, while other board members spend less time on this, or focus on preparation for a board meeting using the different methods and activities outlines in the research.

Board members, as part of their board meeting preparation and ongoing development as a board member of a Christian school board, need to be continuously nurturing their own discernment skills (Fendall et al., 2007) and spiritual development (Barton, 2012b). The development as a board member and the individual meeting preparation by board members needs to be done in alignment with and drawing on the school's purpose; in accordance with the tree analogy, this needs to be rooted in the soil provided by the school's purpose, not just based on the individual person's own beliefs and ideas in isolation as to why the school exists.

6.4.2.3 The Trunk

The trunk of a tree provides strength and structure to the tree, providing the connection for transporting nutrients and water between the roots and the branches that become the canopy of the tree upon which the fruit grows (Huang, 2025). The "trunk" of the Tree of Discernment is the structure around two key aspects of the Christian faith that provide wisdom and knowledge to Christians, being the use of prayer and Scripture. Both prayer and Scripture emerged from the quantitative and qualitative research as central for a Christian school board's operation, and to enable the initial integration of the Christian faith into meetings including the hearing of God's direction and guidance. Prayer and Scripture reading also provide linkages between the individual lives of board members and each other, as well as between individual lives and the corporate life of a board meeting together.

Prayer is seen by Christians as a key way for them to communicate with God, both in speaking to God and listening to God in directing their ways and decisions (Willard, 2012). Prayer was a very common activity identified in the research as being utilised by individuals

and the board in various forms including, individually prior to a meeting, at the opening of board meetings, in the midst of meetings, and in the closing of meetings. Prayer was discussed in the literature and in the qualitative interviews as being times of silence, praying audibly individually and also praying together as a group for a range of specific purposes, praying for wisdom, praying for indifference, or praying in respect of a specific decision. Skoog et al. (2024), in their research, identified a correlation between prayer and fruitfulness, both for individuals and organisations, that make prayer a central part of their practices.

Reading the Scriptures by "dwelling in the Word" (Niemandt, 2019, p. 150) is relied upon by Christians as a main means of knowing God (Packer, 1973), listening to God to understand God's will for them (Willard, 2012), and in the provision of key principles for governance (Uwagaba, 2025). Scripture is seen by Christians as providing wisdom and knowledge that they can apply to the issues facing the board about which they need to make decisions. Therefore, for board discernment, "scripture needs to be an active part of our discernment process" (Fendall et al., 2007, p. 31), and not incorporating this into board processes is a problem.

At the top of the trunk of the Tree of Discernment, just prior to the commencement of the branches, is "consensus" as being the overall culture of the board, whereby board members remain open to the ideas of others in discussions and what the data is saying. It is important that board members come to meetings without locked-in preconceived decisions, and, in so doing, hear the views of others in humility, seeking to "perceive together" (Farnham et al., 1996, p. 32) the sense of the meeting (Burton et al., 2023; Morley, 2023) as to what God's will is for them to achieve together in unity (Anderson, 2006). Where a number of board members come to a meeting with their own fixed opinions on decisions, it is easy for discussions to descend into a debate and argument rather than taking time to listen well to others in what they are saying and even the meaning behind what they are saying

(Barton, 2012b); instead it becomes about point scoring and who can force through their ideas.

The culture of the board, and the way the board members interact, influences how and what decisions are made (Fryday-Field & Janzen Le Ber, 2024). Consensus per the data from the quantitative phase of the research was the most common method of the board reaching a decision (see Section 4.6.2). However, consensus is not just the collective wisdom of those at the meeting and reading the data, but it is "the collective discernment of God's will" (Morley, 2023, p. 1) in achieving a common goal together and is not based on compromising opinions in a win-lose paradigm, which is the usual process in most board decision making where it is power or politically based (Anderson, 2006).

6.4.2.4 The Branches

In a natural tree, the branches are made from the same material as the trunk, and they support the leaves and fruit that the tree will bear. The branches can be left to grow on their own, or they can be pruned and shaped to assist in keeping the tree strong and to remove diseased branches (Huang, 2025). Continuing to move up the Tree of Discernment, the "branches" of the tree represent the actions and activities that take place when board members come together in a board meeting, which are consistent with prayer, Scripture and creating a culture of consensus (the same material as the trunk). These actions and activities need to be constantly maintained and reviewed by the board, with systems and processes being strengthened and even pruned when they are no longer suitable or relevant for the board to preserve the strength and healthiness of the Tree of Discernment.

The research and literature identified three main branches for the Tree of Discernment that the board needs to work on in keeping a discerning approach to decision making by the board.

1. Fellowship

The importance of building relationships between board members by spending time together, through activities as simple as sharing a meal or more complex events such as a board retreat, was seen by respondents to the interviews. While such times may feel like lost time that could be used to do the business of the board, such fellowship times build trust and true relationships between board members, and as a result, they become more familiar with each other, understanding how they think, and learn to trust their judgement more. The ultimate outcome of building trust and relationships is the board's ability to make better decisions together as they learn to listen to one another more easily. The importance of informal relationships was highlighted by Bradley (2022) in his New Zealand school board research, which showed that the strengthening of relational space between board members impacts board cohesion, improving board performance, increasing the level of satisfaction by board members by being more united in their work, and also assists in improved board member retention. A theme that emerged from the qualitative research supported this as interviewees indicated that they, not only valued relationship building and time for fellowship in terms of enjoyment of the role, but also in caring for their fellow board members and providing a supportive spiritual environment.

The support of board members and the good fruit that comes from this, in terms of decisions, is built up over time with activities such as a meal together as part of each board meeting, time for chatting before and after the meeting. Boards who undertake regular retreats that include social time and activities, as well as team building time, benefit through "different perspectives, clearer thinking, focus and a team perspective" (Efrat, 2024); all of which assist improving the culture of the board, and in making discerning decisions together.

2. Practices

The second main branch in the Tree of Discernment is the Christian spiritual discernment practices implemented by the board that support the fruit that comes from making decisions as a group. Three key Christian spiritual discernment practices were identified through the research that a board should undertake to create an environment of discernment.

The first Christian spiritual discernment practice identified was prayer. The research and literature indicates that Christian school boards need to ensure that there is a significant time of prayer at the commencement, and conclusion, of the board meeting, and, additionally, in the midst of a meeting, especially in the process of making decisions. Praying in the midst of decisions during a meeting was statistically shown in this research as having the highest correlation of any factor of the board undertaking Christian spiritual discernment (See Section 4.8.2).

The second Christian spiritual discernment practice identified was the use of silence in waiting and listening to God in the middle of a board meeting and not just speaking and rushing through decisions.

The use of Scripture in the board meeting, often as part of the devotion time or a reflection at the commencement of a meeting provided by board members, was a very common practice used to ground the meeting and provide focus as well as guidance. Similarly, a number of boards identified that they also use Scripture throughout the meeting to assist in determining the principles of discussions, board operations and responding to the issues upon which they need to make decisions.

3. Processes

The third main branch for the Tree of Discernment relates to the processes implemented by the board to assist in its decision making. These processes can have a specific Christian spiritual discernment focus, while others have a more general board

focus to assist in smooth board operations, and are considered more broadly as governance best practice. These processes include elements such as:

- Discussing the overall approach to making decisions, seeking agreement from board members on the processes that will be utilised by the board, and the implementation of Christian spiritual discernment practices in board meetings. A Christian Spiritual Discernment Decision Framework (see Table 6.3) has been developed by the researcher, based on this study, for boards to use as a tool to assist them in determining a possible Christian spiritual discernment process and ensuring that the board has "shared behavioural norms and routines in discernment" (Burton et al., 2023, p. 695).
- The process of orienting new board members to the board as a means to accelerate their ability to make a contribution to board decision making. Ideally, the new board member orientation will include the aspects of: history of the school and its purpose, vision and values, information in respect of the current issues under consideration, the approach utilised in relation to decision making, and Christian spiritual discernment activities in particular, expectation of board members in relational and spiritual life as well as their relationships with other board members, and expectations of board members, in relation to their preparation for board meetings. This research has shown that both supporting the spiritual orientation of individuals and the board, as well as the guidance of meeting preparation for individual board members, appear to be gaps in Christian school board practice amongst the boards surveyed.
- Planning of meeting agendas, ensuring they are focused on what is important for the board to make decisions on, and that sufficient time is provided to discuss issues and implement Christian spiritual discernment practices as part of the

meeting. The process of planning the agenda is an important step to ensure the agenda does not become overcrowded with operationally related matters and the board remains focused on the governance needs and overall strategic direction of the school.

- Ensuring board papers are sent to board members, well in advance of the board meeting, providing them with sufficient time to enable proper preparation for the meeting by board members in considering the matters before the board, at both a practical and spiritual level. The provision of board members with adequate time and guidance on how to approach meeting preparation is critical to the discernment process so they can come to the board meeting prepared to contribute with "knowledge and perspective" (Anderson, 2006, p. 29).
- The overall processes used in making decisions during a board meeting need to be open, clear and consistent, so as to ensure that all board members have an opportunity for input in the discussion, allowing an open exchange of ideas (McCormick et al., 2006) in determining the sense of the meeting, as a group, in moving to an actionable decision and outcome by the Christian school board.

6.4.2.5 The Fruit

The fruit borne by a tree is reflective of the health and goodness of that tree; a bad tree cannot bear good fruit and, in the same way, a tree is known by the fruit it bears; an apple tree has apples, orange trees have oranges, and so on. Likewise, with the Tree of Discernment, where the "fruit" represents the output of the board in the form of the decisions it makes, whether they be large or small decisions, strategic or compliance-related, procedural or policy decisions, or a myriad of other decisions. The growth of good fruit on a tree requires all the different parts of the tree functioning and growing well together, as well as the tree being planted in rich soil for an extended period of time. So it is with decisions made by a board,

especially one that implements Christian spiritual discernment; the board needs to slow down, take its time and listen to each other and where God is leading them. “Decisions that are both understood and collectively owned have a far greater chance of being carried out with missional success than do quickly made decisions that are mandated by a dominant individual or group” (Anderson, 2006, p. 43). Legally and morally, a board is seeking to make the best decision it can in the interests of the organisation (Coffeng & Van Steenbergen, 2021). Therefore, a board slowing down their decision-making process to seek discernment on a matter, not only is beneficial in seeking God’s will and listening to each other, but it also improves the legal and compliance outcomes for the school has a whole.

Fruit on a tree contains within it the seeds for future trees, and so the analogy continues for the Tree of Discernment, where the fruit of decisions contains within it the basis for further decisions and actions of the board. Board decision making builds upon itself in the same way the literature on Christian spiritual discernment indicates that individuals become better at decision making through spiritual discernment the more they practice it and reflect on how to improve the processes, as the board becomes more familiar with utilising Christian spiritual discernment (Liebert, 2015).

6.4.2.6 The Ropes

The Tree of Discernment is supported and held in tension by the two “ropes” that are key pressures for Christian school boards as identified by the interviewees during the qualitative phase of the research being “Business” and “Ministry” (see Section 5.4.4.1). Both of these pressures exist within the life of a Christian school board, as the board needs to carry out its fiduciary and strategic responsibilities (business), in addition to ensuring it meets the generative and purpose (ministry) responsibilities (Chait et al., 2004) of the school. The elements of business and ministry must be held together in tension, otherwise the tree will grow lopsided if one is overused and the other is neglected to a greater degree. If there is too

much focus on business to the exclusion of ministry, the tree will start to “lean” that way with the board becoming very corporate, and the ministry work of the school is likely to suffer as a consequence. Similarly, if the board is too ministry-minded to the exclusion of business, the tree will lean that way, and the business aspect of the school will be put under strain or will be ignored to the overall detriment of the school and its ability to operate as a viable entity. If both “ropes”, business and ministry, are held in too tight a tension, the board will become overly risk-averse in not wanting to take either ministry or business risks to such an extent that the tree will be unable to grow and thrive, as it is too tightly constrained. As a result, both the board and the school as a whole can become “stunted”, either size-wise or impact-wise, potentially to a point where the school becomes unhealthy and its viability is under threat.

The ”Tree of Discernment” intentionally does not include two of the three statistical findings of the quantitative research, which indicated that there was a correlation between the number of enrolments in the school and the size of the Christian school board with the undertaking of Christian spiritual discernment. The statistical analysis demonstrated that the larger the size of a school, the more Christian spiritual discernment the board undertook; similarly, the larger the board, the more Christian spiritual discernment the board utilised in decision making. The statistics show that the level and quality of the fruit, or discerned decisions, produced by a larger board and a larger school will become more plentiful as the school and the board become larger. In the same way, a tree when it is younger and small does not provide the same volume of fruit as a tree that is larger, yet it will still bear fruit. “The age of an organisation should not be conflated with the maturity of its governance. ‘Young’ organisations can have mature governance and ‘old’ ones anything but.” (Clapham, 2024, p. 914). It is therefore possible for a young or small school to implement Christian spiritual discernment and yield fruit in the decision making, though it will be more difficult to

do so and will not yield as large a crop, as a larger or older school with greater resources is able to.

6.4.3 Linking the Tree of Discernment to the Research Questions

The Tree of Discernment provides a graphical representation of the distillation of the research findings emerging from the quantitative and qualitative phases, as well as based on the Literature Review, with each element of the Tree of Discernment linking to the research questions that form the basis for this research (see Table 6.2).

Table 6.2

Linkage of the Research Questions to Each Element of the Tree of Discernment

Research Question	"Tree" element	Activities/Labels
RQ1. What Christian spiritual discernment practices do individuals (board chair, board members and Principals) undertake in relation to the governance of Christian school boards in Australia and New Zealand?	Roots	Board Member • Meeting preparation
RQ2. What Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes do Christian school boards collectively undertake in relation to the governance of schools in Australia and New Zealand?	Trunk	• Prayer • Scripture • Culture of Consensus
	Branches	• Fellowship • Practices • Processes
RQ3: How do Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes influence decision making in the governance of Christian school boards?	Fruit	• Decisions
	Ropes	• Business • Ministry
RQ4: What makes a good Christian school board	Roots	Board Member • Skills and Experience • Character

6.4.4 Christian Spiritual Discernment Decision Framework

A Christian Spiritual Discernment Decision Framework (see Table 6.3) has been developed for the use of Christian school boards, and the facilitators of decision-making to those boards, as a guide to enable the pragmatic application of the findings of this research. The Christian Spiritual Discernment Framework provides detail for two of the branches described in the Tree of Discernment, being the two elements of the practices and the processes undertaken by the board, as they seek to implement Christian spiritual discernment. The steps for the Christian Spiritual Discernment Decision Framework are in three phases:

1. Prior to the board meeting: individual preparation for the meeting and the steps to be taken to assist with the board members undertaking Christian spiritual discernment.
2. During the board meeting: the group Christian spiritual discernment practices and process that should take place during the course of decision making in a meeting.

3. After the board meeting: what happens after a decision has been discerned and finalised.

The resources utilised in the development of the framework include the results of the quantitative survey phase, the results of the qualitative interview phase, and informed by the various approaches to spiritual discernment identified in the Literature Review for this research (Barton, 2012a, 2012b; Farnham et al., 1996; Fendall et al., 2007; Liebert, 2015; Morris & Olsen, 1997). The specific approaches integrated in the framework include those of the Ignatian tradition, which focuses more on individual spiritual discernment practices, and the Quaker tradition of collective or group discernment (Burton et al., 2023).

Table 6.3

Christian Spiritual Discernment Decision Framework

Step	**Element**
PRIOR TO MEETING	
1	Ensure all board members are familiar with the agreed Christian Spiritual Discernment Decision Framework for the board.
2	Ensure that in planning the meeting, sufficient time is set aside for the decisions to be made including the undertaking of Christian spiritual discernment practices.
3	Ensure all relevant reports, papers and data is provided to board members in advance of the meeting.
4	Ensure all board members are aware of the need for individuals in the group to be seeking discernment on specific matters before they come together.
5	Board members to undertake appropriate individual Christian spiritual discernment and board preparation prior to the meeting.
DURING THE MEETING	
6	Ensure a significant time of prayer and Scripture reading is undertaken at the commencement of the meeting and during discussions.
7	Remind board members of the need to be indifferent to the outcomes as they commence discussions on the issue.
8	Remind board members of the importance of listening carefully, individually and as a group, to God and others in the meeting.
9	Have the board chair/Principal/relevant person frame the issue/s, especially if they are large and complex.
10	Review and discuss the data and information that is helpful for the issue being examined.
11	Explore options as a board in forming a tentative decision as a consensus. Include the integration of prayer and Scripture in this process with input in discussions from all board members.
12	Seek confirmation from God about the decision with time(s) of prayer and silence.

Step	Element
13	Further discussions and subsequent rounds of silence and prayer as needed to reach a final "sense of the meeting".
14	Finalise the decision.
AFTER THE MEETING	
15	Put the decision into action.

The steps outlined in the Christian spiritual discernment Decision Framework (see Table 6.3) have been determined with the following reasoning and background for each step:

Step 1. Agreement by all board members with the Christian Spiritual Discernment Decision Framework

Board members may come from a range of different theological understandings and practices in how decisions are made in a group setting, and their views on Christian spiritual discernment and related practices. Therefore, it is important that even prior to a discernment matter being before the board requiring a decision, especially if it is a difficult or complex issue, that the board members reach agreement on how they will make decisions, what Christian spiritual discernment is, their utilisation of Christian spiritual discernment practices, and what actual practices will be used by the board. Barton (2012b) recommends that the board consider undertaking a number of practice discernment decisions, so it is able to get used to the idea of utilising Christian spiritual discernment practices in its decision making. The agreement as to the approach to be used in relation to Christian spiritual discernment needs to be revisited regularly, as board membership changes will continue to take place, and there needs to be confidence that all board members, whether they have been there for a long time or are relatively new, know, understand and agree to the Christian spiritual discernment processes being used in decision making.

Step 2. Ensure there is sufficient agenda time

An issue that was apparent throughout the quantitative and qualitative phases of the research was the pressure on time in the agenda, which leads to competition for meeting

attention in dealing with issues, including the inclusion of spiritual activities in the board meeting, and particularly the integration of faith in the making of decisions. The literature highlights the need to slow down group decision-making processes to allow time and space to ensure proper consideration of matters, allowing for specific Christian spiritual discernment-related activities, including detailed discussions, time to listen to God and each other in the meeting, prayer, Scripture reading, and the use of silence, such that the whole meeting is at a "reflective pace" (Farnham et al., 1996, p. 44). The quantitative phase results indicated that the average board meeting is two to three hours long, and only 38 or 39 hours, on average per annum, are spent in board meetings. Therefore, in the planning of a board meeting that is discussing a major or complex decision, there needs to be discipline in the framing of the agenda such that only the important issues are focused on and plenty of quality time is allowed for Christian spiritual discernment activities to be utilised in the making of decisions (Fendall et al., 2007). The issue of creating sufficient agenda space is further explored in the Biblical Agenda section of the Christian Spiritual Discernment Assessment Tool, as outlined in Section 6.4.5.3.

Step 3. Ensure board papers are distributed in advance of the meeting

A simple, practical matter for the team that puts together the board papers for each meeting is to ensure that the papers and reports are sent out in advance of the meeting in sufficient time for board members to read and consider the papers (Barton, 2012b) and to implement individual Christian spiritual discernment activities that enable them to discern the issues they need to pay attention to in the meeting, and also where God may be leading in relation to the will of God regarding the decisions they should be making. The focus on needing to ensure board papers were sent to board members well in advance of the meeting was a strong theme that emerged from the qualitative phase of the research, with many interviewees commenting on this being a priority.

If the board papers are not available sufficiently in advance of the meeting, especially if there is a large or complex issue that the board needs to make a decision upon, it is difficult for board members to spend adequate time considering the issue in advance of the meeting, or undertaking any individual Christian spiritual discernment activities in relation to the decision required. As a result, board members may not come to a meeting being fully across the issue and having already had a sense of the direction they should be taking as a board.

Step 4. Ensure all board members are aware of the need to individually seek discernment prior to the meeting

As part of sending out the papers in advance of the meeting, especially where there is a difficult decision to be made, the board chair should remind board members to take their time and seek to implement individual Christian spiritual discernment activities, such that when they come to the meeting they are already attuned to where God might be leading the board with the decision (Farnham et al., 1996) and therefore be able to participate more fully in the group Christian spiritual discernment activities than they would if they only started praying, reflecting on the issue and reading relevant Scripture while the meeting is actually taking place. Based on the data collected in the surveys and interviews, it is easy for board members to slip back to just cognitively reasoning their way through a problem rather than seeking God's guidance on the matter, and so a timely reminder, from the board chair for board members to use Christian spiritual discernment practices as the agreed way forward, per Step 1 of this Christian Spiritual Discernment Decision Framework, is useful. The importance of undertaking individual Christian spiritual discernment before the meeting and the nurturing by board members of their own discernment skills (Fendall et al., 2007) has an impact on group discernment and is further explored in the Christian Spiritual Discernment Integration section of the Christian Spiritual Discernment Assessment Tool as outlined in Section 6.4.5.4.

Step 5. Board members to individually undertake Christian spiritual discernment and other board meeting preparation

Following through on the reminder provided in Step 4 of the Christian Spiritual Discernment Decision Framework, to undertake individual Christian spiritual discernment and other preparations prior to the meeting, board members need to take action and actually individually prepare for the board meeting in reading the papers, praying about the issues they contain and seeking God's guidance on what the options are in making a decision, and what the best way forward is. As outlined in the Literature Review, Barton (2012b), Butts (2019) and Liebert (2015) all emphasised that individual members of the group need to undertake spiritual discernment activities in respect of the issues to be considered by the group before the board comes together, as being absolutely critical to discerning decisions together. Based on the data from the survey, it appears that board members do undertake some Christian spiritual discernment activities pertaining to matters to be discussed at the upcoming board meeting, such as prayer and consulting Scripture, though the time set aside for these activities appears to be reasonably limited in most cases when compared to other meeting preparation activities they undertake, such as reading the papers, thinking about the issues and talking to others about the issues on which to be decided. This suggests a potential disconnect between the theological emphasis on prior individual discernment and the practical realities of board preparation, with implications for the depth and quality of collective discernment undertaken during board meetings, whereby a lack of personal individual discernment preparation hampers their participation in group Christian spiritual discernment.

Step 6. Significant time of prayer and Scripture reading in the board meeting

Step 6 moves the Christian Spiritual Discernment Decision Framework from the preparations being made prior to a meeting, to the practices and processes undertaken during

the course of a board meeting. The primacy of prayer and Scripture, as a means for Christians to discern the will of God, is key to the decision-making process, with the literature review highlighting that this also continues through as part of a group discernment process. Specifically in relation to setting the meeting agenda in Step 2 of the Christian Spiritual Discernment Decision Framework, there should be significant time set aside during the board's deliberations, as well as part of the opening of the meeting, and the closing of the board's time together, for prayer and Scripture. The common convention in boards is for the process of discussions and decision making to be managed by the board chair, however, the Quaker tradition provides the concept of there being a clerk of the meeting, facilitator, moderator or discernmentarian to help manage the discernment process (Morris & Olsen, 1997), as they may be especially skilled in knowing when to utilise prayer and Scripture in the course of discussions on a decision, rather than it defaulting to the board chair. Similarly, there may be a board member, other than the board chair, who is better at using prayer and Scripture as part of the board meeting, and they actually facilitate the Christian spiritual discernment process instead of the board chair.

The importance of the significant use of prayer and Scripture in the board meeting has an impact on group discernment and is further explored in the Purpose Heart and Biblical Agenda of the Christian Spiritual Discernment Assessment Tool, as outlined in Sections 6.4.5.2 and 6.4.5.3, respectively.

Step 7. Board members to be indifferent to the outcomes as part of decision making

Steps 4 and 5 relate to individual board members undertaking discernment in preparation for the meeting on the issues to be decided upon and the seeking of God's will in those decisions. The literature contends that this is an important element for board members preparing to enter into the group discernment, but at the same time following the Ignatian principle of indifference, where group members come "no longer being bound to any single

option, outcome, point of view, theology, person, or strong impulse toward any single outcome" (Liebert, 2015, p. 49). The paradox is that it is important for board members, as they enter into group discernment, that they do not hold too tightly to their own opinions and even what they may have discerned individually, but instead subject that thinking to the group as a whole, as part of the group discernment process. A reminder from the board chair of the need for board members to have this posture of indifference as they enter discussions is helpful, and pausing as a group to pray the prayer of indifference (Barton, 2012b) as part of the board members committing themselves to set aside their own personal agendas and ideas.

Step 8. Board members to listen carefully to what God and others are saying

A key aspect of discernment throughout the literature is the art of listening carefully, both to God and others simultaneously (Fendall et al., 2007) as those present at the meeting share their perspectives on the matter being discussed. Many board members come to meetings with their own ideas and sometimes firmly or forcefully share these ideas with the others and often at the exclusion of listening to what other people might have to say, especially to the characters in the board who are quieter or are more reserved in coming forward with their ideas and thoughts (Barton, 2008). To assist in facilitating listening to each other better, guidelines may be put in place to help regulate the conversation and listening. For instance, in a Roman Catholic Synod meeting, guidance for spiritual conversations were put in place to assist with group discernment, including outlines for active listening and a process of multiple rounds of discussions, where each person shares in providing input on the issue without interruption, interspersed with times of silence and reflection leading to a point where there is a sense of where God is leading the group (Synod of Bishops, 2023), rather than the more traditional board means of discussion, debate and argument in reaching a decision.

Step 9. Frame the issues before discussion

Before launching into a discernment discussion, it is important to have the matter to be discussed appropriately framed, including elements such as a brief history of the issue, actions that have happened to date, the current status of the issue and clarify what the question is that the board needs to make a decision about (Barton, 2012a). This framing of the issue is even more critical when the matter to be considered is difficult, complex or painful, to ensure the issue remains clear to the board and to draw them into the search for truth together (Farnham et al., 1996). Only after the issue has been properly framed, a common platform in place, with all board members on the same page and with the same basic understanding of the issue being discussed, can the discernment process continue.

Step 10. Review and discuss data related to the decision

Christian spiritual discernment is not just about praying and listening to God and other people, but also involves the inclusion of considering data, facts and using cognitive reasoning as part of reaching decisions (Barbee, 2019). A foundation in considering the data provided as part of a discernment process, is to notice pertinent information for the situation without judging, at least at first (Barton, 2012b). The art of sharing this information as a group and listening to what other people notice can feel foreign at first, but it is a powerful tool in discussing fact-based information, whether it be internally sourced or externally sourced, as the group seeks to discover where God may already be at work in a situation. As the data continues to be considered, the different skills and experience of individual board members can be drawn on further to assist the other board members to gain greater insight into the information provided and perhaps start making judgements on what that information is saying so as to inform a decision.

Step 11. Explore options in forming a consensus decision

At this point in a Christian spiritual discernment journey, potential ways forward on a decision begin to become apparent, as the board begins to explore what the various options are that may end up being the final decision. However, the board must resist the temptation of rushing to a decision and explore all the possible options it has, and then start to narrow this down to a smaller number of viable potential options (Morris & Olsen, 1997). Throughout this step of the decision process, the board should evaluate the various options against the stories and principles arising from Scripture to ensure the option being considered aligns with the core beliefs and values of the school. As part of reflecting on the potential options, there also needs to be scope for time to be spent in prayer, seeking wisdom and God's guidance, either silently or as a group audibly, in sifting through the options available.

The Ignatian expressions of consolation (bringing life or energy with a sense of alignment with what God would have the group do) or desolation (dis-ease or turmoil or a lack of a sense of alignment with God) can be utilised by board members as they weigh up the options before them, especially in situations where they are having difficulty in articulating exactly how they feel about a suggested option whether they be in favour of it or against the proposed option.

As the quantitative survey revealed, the majority of Christian school boards already come to a decision via consensus or general agreement (see Section 4.6.2), therefore, the use of Christian spiritual discernment in reaching a consensus decision fits well with the prevailing culture of Christian school boards.

Step 12. Seek confirmation from God about the proposed decision

The Board is now to a point where it has a proposed decision, or perhaps in more complex matters, a series of proposed decisions, that it has come to via a Christian spiritual discernment process and an agreed position or consensus. At this point of the process, it is

important for the board to pause and seek confirmation from God on the proposed way forward. This is predominantly done through silence, prayer and reflection.

Barton (2012b), as part of confirming a final decision, advocates the idea of the group taking time apart, so each person can sit in silence, reflect and pray about the proposed decision before coming back together again to discuss and listen as a group, so as to determine if there is a sense of peace about the decision as the board moves towards a final sense of the meeting.

Step 13. Further discussion in reaching a final "sense of the meeting"

This is the last step in discerning the decision to be made by the board, as they seek a sense of peace about the decision to be made. This step involves further discussion and prayer as a group, both of which are particularly vital in very significant decisions, where a final check-in with board members as to how they feel about the decision is important. Such a check-in is also key where there is a lack of unity or uncertainty about the decision; every avenue needs to be explored and discussed fully before a final decision is made. The Quaker expression of finding "the sense of the meeting" allows for some dissent on the decision and does not require complete unanimity but instead seeks unity in the decision where the concerns of even one or two people are worked through completely. At the end of this process, even if they do not change their mind to be in favour of the decision, they are clear to allow the group to proceed in its proposed direction by "standing aside" (Fendall et al., 2007, p. 114).

Step 14. Finalise the decision

The final decision may be made as a formal vote, where board members who are eligible to do so vote in favour or against the proposed resolution, or it may be more of a consensus decision or by some form of general agreement, where the board members provide consent on the way forward.

As part of the formal element of the decision, there needs to be the recording of the decision in the minutes of the board meeting. Schools in Australia and New Zealand are receive significant government funding that requires them to be incorporated entities so as to sign the necessary contracts and agreements with the government in order for them to receive that funding. Being incorporated entities means they are bound by the requirements of corporate law, which includes the taking of minutes of board meetings so as to provide an official record of the decisions of the board. Best practice board minutes must capture the essence of the discussion, the reasoning behind a decision and also the decisions made (Australian Institute of Company Directors, 2025). Therefore, the finalisation of the decision as per the minutes needs to capture more than just the final decision itself, but the process that led to that decision, including the pertinent steps undertaken by the board, the data and information considered in coming to the decision, and a brief outline of how other options were examined. The purpose of the minutes is for those present at the meeting to ensure there is appropriate capturing of the processes undertaken, but also as a record for board members who were not present and also for others outside the meeting who need to understand, implement or may wish to review the decisions made by the board.

Step 15. Put the decision into action

Once a decision has been made by the board, it then needs to be enacted by the relevant parties. There may be actions arising from the decision that require attention by the board chair, or a board member, or a series of board members, or by the Principal, or other members of the management team. In the making of the final decision, it must be clear as to what actions need to be taken, by whom and when; until actions are taken, the decisions that have been carefully discerned remain as ideas and thoughts only.

6.4.5 Christian Spiritual Discernment Assessment Tool

The Literature Review in Chapter 2 of this study concluded that there has been little research on school governance (Austen et al., 2012; Bambach, 2020; Codrington, 2015; Krishnan et al., 2016) and no scholarly research in respect of Christian school governance and the integration of faith into the decision making of Christian school boards. The literature in relation to Christian school governance is either opinion and experience-based, or does not include the use of spiritual practices in the making of decisions (Coley, 2015; Contant & Noot, 2021; Lowrie, 2004). There have been many years of research into not-for-profit governance more generally and the construction of models developed in seeking to assess and improve the governance of not-for-profit organisations (Carver, 2006; Chait et al., 2004; Laughlin & Andringa, 2007). There has also been research into the effective governance of Christian not-for-profits (Hotchkiss, 2016; Stob, 2015). The only research that is similar to this research in dealing with the subject of the integration of faith into the decision making of Christian boards, has been in relation to US Christian higher education providers (Barbee, 2019), a single social services provider in the United States of America (Uwagaba, 2025) and a broad study of spiritual formation in the boards of Christian organisations (Schoonover, 2013). The researcher has been unable to identify from this review of research and publications, the development of any practical models to assist boards in their assessment of how they are integrating the faith basis of their organisation in the practical work of making decisions in board meetings. Utilising the themes and findings from this research a Christian Spiritual Discernment Assessment Tool has been developed for practical application in a Christian school board.

The Christian Spiritual Discernment Assessment Tool (see Figures 6.2, 6.3, 6.4 and 6.5) consists of four diagrams, all of which have four common quadrants to describe four different types of Christian school boards that eventuate when a board remains in a particular

mode of decision making for an extended period of time, in relation to Christian spiritual discernment activity implementation and other key Christian spiritual discernment-related factors identified in the research:

Quadrant 1: The Chaotic Board

A board that is inconsistent, unclear, contradictory in its direction setting, is reactive in nature and can have unreasonable expectations (Haerens et al., 2022). The board often lacks clarity in its own purpose as a board (Kramer, 2007). Board meetings are potentially unsafe for management, generally ineffective and can be destructive in their leadership of the school. It is difficult in a chaotic board to be consistent and practice Christian spiritual discernment as a group in listening to each other and God in the making of decisions.

Quadrant 2: The Corporate Board

A board that is focused only on the business and finance of the organisation; the board members are very compliance and legislatively focused to the point of the exclusion of the overall purpose, vision and mission of the school from decision making. Board meetings are efficient and the documentation utilised is of a high professional standard, but the board may lose the heart of the ministry (Stob, 2011). It is difficult to practice Christian spiritual discernment in a corporate board, where the agenda is already crowded with business work and people are reliant on their own experience, wisdom and insight rather than others, or God's, in the making of decisions. A number of the key practices of Christian spiritual discernment, such as silence, prayer and Bible reading, are often absent from a corporate board meeting and individuals generally do not attend to their own spiritual formation, prayer and scripture reading (Barton, 2012b).

Quadrant 3: The Frustrated Board

A board which is made up of well-meaning Christians who find that they are unable to perform the ministry work that they have the heart for, as they lack direction and

purposefulness in terms of the spiritual aspects as a group, even where they have personal spiritual practices. The frustrated board often finds it difficult to make clear decisions as a group. These boards spend considerable time meeting and talking, but do not really govern and lead the school forward in a focused manner; the board lacks focus on issues that it should be focused on (Kramer, 2007). The frustrated board often loses higher capacity board members or finds it difficult to attract new board members due the board's lack of clear purpose and direction, plus unity in making decisions. Frustrated boards are seen in Tables 4.13 and 4.14 of the quantitative phase, where those boards often experience significant board member vacancy rates.

Quadrant 4: The Discerning Board

A board that is characterised by its clear use of Christian spiritual discernment prior to and during meetings to good effect in listening and making its decisions; the board intentionally seeks God's will in making its decisions. Board meetings are a more energised, productive, strategic, consistent, positive, caring environment where each person participates and shares their input while listening to others with humility (Farnham et al., 1996). Discerning boards understand their own and the organisation's purpose well, have a clear process around decision making and the use of Christian spiritual discernment practices in preparation for and during the meeting, as well as managing the tension between ministry and business without losing sight of both as they seek to govern the school in fulfilling its purpose.

The four different Christian Spiritual Discernment Assessment diagrams are described in detail in each of the following four sub-sections.

6.4.5.1 Ministry Style

The ministry style of the board framework is set out in Figure 6.2.

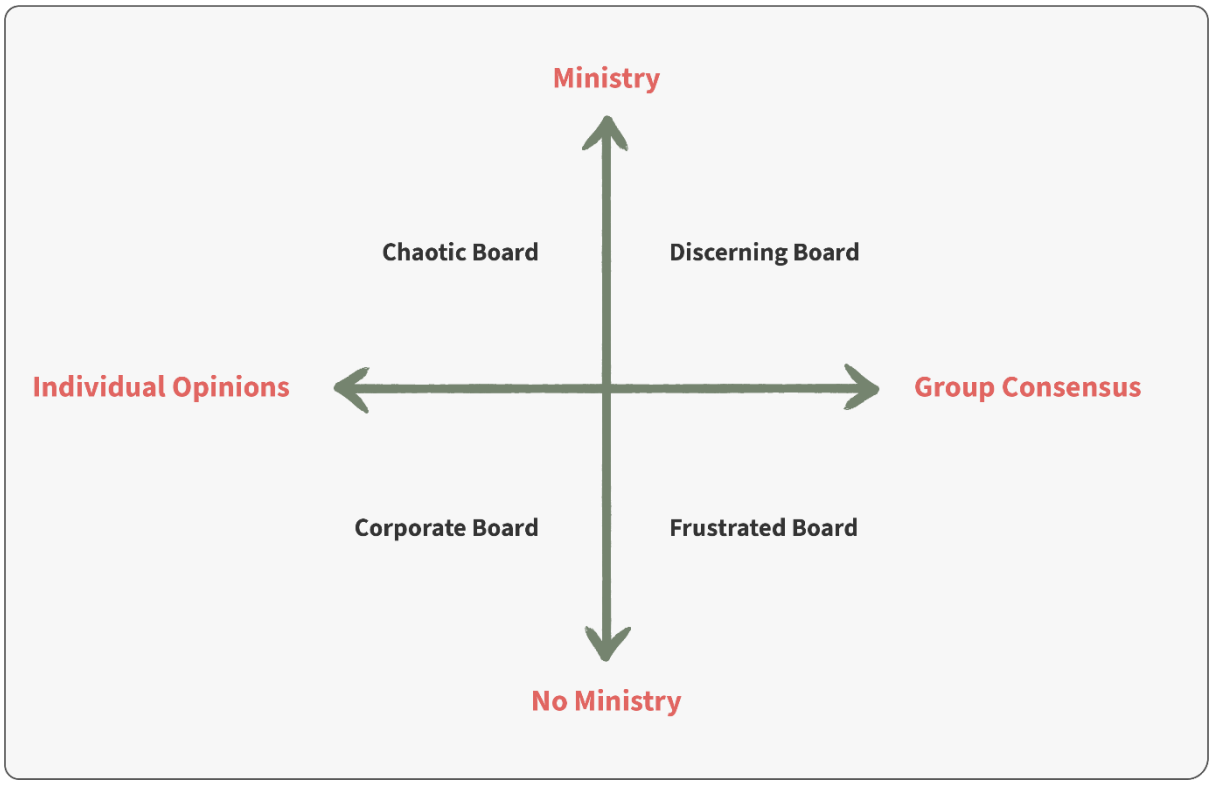
The x and y axes provide sets of descriptors on a continuum. The x-axis indicates the way in which the board approaches the making of decisions, from an individualistic opinion-based approach, through to group consensus. The y-axis provides a continuum in the way board members think about the organisation in a range from ministry to no ministry, whereby the outcomes and what they deem as success is focused on ministry impact (e.g. education, faith formation) on their beneficiaries, or not in terms of ministry but instead, only financial resources and the business operations of the school.

Utilising this figure, we can therefore describe boards as follows:

1. A board that is focused on ministry outcomes and where board members come with their own opinions and believe they are correct, will be a chaotic board, as the board members seek to have their own ministry beliefs implemented that may be in conflict with those of others.
2. A board that is not focused on ministry outcomes and where board members come with their own opinions will be a corporate board, as they seek to run the school as a business with their own ideas.
3. A board that is not focused on ministry outcomes but makes decisions by group consensus will be a frustrated board. The board members volunteered to be on the board to carry out the school's purpose, but as a group, they do not make clear decisions that focus on its implementation.
4. A board that is focused on ministry but at the same time makes decisions by group consensus in listening to God and each other in the formulation of those decisions will be a discerning board.

Figure 6.2

Ministry Style



6.4.5.2 Purpose Heart

The purpose heart of the board framework is set out in Figure 6.3.

The x and y axes provide sets of descriptors on a continuum. The x-axis indicates the way in which the board approaches the making of decisions, from a compliance-based approach through to purpose. The y-axis provides a continuum in the way board members approach decisions, with prayerfulness through to no prayer being involved in the decision-making process.

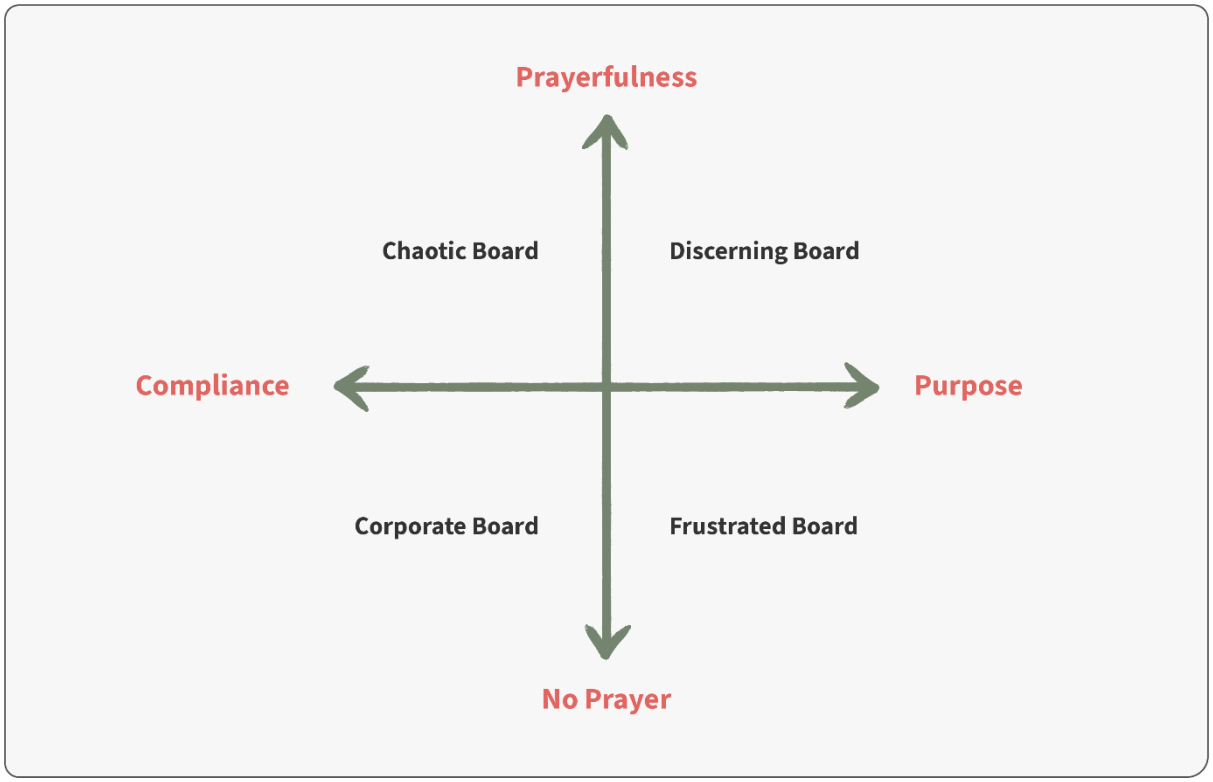
Utilising this figure, we can therefore describe boards as follows:

1. A board that is prayerful and where board members come with a compliance mindset, will be a chaotic board, as the board switches backwards and forwards between prayer and hard-nosed, rules-based compliance thinking.

2. A board that is focused on compliance and where board members do not undertake prayer, will be a corporate board. The board meetings will just be about business issues, and there is unlikely to be any real Christian mission or focus.
3. A board that does not pray but seeks to fulfill the school's purpose will be a frustrated board, as they seek to make decisions with a Christian heart but not in seeking what the decisions should be. The board will be clear on the overall why of the school, but they will lack direction as they are not seeking guidance in fulfilling the school's purpose.
4. A board that comes with a clear purpose and makes decisions through prayer, as they listen to God and each other in the formulation of those decisions, will be a discerning board.

Figure 6.3

Purpose Heart



6.4.5.3 Biblical Agenda

The biblical agenda of the board framework is set out in Figure 6.4.

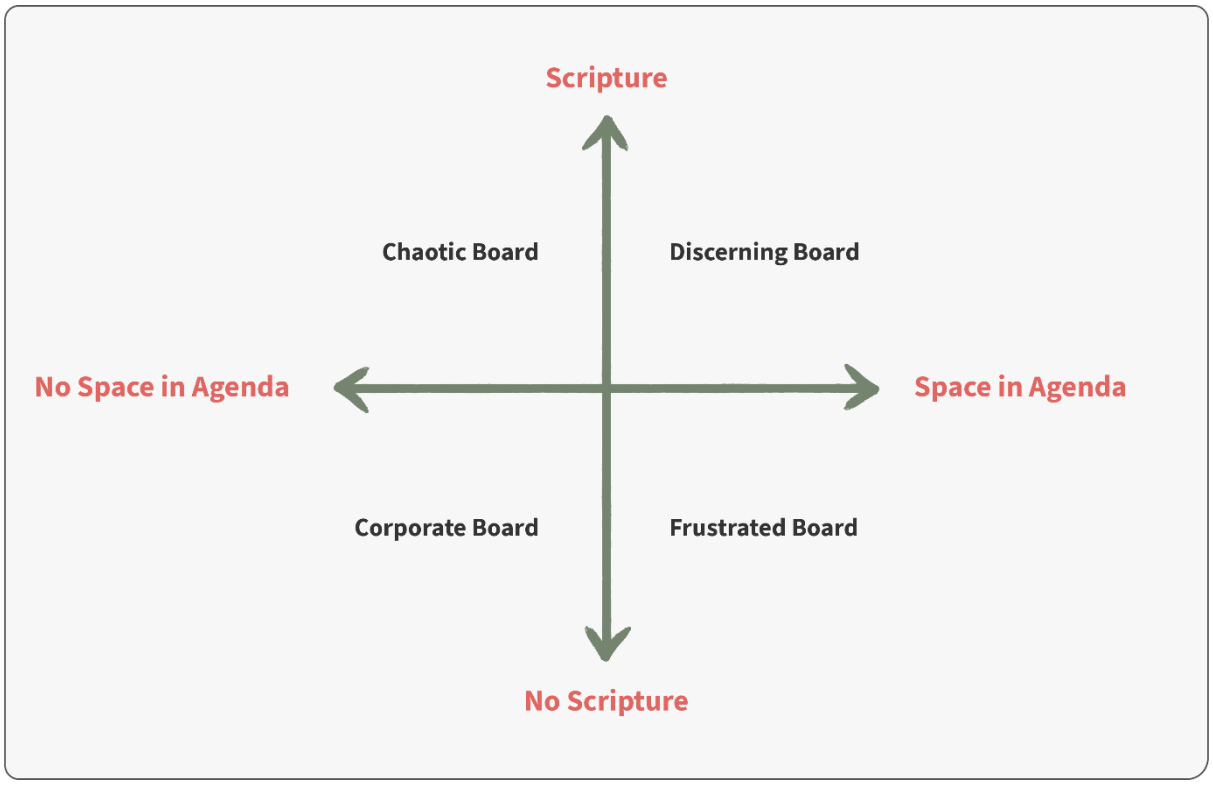
The x and y axes provide sets of descriptors on a continuum. The x-axis indicates how the actual board meeting agenda is constructed, from being packed with lots of items through to an agenda that has time to slow down and space for board members to reflect on issues before the board. The y-axis provides a continuum in the way the board includes the reading and use of Scriptures within meetings and in making decisions, ranging from scripture being used, to not being involved in meetings at all.

Utilising this figure, we can therefore describe boards as follows:

1. A board that utilises Scripture and where there is no space in the agenda will be a chaotic board, as they seek to utilise Scripture by jamming it into the meeting, but not really having time to reflect on it or utilise what it says properly in the making of decisions.
2. A board that does not have space on the agenda and where board members do not utilise Scripture will be a corporate board. The board meeting will just be about business issues and not distinctly Christian.
3. A board that does not utilise Scripture but has space in the agenda will be a frustrated board, as they have space to insert Scripture into their meeting but do not do so. The board will not be clear on their biblical decision-making framework and will waste meeting time on other things, which are unlikely to help them focus as a group.
4. A board that utilises Scripture in its meetings and has space on the agenda to properly reflect on it, what it means for the school, and the decisions before the board will be a discerning board.

Figure 6.4

Biblical Agenda



6.4.5.4 Christian Spiritual Discernment Integration

The Christian spiritual discernment integration of the board framework is set out in Figure 6.5.

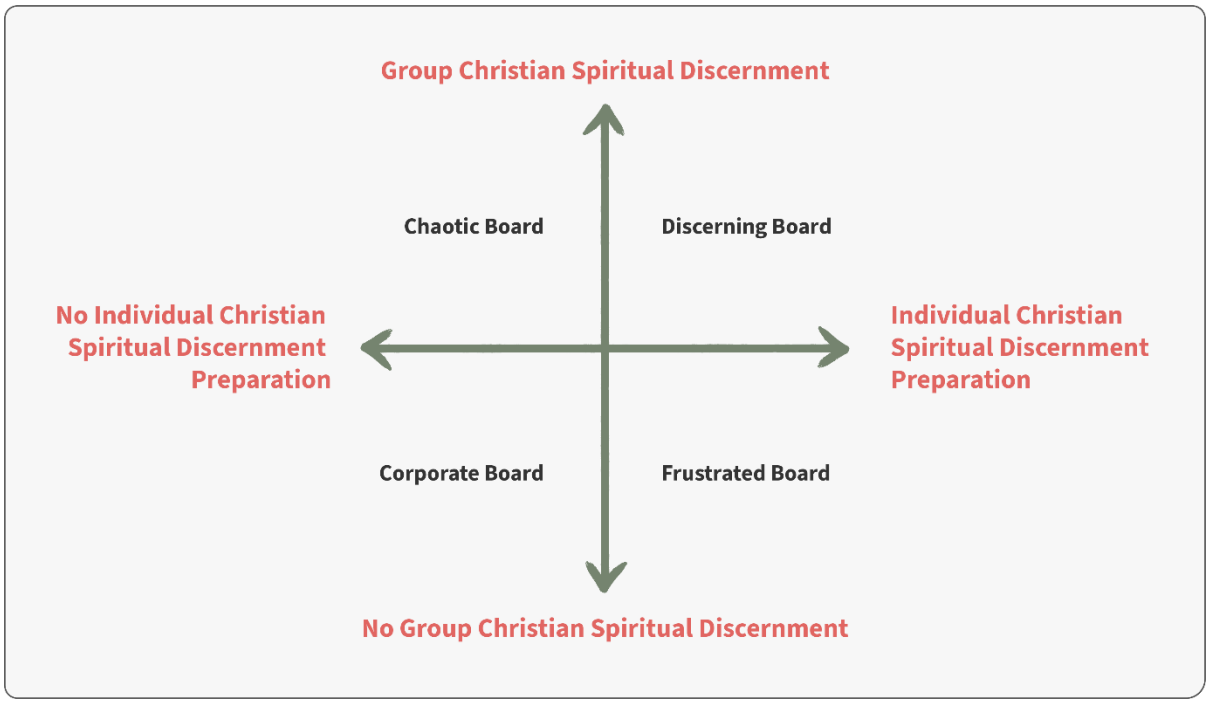
The x and y axes provide sets of descriptors on a continuum. The x-axis indicates the way in which and individual prepares for a board meeting from not undertaking any individual Christian spiritual discernment practices (such as prayer, Scripture reading, spending time listening for God's leading on issues) through to utilising Christian spiritual discernment practices in their preparation for the board meeting. The y-axis provides a continuum in the way board members as a group approach decisions from utilising Christian spiritual discernment practices in the board meeting through to not utilising group Christian spiritual discernment practices in the decision-making process.

Utilising this figure, we can therefore describe boards as follows:

1. A board that utilises Christian spiritual discernment practices in the group setting but do not do so in their individual preparation for meetings will be a chaotic board. The board attempts to utilise Christian spiritual discernment practices but does not have a foundation of personal Christian spiritual discernment practices, such as listening and being familiar with Scripture as a core element that provides principles on which to make decisions (Farnham et al., 1996).
2. A board where individual members do not prepare for board meetings utilising Christian spiritual discernment and the group does not practice Christian spiritual discernment activities in the making of decisions, will be a corporate board. The board meetings will just be about business issues, and there is unlikely to be any real Christian ministry mission or focus.
3. A board that does undertake Christian spiritual discernment practices as a group, but where board members come having prepared for a meeting utilising Christian spiritual discernment, will be a frustrated board, as they seek to make decisions with a Christian heart from an individual perspective, but the actual decision-making process will not include any group discernment or sense of agreed mission or Christian heart.
4. A board that comes where the individuals have undertaken Christian spiritual discernment activities in preparing for the meeting, and also utilises Christian spiritual discernment in decision making as a group through activities, such as reading Scripture and prayer as they listen to God and each other in the formulation of those decisions, will be a discerning board.

Figure 6.5

Christian Spiritual Discernment Integration



The aim of the four Christian spiritual discernment assessment diagrams developed by the researcher is to see Christian school boards move "up and to the right" in becoming a discerning board in the making of important decisions, rather than being characterised as one of the other three types of boards. Assisting a board to become a discerning board is achieved by implementing a series of activities and attitudes, as reflected in the upper and right-hand side axes of each diagram. In addition to undertaking Christian spiritual discernment activities, the board also ensures a Christian spiritual discernment alignment in key elements such as board papers and agendas, the actual conduct and format of board meetings, as well as changes to board policies and processes.

6.5 Challenges and Opportunities

There are two key groups who seek to ensure that there is effective governance by Christian school boards and that boards remain focused on good decisions and quality outcomes: the Christian school boards themselves, and the associations with which the

schools are affiliated. These associations provide governance training to their member schools (Associated Christian Schools, 2025c; Christian Education National, 2025b; Christian Schools Australia, 2025a; New Zealand Association for Christian Schools, 2025b), though at this time all the training being offered appears to focus almost exclusively on the compliance and legal sides of board governance. The research indicates that the schools and their associations have a number of challenges and opportunities in seeking to improve the governance of a Christian school generally and specifically, as it relates to decision making that aligns with the Christian faith of the school through the implementation of Christian spiritual discernment.

6.5.1 School Board Challenges and Opportunities

School boards are responsible for their own ongoing operation, processes and culture. These domains provide both challenges for boards as they seek to address those areas and opportunities for growth, as a board and as individual members of that board.

The research identified that the implementation of Christian spiritual discernment activities, such as prayer, will change in its utilisation over time as the membership and composition of the board changes. Interview participants identified that the turnover of board members leads to “ebbs and flows” (Respondents 5 and 6) in the prayerfulness of the board and along with this the spiritual nature of the board. The challenge to maintain prayer and Christian spiritual discernment more broadly, as part of a strong and consistent culture in the board and its decision making is an issue to be addressed by the board to ensure there is a good transmission of culture as the board composition changes over time. Transmission of board culture involves:

1. The selection of new board members where their personal values, qualifications and expertise align with the organisation’s mission (Fisman et al., 2009; Sundean et al., 2021), as opposed to just relying on formal systems such as a skills matrix, which

may result in purpose and values misalignments from new board members (Maharaj, 2009).

2. The induction of new board members as to their major responsibilities, which is not just factually based but also specifically includes the culture and ethos around the board (Lowrie, 2004).
3. A provision of a brief history of the school (Simpson, 2025).
4. A briefing on the current issues before the board (Institute of Community Directors Australia, 2025).
5. The assignment of a "board buddy" to assist new board members settle into their role, help them with their first few meetings, and to help them in their understanding of the school, the board and also the mission of the school (Simpson, 2025).
6. Orientation of new board members in respect of the "patterns of beliefs, traditions and practices that prevail when the board convenes to perform its duties" (Prybil et al., 2012, p. 37).

Therefore, the selection, induction and orientation of new board members, in relation to the practices and processes of the board, represents an important element of the board's ongoing work and development in terms of the business of the board, the culture of the board and its decision-making practices. The processes around how a decision is made, and having a board culture that welcomes differing viewpoints and encourages diversity, can have a significant impact on what decisions are made (Fisman et al., 2009; Leggett et al., 2016). To retain a focus on Christian spiritual discernment as the means of making decisions, the board needs to be intentional about embedding this in the culture of the board and ensuring that this is transmitted to new board members if they do not already have a solid understanding in this space that aligns with the practice of the school board.

Another challenge for boards that emerged from the research was the diversity in preparation by individual board members prior to a board meeting. A number of research participants outlined the very detailed preparations they undertake for each board meeting, generally and also for specific decisions to be made at a Board Meeting, including their use of individual Christian spiritual discernment activities. Many board members, however, appeared to take a very corporate view on the business of the board and did not look upon board decisions with a spiritual lens or that they should be seeing God's will in the making of decisions. Some other board members seemed to undertake very limited or no real preparation for meetings with little more than a cursory look at the board papers prior to a meeting. This varied preparation for meetings by board members provides challenges within the context of decisions at a meeting both from a practical and spiritual standpoint. The board members have varied levels of depth of thinking or understanding on an issue, so come to the meeting with significantly different levels of insight on a matter or ability to participate in discussions. Due to the varied preparation for meetings, board members also come to a decision sometimes with a biblical basis behind their reasoning and a depth of prayer and reflection, while other board members do not have that time behind them and, as a result, they tend to just express their "off-the-cuff" opinion rather than showing any deep consideration.

Research participants indicated that they received little to no guidance on how to prepare for a board meeting, and there was no real discussion or consensus by the board on the expectations of individual board members of their preparation for board meetings. There is an opportunity for Christian school boards to provide training and guidance to their board members as to their individual preparation for meetings, both practically and spiritually, and what are the board's expectations of them as a board member. There is also an opportunity for discussion and agreement within the board as a group in respect of the implementation of

group Christian spiritual discernment activities during board meetings to assist them in the making of decisions.

Board members serve in their role in a volunteer capacity with little recognition and no remuneration for the significant responsibilities they carry. As volunteers, they have lives outside of the school board in paid work, family responsibilities and other interests, therefore the time they can dedicate to school board business and board meetings is limited. The quantitative phase of the research indicated that, on average, the annual accumulation of all board meetings held equates to a normal 38 hour working week. This relatively limited time given the scale and span of many schools creates crowded board meeting agendas and provides a significant challenge for boards to address all the normal business and compliance issues of the board, respond to critical issues before the school, develop policy and strategic plans for the schools, undertake the training required for their role, and at the same time allow sufficient time to practice Christian spiritual discernment activities in the form of reading Scripture, undertaking significant prayer, spending time in reflection and friendship (Heie & Sargent, 2012) to ensure both the business and ministry purposes of the school are being fulfilled.

In summary, the ongoing challenge for school boards is to ensure that they "invest in current trustees [board members], provide a thorough board orientation, train them about governing boards' roles and expectations, and equip them with the tools needed" (Twardowska-Case, 2021, p. 137), simultaneously ensuring the board remains focused on its own and the organisation's purpose, as well as ensuring that Christian spiritual discernment practices are embedded in the decision making and culture (Fisman et al., 2009) of the board and its individual members.

6.5.2 School Association Challenges and Opportunities

The research examined schools that are affiliated with five different school associations. Four of these associations are school membership associations (ACS, CEN, CSA and NZACS) to whom schools apply for membership and agree to confirm their agreement with a common statement of faith and a number of other key philosophies and policies for each organisation, including such elements as policies in respect of the employment of staff. In joining these associations, however, the member schools and boards remain independent and are not under the control or direction of the association to which they belong or any other governing body. The fifth organisation of Christian schools participating in the research, Adventist Schools Australia, describes itself as a "learning community" (Adventist Schools Australia, 2025) of schools and early learning services. It is an organisation of schools with a single vision and mission, with state-based boards that direct their local schools. The member schools of ACS, CEN, CSA and NZACS each have their own independent corporate, governance and leadership structures such that the associations they are members of do not have any legal power to direct the board, or school more generally, in the manner in which they operate or the policies and processes that they have in place. As a result, school associations of Christian schools can only seek to educate their member school boards and board members as to what they believe represents good governance practice, and can only influence the manner in which the boards conduct their schools; they cannot direct them. This structure represents a challenge for Christian school associations as they seek to have their member schools practice good governance, but they cannot make them implement any specific policies and processes, including the integration of spiritual practices in their decision making, instead they can only influence them.

A key role undertaken by the associations of Christian schools, as indicated by their own websites (ACS, CEN, CSA and NZACS), is the education of school boards in their

governance roles and responsibilities through board training, and the provision of resources and assessment tools to the boards of their member schools (Associated Christian Schools, 2025c; Christian Education National, 2025b; Christian Schools Australia, 2025a; New Zealand Association for Christian Schools, 2025b). All of the resources and courses publicly available by the different associations on their websites appear to focus solely on the technical, corporate, legal and compliance aspects of boards and do not address any distinctly Christian decision-making processes for Christian school boards, nor did any of the research participants mention any courses made available by their associations in relation to the integration of faith in their board decision making. The courses, resources, and other materials made available to Christian schools do not appear to address the integration of faith in board processes as a specific topic. It is understood, however, that one of the associations, CSA, offers a Missional Governance course, though it is located in a members-only section of their website (Christian Schools Australia, 2025a). It is likely that the associations effectively assume that the area of faith integration into the governance of their member schools takes place as a matter of course, or following on from the lack of formal research into Christian school board governance, this aspect of Christian school operations has not been considered as an area requiring examination and work. There is an opportunity available for Christian school associations to address this gap with the provision of additional resources, training and education of their member school boards that address faith integration, governance issues, and decision making from a distinctly Christian viewpoint. The closing of such a gap would be of great benefit to Christian school boards in including faith more intentionally in their education and development plans for the assessment and training programs of boards (Barbee, 2019).

6.6 Limitations of Study

This study is the first of its kind in assessing Christian spiritual discernment board practices within K-12 Christian schools, although it only represents the perceptions of individuals in a range of roles (board chair, board member and Principal) in Christian schools in Australia and New Zealand. Therefore, the responses collected in the research may be biased by the individuals own personal experience of Christian spiritual discernment, their knowledge of Christian spiritual discernment, their position within the school and their own board decision-making experiences (Zhu et al., 2016) and the current issues and processes of their school board now, as opposed to the longer term history of the board. Additionally, responses may be shaped by respondents' own, as well as their schools, denominational and theological traditions (Mellon & Kroth, 2013) in relation to decision-making processes and Christian spiritual discernment-related activities covered by the research. The pool of schools researched were selected on the basis of their school's association affiliations and not based on their denominational or theological affiliations, apart from the schools that form part of Adventist Schools Australia, whose governance and leadership are a ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and therefore have a common doctrinal platform. The non-Adventist schools in the study represent a very broad cross-section of denominational and theological backgrounds and are a non-homogenous group including Baptists, Pentecostals, Presbyterians, Brethren, Reformed and independent Christian schools with no specific theological background, all of whom are likely to have varied approaches to, and views on, Christian spiritual discernment. The research did not seek to discover the research participants' individual theological position or experience of Christian spiritual discernment or that of their school. No details were gathered as to how the theological understandings of different individuals, schools or churches may impact the Christian school board's approach to Christian spiritual discernment. The participation in the quantitative survey and qualitative

interviews was voluntary and is likely to have been more attractive to people who are interested in Christian spiritual discernment as a topic.

This study only examined K-12 Christian schools, and while many of the findings from this research may apply to other Christian ministries and not-for-profit organisations, the exact nature of schools being in a regulated environment, involving the care and education of children, may lead to a particular view, approach and implementation of Christian spiritual discernment. Other types of Christian organisations may face different regulations or no industry-specific ones at all, along with differing mission goals than those of a school, which may in turn have an impact in board decision making and on the nature and role of Christian spiritual discernment in those different types of Christian organisations. The unique regulatory and circumstances of each organisation may impact on the operations and decision-making processes of the board, so the findings of this study may have limitations to application.

This research did not examine the nature of specific decisions being reached or the details of how decisions were approached by individual people; rather, it remained as an overall examination of Christian spiritual discernment in Christian school board decision making. No distinctions were drawn between major versus minor decisions, or those decisions that may be more contentious and troublesome for boards to determine than others. The research was on the board's overall approach and implementation of Christian spiritual discernment in their decision making rather than in their addressing of specific types of decisions.

Central themes that emerged from the research as being key Christian spiritual discernment group activities undertaken by Christian school boards included prayer, Scripture reading and devotions. The research only gathered data in relation to the amount of time spent under the broad headings of these activities and did not examine the specific

nature, quality or content of these Christian spiritual discernment activities. Similarly, in researching the general individual spiritual activities of board members and their preparation for board meetings, the time that they spend on these activities was used as the measure, and the activities were not independently analysed. Qualitative analysis was only in respect of the information and descriptions of their processes provided by the interviewees in their interviews.

The research only briefly examined the concept of what makes a good Christian school board beyond the utilisation of Christian spiritual discernment in the decision-making process. The results of this research indicated that while there are desired characteristics that would be common to all not-for-profit boards, such as a diversity of skills amongst the board, a range of experience among board members, and a clarity of purpose for the organisation, there were also those characteristics that could potentially be unique ones for boards of a Christian ministry. For instance, the nature of the character of individual board members. The research concluded that having board members who exhibit "the fruits of the Spirit", as identified in the Bible as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23) and govern in humility, are key to being a good Christian school board.

6.7 Suggestions for Future Study

As highlighted in the Literature Review, there has been little research on Christian school governance world-wide and very little research about independent school governance in Australia and New Zealand, with even less research into Christian school boards. Most of the research to date on school governance has been in respect of the basic characteristics of a school board and the documentation it has, rather than the behavioural aspects of school board governance, including such areas as the integration of faith in the decision-making process and the impact this has on decision making. As a first of its kind of research on K-12

Christian school boards in Australia and New Zealand, there is a significant opportunity to further examine a number of facets of the use of Christian spiritual discernment and the decision-making processes used in Christian boards of all types.

As this study did not research or differentiate on differing theological or denominational bases for different schools, there is potential for further study that examines in more detail the patterns or styles of Christian spiritual discernment used by different church or denominational groupings, or their different beliefs and experiences about spiritual discernment and how those processes or beliefs inform their implementation of Christian spiritual discernment, as well as the school's broader policies and operations.

The research was focused on a narrow field of Christian organisations, being only Christian schools. Based on the researcher's discussions and interactions, while conducting this study with the governors and leaders of other types of Christian organisations (particularly among those that are not a church, but instead are a para-church organisation, such as aged care organisations, welfare organisations, Christian media organisations and Christian associations), there is scope for studies of other types of Christian organisations to explore the applicability of this study's respective findings to different Christian organisational board settings.

All types of decisions were treated the same for the purposes of this study, however, some decisions that need to be made by a Christian school board are more difficult, problematic and impactful than others, and in the mind of many board members these would perhaps warrant utilisation of Christian spiritual discernment, rather than in the case of a more straightforward and simpler issue. Therefore, further research could be undertaken in relation to the specifics of the decisions by a board, or the nature of those decisions, and how the nature of these decisions increases or decreases the likelihood of utilising Christian

spiritual discernment and the impact that results from utilising Christian spiritual discernment processes and practices.

During the qualitative phase, the interviewees were articulate and clearly had opinions on what characterises a good Christian school board, and specifically what the characteristics are that make an individual a good Christian school board member. Based on these research findings, it would be extremely helpful in relation to the selection and development of Christian school board members, as well as the governance of Christian schools and organisations from the broader Christian not-for-profit sector, to undertake further research on the characteristics necessary for a good Christian board, and also the characteristics of a good Christian board member.

As a first-of-its-kind research on K-12 Christian school boards in Australia and New Zealand, there is significant opportunity to understand the actual decision-making process of boards as a group of people, the quality and quantity of materials and information that they rely upon in making those decisions, and the interactions that take place between the decision makers in discussing issues and coming to a conclusion on an agreed way forward. Future study could be built on this research to more closely observe the actual processes that take place in board meetings, rather than relying on the reflections of people from within those meetings on how decisions are made at the meetings they attend and participate in.

There would be further opportunity in the K-12 Christian school area to build on the findings of this research utilising an educational lens, and undertake a study as to whether a culture of utilising Christian spiritual discernment for decision making at a board level extended through to the use of Christian spiritual discernment among the executive leadership team of the school in its decision making, which in turn had an impact on the outcomes of the school and its students academically, socially and spiritually.

6.8 Summary

Chapter 6 integrates the quantitative findings outlined in Chapter 4 and the qualitative findings outlined in Chapter 5 to address the four research questions for this study. The chapter also utilises the research findings to develop three models being the Tree of Discernment, the Christian Spiritual Discernment Framework, and the Christian Spiritual Discernment Assessment Tool that are designed to assist Christian school boards in a greater implementation of Christian spiritual discernment in their operations and decision making. The chapter also outlines the challenges and opportunities identified during the research, the limitations of the study, and outlines suggestions for future study in relation to Christian school boards and the application of Christian spiritual discernment in board and other Christian leadership groups.

Chapter 7 outlines the proposed implementation and dissemination of the findings of this research, as well as providing details in relation to the theoretical and practical contributions that the findings make to the practice of governance and decision making by Christian schools boards.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Research into the governance of Christian school boards is very limited around the world, and this research outlines the practices and processes undertaken by Christian school boards as they seek to discern God's will in their decision making. The findings of this research are original and, when implemented by Christian school boards, will make significant changes to their operations and processes along with the resulting decisions they make. This final chapter outlines the implementation and dissemination of the findings of the research, providing details of its theoretical and practical contributions and why the implementation and dissemination is important.

7.1 Implementation of Findings

There has been a significant amount of research over many years in respect of the governance of organisations, predominantly for-profit organisations, with a particular focus on the practical outworkings of the role of board members in the governance of these organisations. However, the literature indicates that there has been very little research into school governance, particularly in Australia and New Zealand. Research into boards of the sub-set of independent schools that describe themselves as Christian schools is even less, and there has been no research globally on the integration of Christian faith into the process of making decisions as the board of a K-12 Christian school.

Addressing the research problem of the nature of Christian spiritual discernment and the role it plays in Christian school board decision making, therefore, provides a unique topic to research and is of significant interest to the boards and decision makers of Christian schools. Christian schools, not including those from Anglican, Lutheran or Catholic schools systems, as their focus, policies and structures are different to the type of Christian school subject to this research, represent one of the fastest growing educational sectors in Australia,

having grown by 18.6% between 2016 and 2024 (My Christian School, 2025). The impact of the findings of this research is significant, given the lack of research to date on the governance and board decision making in such a growing sector of education.

The research questions that come from the research problem provide an insight into the theoretical and practical implications that arise from the research.

Research Question 1: “What Christian spiritual discernment practices do individuals (board chair, board members and Principals) undertake in relation to the governance of Christian school boards in Australia and New Zealand?” This question enables an understanding to be gained on the way individuals approach Christian spiritual discernment and the process and practices they utilise in preparation prior to a board meeting.

Research Question 2: “What Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes do Christian school boards collectively undertake in relation to the governance of schools in Australia and New Zealand?” This question enables an understanding to be gained as to the practices and processes the board as a group utilises in their decision making during a board meeting.

Research Question 3: “How do Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes influence decision making in the governance of Christian school boards?” This question provides insight as to whether the utilisation of Christian spiritual discernment processes and practices have an impact on decision making in a Christian school board meeting.

Research Question 4: “What makes a good Christian school board?” This question provides insights on perceptions and insights as to what constitutes a good Christian school board, and enabled participants to provide additional relevant information that had not been collected in asking the previous three research questions.

The outcomes from this research answer the four research questions and provide results that are twofold, being both theoretical and practical in nature, though with the central

aim of discerning God's will in the making of better decisions, that improve the operations and outcomes for the Christian school that the board governs.

7.1.1 Theoretical Contributions

The theoretical contributions resulting from the research enable a better understanding of what Christian spiritual discernment is, and conceptually what this would ideally look like in a Christian school board setting, so as to enable better decision making and improved effectiveness of the board. The research findings utilising the quantitative survey results, the qualitative interview themes, and the literature review, as to the key elements that a Christian school needs to display, have been synthesised into a single graphical representation, being the "Tree of Discernment" as shown in Figure 6.1, and described in detail in Sections 6.4.1 and 6.4.2. The Tree of Discernment provides ready access to the readers of this research, and the recipients of subsequent articles and training, to enable them to comprehend the research findings and concepts behind the utilisation of Christian spiritual discernment in a Christian school board, as well as visualise what elements they need to have in place to measure their own board against as a theoretical construct. The practice of spiritual discernment and its use in a group setting to make governance-related decisions occurs within a regulated environment that is perceived as being complex from a theological and governance point of view.

The Tree of Discernment brings together theoretical elements for a board to consider in their work, and that of the whole school: the importance of a clear purpose for the school to focus on and be inspired by, the nature and character required of board members, and the centrality of prayer and Scripture in a Christian-based organisation.

7.1.2 Practical Contributions

In commencing the research many years ago, into the nature of Christian spiritual discernment and its role in the decision making of Christian school boards, it was the

researcher's desire for the results of the research to be practical, able to be implemented and positively impact the effectiveness and performance of Christian school boards, which in turn would improve the outcomes for Christian schools. The synthesis of the approaches and practices arising from key Christian discernment traditions, as well as the results of both the quantitative and qualitative research into the practices and processes of Christian school boards in modern Australia and New Zealand, has provided deep insight into the process of collective decision making in Christian boards. This has resulted in the development of the Christian Spiritual Discernment Decision Framework and the Christian Spiritual Discernment Assessment Tools, both described in Chapter 6, as significant tools that allow the findings of the research to be practically implemented by Christian school boards and other Christian organisation boards as they seek to improve their decision making and integrate their faith in their board governance. The Tree of Discernment (see Section 6.4.1) also extends across to be a practical contribution to Christian school board operations in its inclusion of the importance of the fellowship, practices and processes of board members and the connection these elements have to the decision making by a Christian school board.

The Christian Spiritual Discernment Decision Framework, as shown in Table 6.3 and discussed in detail step-by-step in Section 6.4.4, represents the synthesis of a number of Christian traditions and their discernment practices that have been outlined in the literature in various forms (Barton, 2012a, 2012b; Farnham et al., 1996; Fendall et al., 2007; Liebert, 2015; Morris & Olsen, 1997). Most of the processes from the literature are difficult for the typical Christian school board member to identify and access, with the processes not provided in a form that allows ready implementation within the context of a corporate board setting, such as a Christian school board, as the authors have provided them in a form more suitable for use within a church setting. The research identified that a gap existed in the training and implementation of Christian school board members in the utilisation of Christian spiritual

discernment practices and processes in their preparation for board meetings, and this area has been specifically included in the decision framework development.

The Christian Spiritual Discernment Assessment Tools, as shown in Figures 6.2, 6.3, 6.4 and 6.5, and as discussed in detail in Section 6.4.5, are designed to be readily and simply implemented by Christian school boards and other Christian organisational boards, as they seek to determine the type of board they are, with easy-to-understand concepts of different Christian spiritual discernment practices drawn from a wide range of faith traditions and relatable descriptions of chaotic, corporate, frustrated and discerning boards. The tools are designed to assist boards to adjust their own practices and processes in a quest to become a more discerning board, a board that builds interpersonal relationships and trust (Reardon, 2023), fostering unity in making collective decisions dealing with truth, values, and the actions to be taken by the board and organisation as a whole (Miller, 2020).

As the research has progressed, the researcher has observed that discussions among Christian school boards, about the way they make decisions, has already resulted in the greater embedding of Christian faith and Christian spiritual discernment practices in the decision making of Christian school boards and the boards have indicated anecdotally that the quality of their decisions have been improving. Christian schools are now actively seeking education and tools for the implementation of Christian spiritual discernment in their decision-making processes, where perhaps this was not an area that they had considered as an area to focus on. The researcher intends to use the basis of the findings of the research in the design of future tools, training and information for the use of Christian school boards and other Christian organisation boards.

7.2 Dissemination of Findings

This research makes an original contribution to the governance of Christian schools, and, in particular, the integration of faith through Christian spiritual discernment practices

and processes in the decision making of Christian school boards. The lack of empirical research that has been undertaken to date, and the lack of ready access to information in this area by Christian school boards, has led to a limited understanding of the implementation and impact of Christian spiritual discernment practices and processes. The nature of the research enables boards to move from symbolic faith practices, such as brief times of prayer in the opening and closing of meetings, toward the integration of those practices and the intentional discernment of God's will in their decisions as a group throughout their board meetings. The research findings include the development of a common language, tools and frameworks that enable Christian school boards to more readily utilise Christian spiritual discernment in their decision making. Therefore, the dissemination of this research and its findings to individual Christian school boards and the Christian schools sector, as a whole, will have significant impact on the decision making practices and outcomes for Christian schools across Australia, New Zealand and beyond. As a result of the improved decision-making practices, the quality of decisions made by the boards will improve and the fulfillment of their vision and mission, along with their sustainability and viability, will improve.

The findings of this research have direct interest among governors and leaders of Christian schools that were the subject of the research, as well as a broader interest beyond Christian schools to other faith-based boards, especially those in regulated environments, as they seek to align their organisation's governance to their organisation's purpose and values through the integration of faith practices in their decision making. During the journey of undertaking the study, the researcher has had many opportunities to speak at a wide variety of Christian organisational conferences, seminars and large-scale meetings about the research and findings while the research has been in process. A listing of these opportunities is provided in the Publications and Conference Presentations Schedule in Appendix H.

While the research has been in progress there have been numerous requests to write on the topic in the form of peer reviewed publications, trade journal articles and a book, to enable easier access for boards to the research findings in learning more about the nature of Christian spiritual discernment and to improve its implementation in the decision making of their boards. Based on the high level of interest to date, there is likely to be ongoing opportunities to present the research findings through conferences and events in the coming years, particularly through the Christian schools associations that assisted in facilitating the research. In the presentation and discussion of the research and resulting tools and models there is significant engagement by School Associations, Board Members and practitioners in the Christian School governance area that will enable the ongoing growth and development of the tools and models as well as determining the suitability for wider dissemination.

7.3 Final Conclusion

The research problem explored in this study is the examination of the nature of Christian spiritual discernment and the role it plays in the decision making of Christian school boards in Australia and New Zealand. The area of Christian school boards is an under-researched area, despite the sector's significant growth over the past 40 years. Additionally, the application of Christian spiritual discernment in group decision making by Christian organisational boards is also an under-researched area. In combining both Christian school boards and Christian spiritual discernment, this study provides unique empirical evidence into the practices and processes implemented by Christian school boards in their decision making and the impact that these processes have on improving the decisions of the board.

This research has highlighted the integral role of Christian faith, at both theoretical and practical levels in the operations of a Christian school board, including the centrality of prayer and scripture, as well as the character and nature of board members as they prepare for and participate in board meetings. There are a number of significant results from the study,

including a simple definition of Christian spiritual discernment for use by Christian school boards: “As a group, utilising practice and processes, identifying where God is already at work and joining in”. Tools were also developed to assist in the application of Christian spiritual discernment for Christian schools boards: The Tree of Discernment (see Figure 6.1), an overview of the elements for a discerning Christian school board, the Christian Spiritual Discernment Decision Framework (see Table 6.3) for boards to utilise in making discerning decisions, and a Christian Spiritual Discernment Assessment Tool (see Figures 6.2, 6.3, 6.4 and 6.5) that describes the characteristics of boards based on their application of practices and processes.

The findings of this research on the application of Christian spiritual discernment and the approach of Christian school board members, as they seek God’s will in the making of decisions as a group, can be summarised in the prayer of Solomon in 1 Kings 3:9, “So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?” (Holy Bible: New International Version, 2011).

References

Adventist Education Australia. (2025). *Welcome to Adventist Education*. https://www.adventist.edu.au/our-education-system/

Adventist Schools Australia. (2025). *A thriving Christ-centred learning community*. Retrieved 9 June 2025 from https://www.adventist.edu.au/

Ahlin, E., M. (2019). *Semi-structured interviews with expert practitioners: their validity and significant contribution to translational research*. SAGE Publications Limited. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526466037

Alharahsheh, H. H., & Pius, A. (2020). A review of key paradigms: positivism v interpretivism. *Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, *2*(3), 39-43. https://gajrc.com/media/articles/GAJHSS_23_39-43_VMGJbOK.pdf

Allen, A., & Mintrom, M. (2010). Responsibility and school governance. *Educational Policy*, *24*(3), 439 - 464. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904808330172

Alsbury, T. L. (2008). School board member and Superintendent turnover and the influence on student achievement: an application of the dissatisfaction theory. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *7*(2), 202-229. https://doi.org/10.1080/15700760701748428

Anderson, P. (2006). The meeting for worship in which business is conducted - Quaker decision-making process as a factor of spiritual discernment. *Quaker Religious Thought*, *106*, 26-47. https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/qrt/vol106/iss1/4

Associated Christian Schools. (2025a). *Our members*. https://christianschools.org.au/our-members/

Associated Christian Schools. (2025b). *Supporting the growth of Christian educational communities*. https://christianschools.org.au/

Associated Christian Schools. (2025c). *Useful ACS Resources*. https://christianschools.org.au/resources/

Aulgur, J., J. (2016). Governance and board member identity in an emerging nonprofit organization. *Administrative Issues Journal: Connecting Education, Practice, and Research*, *6*(1), 6-21. https://doi.org/10.5929/2016.1.1

Austen, S., Swepson, P., & Marchant, T. (2012). Governance and school boards in non-state schools in Australia. *Management in Education*, *26*(2), 73-81. https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020611430533

Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. (2018). *Governance for good*. https://www.acnc.gov.au/tools/guides/governance-for-good-acncs-guide-for-responsible-people

Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. (2025a). *ACNC Governance standards*. https://www.acnc.gov.au/for-charities/manage-your-charity/governance-hub/governance-standards

Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. (2025b). *CMA standards and the ACNC*. https://www.acnc.gov.au/for-charities/manage-your-charity/governance-hub/governance-standards/cma-standards-and-acnc

Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. (2025c). *Governance for good: A guide for responsible people*. https://www.acnc.gov.au/tools/guides/governance-for-good-acncs-guide-for-responsible-people

Australian Institute of Company Directors. (2025). *Board meeting minutes*. https://www.aicd.com.au/board-of-directors/meeting/minutes.html

Baburajan, V., Silva, J. d. A. e., & Pereira, F. C. (2022). Open vs closed-ended questions in attitudinal surveys — comparing, combining, and intepreting using natural language processing. *Transportation Research Part C: Emerging Technologies*, *137*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trc.2022.103589

Bambach, M. (2020). *Maximising board governance effectiveness in small and medium-sized Australian independent schools* Edith Cowan University]. https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7418-2714

Barbee, D. M. (2019). *The soul of governing: exploring the corporate spiritual discernment process of Christian higher education institutions* Regent University]. https://search-proquest-com.databases.avondale.edu.au/docview/2219325755?accountid=26359

Bartlett, D., & Campey, P. (2008). *Community governance: a framework for building healthy christian organisations*. Resolve Consulting Group.

Barton, R. H. (2005). *Discerning God's will together: Discovering a process of leadership discernment*. Transforming Center. https://transformingcenter.org/2005/02/discerning-gods-will-together-discovering-a-process-of-leadership-discernment/

Barton, R. H. (2008). Can you hear God now? Your most important leadership role: discerning and obeying God's voice. *Leadership Journal*, *29*(3). https://link-gale-com.databases.avondale.edu.au/apps/doc/A183276530/AONE?u=avondalecoll&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=f3347471

Barton, R. H. (2012a). Finding God's will together: How to help a group discern God's leading. *Leadership Journal*(Fall 2012), 39-42. https://link-gale-com.databases.avondale.edu.au/apps/doc/A308131279/AONE?u=avondalecoll&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=a8c3cfc9

Barton, R. H. (2012b). *Pursuing God's will together: A discernment practice for leadership groups*. InterVarsity Press.

Bekele, W. B., & Ago, F. Y. (2022). Sample size for interview in qualitative research is social sciences: A guide to novice researchers. *Research in Educational Policy and Management*, *4*(1), 42-50. https://doi.org/10.46303/repam.2022.3

Benefiel, M. (2005). *Soul at Work: Spiritual leadership in organizations*. Veritas Publications.

Bernard, H. R. (2013). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Bernstein, R., Buse, K., & Slatten, L. (2015). Nonprofit board performance: Board members' understanding their roles and responsibilities. *American Journal of Management*, *15*(1), 24-35. https://digitalcommons.tacoma.uw.edu/ias_pub/651?utm_source=digitalcommons.tacoma.uw.edu%2Fias_pub%2F651&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages

Bieber, N. L. (2010). *Decision making & spiritual discernment: The sacred art of finding your way*. SkyLight Paths Publishing.

Bird, R. C., & Park, S. K. (2018). Organic corporate governance. *Boston College Law Review*, *59*(1), 21-69. https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/organic-corporate-governance/docview/2014386156/se-2?accountid=26359

Boddy, C. R. (2016). Sample size for qualitative research. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, *19*(4), 426-432. https://doi.org/10.1108/QMR-06-2016-0053

Bowen, G. D. (1985). Roots as a component of tree productivity. In M. G. R. Cannell & J. E. Jackson (Eds.), *Attributes of trees as crop plants*. Natural Environment Research Council.

Bradley, P. M. (2022). *Better boards, stronger schools: informal relationships between members and school board performance* The University of Auckland]. https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/bitstreams/b7d50bf8-40a6-4946-b886-d0b9f7e6e1dc/download

Brillhart, P. (2025). *The lost art of fasting in a gluttonous world*. Koinonia House. Retrieved 27 September 2025 from https://www.khouse.org/personal_update/articles/2025/lost-art-fasting-gluttonous-world

Brink, N. S. (2023). *Jesus above school: A worldview framework for navigating the collision between the gospel and christian schools*. WestBow Press.

Brinton, S. (2025). *A tale of two missions: the stated and perceived mission of three member schools of Christian Schools Australia* University of Newcastle]. https://hdl.handle.net/1959.13/1471640

Brown, W. A., & Guo, C. (2010). Exploring the key roles for nonprofit boards. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *39*(3), 536-546. https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764009334588

Buckingham, J. (2010). *The rise of religious schools in Australia*. The Centre for Independent Studies.

Burton, N., Vu, M. C., & Hawkins, M. (2023). Secular discernment: A process of individual unlearning and collective relearning. *Management Learning*, *54*(5), 680-704. https://doi.org/10.1177/13505076221100919

Butts, K. (2019). *7 prayers for discernment and decision-making*. PrayerShop Publishing.

Cambridge Dictionary. (2025). *Cambridge Dictionary*. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/discernment

Campey, P. (2022). Information letter: seeking God's will: The role of Christian Spiritual Discernment in Christian School boards. In.

Campey, P. (2024). *Financial health assessment: Global learnings and US Results (FY2023)* 2024 Funding the Future, Grand Canyon University.

Caruth, G. D. (2013). Demystifying mixed methods research design: a review of the literature. *Mavlana International Journal of Education*, *3*(2), 112-122. https://doi.org/10.13054/mije.13.35.3.2

Carver, J. (2006). *Boards that make a difference: a new design for leadership in nonprofit and public organizations*. John Wiley & Sons.

Chait, R. P., Ryan, W. P., & Taylor, B. E. (2004). *Governance as leadership: reforming the work of nonprofit boards*. BoardSource.

Chalfoun, A. (2023). Biblical Authority in interaction: How do evangelicals use the Bible? *Journal of Pragmatics*, *208*, 19-32. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2023.02.010

Charas, S. (2014). Improving corporate performance by enhancing team dynamics at the board level. *International Journal of Disclosure and Governance*, *12*(2), 107-131. https://doi.org/10.1057/jdg.2013.35

Chesters, J. (2019). Egalitarian Australia? Associations between family wealth and outcomes in young adulthood. *Journal of Sociology*, *55*(1), 72-89. https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783318777293

Christian Education National. (2025a). *About us*. https://cen.edu.au/about-cen/

Christian Education National. (2025b). *Board Training*. https://cen.edu.au/services/board-training/

Christian Education National. (2025c). *Schools*. https://cen.edu.au/schools/

Christian Ministry Advancement. (2025). *About us*. Retrieved 3 December 2025 from https://cma.net.au/about-us/

Christian Ministry Advancement Standards Council. (2025). *The Nine Principles of Ministry Accountability*. http://www.cmasc.net.au/principles-standards/principles

Christian School Management. (2026). *Christian leadership: The servant leadership principle*. https://christianschoolmanagement.org/christian-leadership-the-servant-leadership-principle/

Christian Schools Australia. (2025a). *Governance*. https://www.csa.edu.au/CSA/CSA/Our-Services/Governance.aspx

Christian Schools Australia. (2025b). *Our Mission & Strategy*. Retrieved 3 December 2025 from https://www.csa.edu.au/CSA/CSA/About-Us/Our-Mission-and-Strategy.aspx?hkey=011e5d75-ac6d-4311-8671-4c488d7e9965

Christian Schools Australia. (2025c). *Our story*. https://www.csa.edu.au/CSA/CSA/About-Us/Our-Story.aspx

Christian Schools Australia. (2026). *Elements of a Christian School*. https://www.csa.edu.au/CSA/CSA/About-Christian-Schools/Elements-of-a-Christian-School.aspx

Clapham, A. (2024). Undiminishing school governance: investigating 'governance maturity theory' for school governing bodies. *Journal of Education Policy*, *39*(6), 899-918. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2024.2337031

Codrington, S. (2015). *Optimal school governance: A handbook for school boards and Heads who value effective governance*. Solid Star Press.

Coffeng, T., & Van Steenbergen, E. F. (2021). Quality of group decisions by board members: a hidden-profile experiment. *Management Decision*, *59*(13), 38-55. https://doi.org/10.1108/MD-07-2020-0893

Coley, K. S. (2015). In search of best practices in christian school governance. *Christian Perspectives in Education*, *8*(1). https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cpe/vol8/iss1/1

Collingridge, D. (2014). Validating a Questionnaire. *Sage Research Methods Community*. https://researchmethodscommunity.sagepub.com/blog/validating-a-questionnaire

Commonwealth of Australia. (2019). *Final report: Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry*. https://treasury.gov.au/publication/p2019-fsrc-final-report

Contant, H., & Noot, E. (2021). *Guiding schools to flourish: Board governance and school leadership*. Society of Christian Schools in British Columbia.

Cook, C. C. H. (2019). *Hearing voices, demonic and divine: Scientific and theological perspectives*. Routledge.

Cope, D. (2019). Ordering Refreshments: A stale board can quickly become an ineffective board. Bank leaders and experts offer tips for strategically refreshing a board's membership and structure. *ABA Banking Journal*, *111*(6), 40-43. https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/ordering-refreshments/docview/2381632530/se-2

Cossin, D. (2024). *High performance boards: a practical guide to improving and energizing your governance*. John Wiley & Sons Incorporated.

Courtney, S. J. (2018). Modernising school governance: corporate planning and expert handling in state education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *39*(3), 407-411. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2018.1424105

Covell, C. L., Sidani, S., & Ritchie, J. A. (2012). Does the sequence of data collection influence participant's responses to closed and open-ended questions? A methodological study. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, *49*(6), 664-671. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2011.12.002

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications Inc.

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Pearson Education.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano-Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Crosby, P. B. (1979). *Quality is Free*. McGraw-Hill.

Crum, K. S. (2007). School board decision making: An analysis of the process. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, *16*(4), 367-389. https://doi.org/10.1177/105678790701600404

Curry, K., Kinder, S., Benoiton, T., & Noonan, J. (2018). School board governance in changing times: A school's transition to policy governance. *Administrative Issues Journal*, *8*(1), Article 2. https://dc.swosu.edu/aij/vol8/iss1/2

Dainty, A. (2008). Methodological pluralism in construction management research. *Advanced reseaerch methods in the built environment*, *1*. https://media.johnwiley.com.au/product_data/excerpt/08/14051611/1405161108.pdf

Daniel, E., Arieli, S., & Akerman, L. (2024). The values of schools: an analysis of vision statements. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, *39*, 3661-3683. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-024-00886-7

De Vries, P. (2024). Authority: Plantinga on the Bible and its interpretation. *Unio Cum Christo*, *10*, 77-94. https://doi.org/10.13109/UNCC.2024.10.1.77

Dickson, J. (2011). *Humilitas: A lost key to life, love and leadership*. Zondervan.

Dovetail Editorial Team. (2023). *Exploring data saturation in qualitative research*. Dovetail. https://dovetail.com/research/data-saturation/

Drexler, J. L. (2007). *Schools as communities*. Purposeful Design Publications.

Efrat, Z. (2024). *The power of corporate retreats in strengthening culture*. Australian Institute of Company Directors. https://www.aicd.com.au/organisational-culture/business-ethics/the-power-of-corporate-retreats-in-strengthening-culure.html

Ehren, M. C. M., Honingh, M. E., Hooge, E. H., & O'Hara, J. (2015). Changing school board governance in primary education through school inspections. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *44*(2), 205-223. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143214549969

Elgeddawy, M., & Abouraia, M. (2024). *Pragmatism as a research paradigm* 23rd European Conference on Research Methodology for Business and Management Studies,

Farnham, S. G., Hull, S. A., & McLean, R. T. (1996). *Grounded in God: listening hearts discernment for group deliberations*. Morehouse Publishing.

Fendall, L., Wood, J., & Bishop, B. (2007). *Practicing discernment together: Finding God's way forward in decision making*. Barclay Press.

Fetters, M. D., Curry, L. A., & Creswell, J. W. (2013). Achieving integration in mixed methods designs-principles and practices. *Health Services Research*, *48*(6), 2134-2156. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6773.12117

Field, A. (2018). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics* (5th ed.). Sage.

Fisher, J. (2012). Leading the development of new models of schooling: Community-based Christian schools in Australia. *Religious Education Journal of Australia*, *28*(2), 36-42. https://search-informit-org.databases.avondale.edu.au/doi/epdf/10.3316/aeipt.195719

Fisman, R., Khurana, R., & Martenson, E. (2009). Mission driven governance. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, *7*(3), 36-43.

Ford, M. R., & Ihrke, D. M. (2015). School board member definitions of accountability; what are they and do they impact district outcomes? *Public Performance & Management Review*, *39(1)*, 198-222. https://doi.org/10.1080/15309576.2016.1071173

Ford, M. R., & Ihrke, D. M. (2016). Understanding school boards and their use of different models of governance. *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs*, *2*(2), 67-81. https://doi.org/10.20899/jpna.2.2.67-81

Ford, M. R., & Ihrke, D. M. (2018). Linking the distribution of board-executive governance responsibilities to charter school performance. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, *26*(1), 2-18. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOA-09-2016-1067

Freiwirth, J. (2017). Rethinking governance in a dynamic environment. *Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership*, *7*(1), 5-12. https://doi.org/10.18666/JNEL-2017-V7-11-8021

Freiwirth, J., Burns, M., Gifford, G., Hiland, M., & Beck, D. (2017). Voices of board chairs. *Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership*, *7*(4), 346-358. https://doi.org/10.18666/JNEL-2017-V7-I4-8641

Frisken, R., J. (2011). *It only takes a spark: The story of Christian Community Schools*. Morling Press.

Froese, P., & Uecker, J. E. (2022). Prayer in America: A detailed analysis of the various dimesions of prayer. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *61*(3-4), 663-689. https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12810

Fryday-Field, K., & Janzen Le Ber, M. (2024). Board leader character and effective governance. *Amplify*, *37*(1), 41-45. https://www.cutter.com/article/board-leader-character-effective-governance

Gamlen, A., & McIntyre, C. (2018). Mixing methods to explain emigration policies: A post-positivist perspective. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, *12*(4), 374-393. https://doi.org/https://doi-org.databases.avondale.edu.au/10.1177/1558689818782822

Geyer, P. (2020). Do directors prepare well for board meetings? *Governance Directions*(July 2020), 272-276. https://www.vuca.com.au/do-directors-prepare-well-for-board-meetings/

Gobo, G. (2023). Mixed methods and their pragmatic approach: Is there a risk of being entangled in a positivist epistemology and methodology? Limits, pitfalls and consequences of Bricolage methodology. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *24*(1). https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-24.1.4005

Governance Institute of Australia. (2020). *Governance Foundations*. https://www.governanceinstitute.com.au/resources/what-is-governance/governance-foundations/

Green, J. C., & Griesenger, D. W. (1996). Board performance and organizational effectiveness in nonprofit social services organizations. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, *6*(4), 381-402. https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.4130060407

Green Point Christian College. (2025). *Statement of Faith*. https://digistorm-websites.s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/gpcc-au-nsw-394-website/documents/Statement-of-Faith.pdf?v=1685480459

Greer, P., Crouch, A., Haggard, A., & Horst, C. (2015). *MissionDrift: the unspoken crisis facing leaders, charities and churches*. Bethany House Publishers, a division of Baker Publishing Group.

Grissom, J. A. (2014). Is discord detrimental? Using institutional variation to identify the impact of public governing board conflict on outcomes. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, *24*(2), 289-315. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mus042

Groothuis, D. (2022). *Christian apologetics: a comprehensive case for biblical faith* (2nd ed.). InterVarsity Press.

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variabiity. *Field Methods*, *18*(1), 59-82. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903

Gunasekare, U. (2015). Mixed research method as the third research paradigm: A literature review. *International Journal of Science and Research*, *4*(8), 363-367.

Guo, C. (2007). When government becomes the principal philanthropist: the effects of public funding on patterns of nonprofit governance. *Public Administration Review*, *67*(3), 458-473. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2007.00729.x

Haerens, L., Matos, L., Koc, A., Benita, M., & Abos, A. (2022). Examining school boards' chaotic leadership style in relation to teachers' job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103821

Hangartner, J., & Svaton, C. J. (2014). Competition between public supervision and professional management: an ethnographic study of school governance reforms in Switzerland. *Ethnography and Education*, *9*(3), 284-297. https://doi.org/10.1080/17457823.2014.904754

Hare, P. A. (1973). Group decision by consensus: reaching unity in the Society of Friends. *Sociological Inquiry*, *43*(1), 75-84. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-682X.1973.tb01153.x

Haverland, J. A. (2025). *Fasting: A neglected discipline*. Christian Library. Retrieved 27 Sepetember 2025 from https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/article/fasting-neglected-discipline

Heie, H., & Sargent, M. (2012). *Soul care: Christian faith and academic administration*. Abilene Christian University Press.

Herman, R. D., & Renz, D. O. (2000). Board practices of especially effective and less effective local nonprofit organizations. *American Review of Public Administration*, *30*(2), 146-160. https://doi.org/doi.org/10.1177/02750740022064605

Hiland, M. (2008). The board chair-executive director relationship: Dynamics that create value for nonprofit organizations. *Journal of Nonprofit Management*, *12*(1), 13-22.

Hoag, G. G., Willmer, W. K., & Henson, G. J. (2018). *The Council: A biblical perspective on board governance*. ECFAPress.

Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (2025). Crossway. https://www.biblegateway.com

Holy Bible: New International Version. (2011). Biblica Inc. www.biblegateway.com

Holy Bible: New Living Translation. (2015). Tyndale House Publishers. www.biblegateway.com

Honingh, M. E., van Genugten, M., van Thiel, S., Blom, R. (2020). Do boards matter? Studying the relation between school boards and educational quality. *Public Policy and Administration*, *35*(1), 65-83. https://doi.org/10.1177/0952076718789739

Hotchkiss, D. (2016). *Governance and ministry: Rethinking board leadership*. Rowan & Littlefield.

Howell, K. E. (2013). *An introduction to the philosophy of methodology* (First ed.). SAGE Publications Limited.

Huang, S. (2025). *What are the 7 parts of a tree?* A Plus Tree Care & Sustainability. https://aplustree.com/what-are-the-7-parts-of-a-tree/

Huber, S. G. (2011). School governance in Switzerland: tensions between new roles and old traditions. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *39*(4), 469-485. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143211405349

Hunter, T. (2024). How leader character can help nonprofit boards protect organisation missions. *Amplify*, *37*(1), 46-57. https://www.cutter.com/article/how-leader-character-can-help-nonprofit-boards-protect-organization-missions

Huse, M. (2005). Corporate governance: understanding important contingencies. *Corporate Ownership & Control*, *2*(4), 41-50. https://www.virtusinterpress.org/IMG/pdf/cocv2i4p3.pdf

Independent Schools Australia. (2025). *Independent schooling 2025: Enrolment trends, characteristics and projections*. https://isa.edu.au/documents/independent-schooling-2025-enrolment-trends-characteristics-and-projections/

Independent Schools Council of Australia. (2020). *Autonomy and Accountability*. https://isa.edu.au/about-independent-schools/about-independent-schools/autonomy-and-accountability/

Institute of Community Directors Australia. (2025). *Developing an effective induction process*. https://www.communitydirectors.com.au/help-sheets/developing-an-effective-induction-process

Jackson, D. K., & Holland, T. P. (1998). Measuring the effectiveness of nonprofit boards. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *27*(2), 159-182. https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764098272004

Johnson, R. B., & Christensen, L. (2020). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative and mixed approaches* (7th ed.). Sage Publications Inc.

Johnson, R. B., Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Turner, L. A. (2007). Toward a definition of mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, *1*(2), 112-133. https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689806298224

Kaufmann, W., Ed. & Trans. (1954). *The Portable Nietzsche*. Viking Press.

Kawar, L. N., Dunbar, G., B, Aquino-Maneja, E., M, Flores, S., L., Squier, V. R., & Failla, K. R. (2024). Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, and triangulation research simplified. *The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing*, *March 2024*, 1+. https://doi.org/10.3928/00220124-20240328-03

Kelemen, M., & Rumens, N. (2012). Pragmatism and heterodoxy in organization research: Going beyond the quantitative/qualitative divide. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, *20*(1), 5-12. https://doi.org/10.1108/19348831211215704

Kelly, L., M, & Cordeiro, M. (2020). Three principles of pragmatism for research on organizational processes. *Methodological Innnovations*, 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1177/2059799120937242

Kelly, S. E., & James K Dew, J. (2017). *Postmodernism: a Christian perspective*. Intervarsity Press.

Kienel, P. A. (1998). *A history of Christian school education* (Vol. 1). Purposeful Design Publications.

Kramer, M. (2007). Managing low-performing board members. *Ha Yidion, The RAVSAK Journal*, *Winter 2007*, 8-15. https://prizmah.org/hayidion/board-leadership/managing-low-performing-board-members

Krishnan, A., Barnett, K., McCormick, J., Newcombe, G., & Bryant, D. (2016). A social cognitive investigation of Australian independent school boards as teams. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *54*(3), 288-304. https://doi.org/10.1108/jea-01-2015-0005

Kugel, J., & Mercado, J. M. (2024). Good governance in not-for-profit organizations: a review of the literature on boards of directors. *Journal of Governmental & Nonprofit Accounting*, *13*(1), 56-82. https://doi.org/10.2308/JOGNA-2022-011

Kutner, M. H., Nachtsheim, C. J., Neter, J., & Li, W. (2005). *Applied linear statistical models* (5th ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Land, D. (2002). Local school boards under review: Their role and effectiveness in relation to students' academic achievement. *Review of Educational Research*, *72*(2), 229-278. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543072002229

Laughlin, F., L, & Andringa, R., C. (2007). *Good governance for nonprofits: Developing principles and policies for an en effective board*. AMACOM.

Leggett, B., Campbell-Evans, G., & Gray, J. (2016). Issues and challenges of school governance. *Leading & Managing*, *22*(1), 36-56.

Leithwood, K., Azah, Vera N. (2017). Characteristics of high performing school districts. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *16*(1), 27-53. https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2016.1197282

Lencioni, P. M. (2012). *The Advantage: Why organizational health trumps everything else in business*. Jossey-Bass.

Liebert, E. (2015). *The soul of discernment: A spiritual practice for communities and institutions*. Westminster John Knox Press.

Lloyd, T. (2022). Celebrating 150 years of Adventist Schooling. *Adventist Record*. https://record.adventistchurch.com/2022/05/26/celebrating-150-years-of-adventist-schooling/

Loh, C. M., Unda, L., Gong, Z., & Benati, K. (2021). Board effectiveness and school performance: a study of Australian independent schools. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, *32*(4), 650-673. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2021.1939734

Lowrie, R. W., & Lowrie, Roy W. (2004). *Serving God on the christian school board*. Purposeful Design Publications.

Macquarie University. (1985). *The Macquarie Dictionary*.

Maharaj, R. (2009). Corporate governance decision-making model: How to nominate skilled board members, by addressing the formal and informal systems. *International Journal of Disclosure and Governance*, *6*(2), 106-126. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1057/jdg.2008.27

Mangalwadi, V. (2011). *The book that made your world: How the bible created the soul of western civilsation*. Thomas Nelson.

McAlpine, S. (2024). Christian schools in Australia are under attack. *Premier Christianity*. https://www.premierchristianity.com/opinion/christian-schools-in-australia-are-under-attack/17564.article

McCormick, J., Barnett, K., Babak Alavi, S., & Newcombe, G. (2006). Board governance of independent schools. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *44*(5), 429-445. https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230610683741

McGuinn, P., & Manna, P. (2013). The tall task of education governance reform. *Journal of School Choice*, *7*(4), 606-611. https://doi.org/10.1080/15582159.2013.837784

McIver, R. (2017). *Purpose and mission of Seventh-day Adventist schools in Australia and Solomon Islands - past and present*. Avondale Academic Press. https://research.avondale.edu.au/handle/1897/11816035

McKinsey & Company. (2018). *A time for boards to act*. https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/a-time-for-boards-to-act

McNeil, L., M. (1999). *Contradictions of control: school structure and school knowledge*. Routledge.

Mellon, J., & Kroth, M. (2013). Experiences that enable one to become an expert strategic thinker. *Journal of Adult Education*, *42*(2), 70-79. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1047342

Merriam-Webster. (2025). *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/discernment

Miles, S. (2017). Stakeholder theory classification: a theoretical and empirical evaluation of definitions. *Journal of Business Ethics*(142), 437-459. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2741-y

Miller, K. D. (2020). Discernment in management and organizations. *Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion*, *17*(5), 373-402. https://doi.org/10.1080/14766086.2020.1812425

Montgomery, D. C. (2017). *Deisgn and analysis of experiments* (9th ed.). Wiley.

Montgomery, D. C., Peck, E. A., & Vining, G. G. (2021). *Introduction to linear regression analysis* (6th ed.). Wiley.

Morley, B. (2023). Beyond consensus: salvaging sense of the meeting. In Annapolis Friends Meeting (Ed.), (Vol. 307): Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

Morris, D. E., & Olsen, C. M. (1997). *Discerning God's will together: A spiritual practice for the church*. The Alban Institute.

Morse, J., M. (1995). The significance of saturation. *Qualitative Health Research*, *5*(2), 147-149. https://doi.org/10.1177/104973239500500201

Mulisa, F. (2022). When does a researcher choose a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed research approach? *Interchange*, *53*, 113-131. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10780-021-09447-z

Murnane, R. J., Reardon, Sean F. (2018). Long-term trends in private school enrollments by family income. *AERA Open*, *4*(1), 1-24. https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858417751355

Mwenja, D., & Lewis, A. (2009). Exploring the impact of the board of directors on the performance of not-for-profit organizations. *Business Strategy Series*, *10*(6), 359-365. https://doi.org/10.1108/17515630911005646

My Christian School. (2025). *A show of faith: 18% increase in Australians choosing Christian Schools*. Retrieved 31 October 2025 from https://mychristianschool.au/schools-growing/

Nayak, M. S. D. P., & Narayan, K. A. (2019). Strengths and weaknesses of online surveys. *IOSP Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, *24*(5), 31-38. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Mudavath-Nayak/publication/333207786_Strengths_and_Weakness_of_Online_Surveys/links/61176e5a0c2bfa282a42253b/Strengths-and-Weakness-of-Online-Surveys.pdf?%20__cf_chl_tk=ulOqypX070Uc5pTJ5yeMHlIvOvAOjGB0psYju8Hlrn4-1738838246-1.0.1.1-4oP9m81GuRf8lF0yTHIRoQX.XhXyLjEe199YsnTATKY

New Zealand Association for Christian Schools. (2025a). *NZACS history*. Retrieved 4 November 2025 from https://www.nzacs.nz/history/

New Zealand Association for Christian Schools. (2025b). *NZACS Strategic Plan*. https://www.nzacs.nz/strategic-plan/

New Zealand Government. (2020). *School Rolls Time Series Data for Trend Analysis 1996-2020*. https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/6028

Niemandt, N. (2019). *Missional Leadership* (Vol. 7). AOSIS Pty Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2019.BK108

Nikolopoulou, K. (2023). *What is self-selection bias? Definition and Example*. Scibbr. https://www.scribbr.com/research-bias/self-selection-bias/

Norman, W. (2011). Business ethics as self-regulation: why principles that ground regulations should be used to ground beyond-compliance norms as well. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *102*, 43-57. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-1193-2

Nouwen, H., Christensen, M., J, & Laird, R., J. (2013). *Discernment: Reading the signs of daily life*. Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

NSW Education Standards Authority. (2023). *NSW Registered and accredited individual non-government schools manual*. NSW Education Standards Authority Retrieved from https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-08/nsw-registered-and-accredited-individual-non-government-schools-manual.pdf

Olson, D. E. (2000). Agency theory in the not-for-profit sector: its role at independent colleges. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *29*(2), 280-296. https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764000292004

Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Johnson, R. B. (2006). The validity issue in mixed research. *Mid-South Educational Research Association*, *13*(1), 48-63. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/R-Johnson-10/publication/228340166_The_Validity_Issues_in_Mixed_Research/links/53d69ace0cf220632f3dba1f/The-Validity-Issues-in-Mixed-Research.pdf

Opsal, T., Wolgemuth, J., Cross, J., Kaanta, T., Dickmann, E., Colomer, S., & Erdil-Moody, Z. (2016). "There are no known benefits…": Considering the risk/benefit ratio of qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research*, *26*(8), 1137-1150. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315580109PMID:25857654

Owen, N. (2003). *The failure of HIH Insurance: A corporate collapse and its lessons*. Commonwealth of Australia Retrieved from https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-2203647152/view?partId=nla.obj-2205995732#page/n178/mode/1up

Packer, J. I. (1973). *Knowing God*. Hodder and Stoughton.

Pally, M. (2018). "Peculiar relations of affectability": Pierce and Royce as resources for the philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr. *Telos*, *182*(Spring), 161-182. https://doi.org/10.3817/0318182161

Piggin, S., & Lindner, R. D. (2018). *The fountain of public prosperity: Evangelical Christians in Australian History 1740-1914*. Monash University Publishing.

Plano-Clark, V. L., Ivankova, N V. (2017). *Mixed methods research: A guide to the field.* Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483398341

Plough, B. (2014). School board governance and student achievement: school board members' perceptions of their behaviors and beliefs. *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development*, *25*, 41. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1028871

Prior, C. (2021). Teaching and Christian worldview: the perceptions of teachers. *TEACH 15*(1), 11-17. https://research.avondale.edu.au/server/api/core/bitstreams/5617787b-815d-4395-bb5e-191bbe97d9cd/content

Prybil, L., Levey, S., Killan, R., Fardo, D., Chait, R., Bardach, D., & Roach, W. (2012). *Governance in large nonprofit health systems: current profile and emerging patterns.* . https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/76528473/Governance_booklet-libre.pdf?1639719073=&response-content-disposition=inline%3B+filename%3DGovernance_in_Large_Nonprofit_Health_Sys.pdf&Expires=1764719282&Signature=Y0ZSsjaAEWjiIqf3HBmPauJpCAUHWu579~1Fnyg-ub7NFi1rkvh1DGSruS07Cn4njZkCbxFPXk91bJVt1YizPsyhj4dkou2EHV~DPb7s-O2p869ImWIVIlZYMIwEcfUIH4okSllSiJmVVktoGPR~4ITtt61QwsQWY0Wg9kg4VDkr2pIw8dxNogbRDy-efkylr-wM70nDmqIEPXuK6gBwOn55uddzRwrtKk5xEQ0dX7eNtQlql4xHJWRRiiaz6SqMo5PGHa6v5isrQ0YUvuKh0U6Yl0XYBKyE~eK1BwSWWbXAhux4uEeQ9-IQXaxFwhbAJF4Py6B3VvTij8NkYnbhUg__&Key-Pair-Id=APKAJLOHF5GGSLRBV4ZA

Ramesh, D. (2021). Board meetings and the agenda. In *Effective directors: The right questions to ask* (1st ed., pp. 172-177). Routledge.

https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/oa-edit/10.4324/9781003201182-35/board-meetings-agenda-dineshi-ramesh

Ranson, S. (2011). School governance and the mediation of engagement. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *39*(4), 398-413. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143211404259

Ranson, S., Farrell, C., Peim, N., & Smith, P. (2007). Does governance matter for school improvement? *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, *16*(3), 305-325. https://doi.org/10.1080/09243450500114108

Reardon, K. (2023). Board alignment: The key to nonprofit success and impactful leadership. *Business NH Magazine*, *40*(12), 32-33. https://www.nhnonprofits.org/news/board-alignment-key-nonprofit-success-and-impactful-leadership

Renz, D. O. (2016). *The Jossey-Bass handbook of nonprofit leadership and management*. John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.

Resolve Consulting Group. (2025). School Financial Management - NESA Accredited Training Seminar.

Roberts, P., & Priest, H. (2006). Reliabiity and validity in research. *Nursing Standard*, *20*(44). link.gale.com/apps/doc/A149022548/HRCA?u=anon~79884322&sid=googleScholar&xid=c55caab9

Saatcioglu, A., Moore, S., Sargut, G., & Bajaj, A. (2011). The role of school board social capital in district governance: effects on financial and academic outcomes. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *10*(1), 1-42. https://doi.org/10.1080/15700760903511780

Sandeman, J. (2024). *The surprising history of Anglican schools*. Retrieved 4 November 2025 from https://theothercheek.com.au/the-surprising-history-of-anglican-schools/

Saunders, M., N K, Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2019). *Research methods for business students* (Eighth Edition ed.). Pearson Education Limited.

Schilling, J. (2006). On the pragmatics of qualitative assessment. *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*, *22*(1), 28-37. https://doi.org/10.1027/1015-5759.22.1.28

Schoonover, A. (2013). *The role of spiritual formation and ministry governance in developing mission-oriented governing boards* George Fox University]. Portland, Oregon. https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/66

Science Facts. (2023). *Taproot*. Science Facts.net. https://www.sciencefacts.net/taproot.html

Sheard, M., & Avis, J. (2010). Schools, governance and community: a next practice intervention. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *39*(1), 84-104. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143210383898

Simpson, B., & den Hond, F. (2022). The contemporary resonances of classical pragmatism for studying organization and organizing. *Organization Studies*, *43*(1), 127-146. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840621991689

Simpson, L. (2025). *Onboarding new board members: proven steps and checklist*. Boardable. https://boardable.com/resources/new-board-members/

Sinek, S. (2009). *Start with why: How great leaders inspire everyone to take action*. Portfolio Penguin.

Skoog, R., Greer, P., & Doolittle, C. (2024). *Lead with Prayer: The Spiritual Habits of World-Changing Leaders*. FaithWords.

Spencer, M. (2020). *2020 Enrolments in the Australian Christian Schooling Sector*. Christian Schools Australia.

St Philips Christian Education Foundation. (2025). *Advantages of a multi-school group*. Retrieved 4 November 2025 from https://www.spcc.nsw.edu.au/central-office/becoming-a-spcef-learning-community/advantages-of-a-multi-school-group

Stob, L. (2011). *Mission directed governance: leading the Christian school with vision, unity and accountability*. The Calvin Press.

Stob, L. (2015). *Mission directed: governing your Christian school with purpose*. Purposeful Design Publications.

Stoesz, E., & Sitiffney, R. M. (2011). *Setting the agenda: Meditations for the organisation's soul*. Herald Press.

Sundean, L. J., Fawcett, J., & Prybil, L. D. (2021). Board culture and the role of interpersonal relationships. *Nursing Economics*, *39*(4), 161. https://doi.org/10.62116/nec.2021.39.4.161

Suveren, Y. (2022). Unconscious bias: definition and significance. *Current Approaches in Psychiatry*, *14*(1), 414-426. https://doi.org/10.18863/pgy.1026607

Swaner, L. E., Eckert, J., Ellesfen, E., & Lee, M. H. (2023). Innovative structural and financial models in US Christian education. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *100*. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2023.102784

Synod of Bishops. (2023). The spiritual conversation. In.

Tashakkorie, A., & Teddlie, C. (2003). *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioural research*. Sage.

Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2009). *Foundations of mixed methods research: Integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in the social and behavioural sciences*. Sage.

The Diligent Team. (2023). School board governance models and best practices. https://www.diligent.com/en-au/resources/blog/school-board-governance-model

Till, R. E., & Yount, M. B. (2017). Governance and incentives: Is it really all about the money? *Journal of Business Ethics*, *159*, 605-618. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-018-3778-5

Turyahikayo, E. (2021). Philiosphical paradigms as the bases for knowledge management research and practice. *Knowledge Management & E-Learning*, *13*(2), 209-224. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1314845

Twardowska-Case, D. (2021). *An investigation of the role of governing board members in leading small Christian Colleges from surviving to thriving* Regent University]. https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/investigation-role-governing-board-members/docview/2583057181/se-2?accountid=26359

Uwagaba, J. (2025). *Integrating Biblical principles and global best practices in corporate governance: A comprehensive assessment framework for Bethany Christian Services* [Paper]. Regent University. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5222327

Van Puyvelde, S., Caers, R., Du Bois, C., & Jegers, M. (2012). The governance of nonprofit organisations: Integrating agency theory with stakeholder and stewardship theories. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *41*(3), 431-451. https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764011409757

Velayutham, S. (2013). Governance without boards: the Quakers. *The International Journal of Business in Society*, *13*(3), 223-235. https://doi.org/10.1108/cg-12-2010-0105

Warner, L. (2016). *Discernment, God's will and living Jesus: Christian discernment as a way of life*. Barefooted Publishing.

Wicks, A. (2014). Stakeholder theory and spirituality. *Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion*, *11*(4), 294-306. https://doi.org/10.1080/14766086.2014.917984

Wilkins, A. (2014). Professionalizing school governance: the disciplinary effects of school autonomy and inspection on the changing role of school governors. *Journal of Education Policy*, *30*(2), 182-200. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2014.941414

Willard, D. (2012). *Hearing God: Developing a conversational relationship with God*. InterVarsity Press.

Wong, K. K. (2013). Politics and Governance. *Educational Policy*, *27*(2), 410-421. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904813479089

Xaba, M. I., & Nhlapo, V. A. (2014). Principals' views on challenges of their school governance roles. *Africa Education Review*, *11*(3), 424-444. https://doi.org/10.1080/18146627.2014.934996

Yüner, B., & Burgaz, B. (2019). Evaluation of the relationship between school governance and school climate. *Education and Science*, *44*(199), 373-390. https://doi.org/10.15390/eb.2019.7961

Zhu, H., Wang, P., & Bart, C. (2016). Board processes, board strategic involvement, and organisational performance in for-profit and non-profit organisations. *J Bus Ethics*, *136*, 311-328. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-014-2512-1

Zikmund, W. G. (2003). *Business Research Methods* (7 ed.). Thomson Learning.

Zimmermann, J. A. M. S., Bonnie W. (2008). Best practices in board governance: Evidence from South Carolina. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, *19*(2). https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.218

Zohbrabi, M. (2013). Mixed method research: instruments, validity, reliability and reporting findings *Theory and Practice in Language Studies 3*(2), 254-262. https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.3.2

Appendices

Appendix A

Approval Letter from the Human Research Ethics Committee, Avondale University

Human Research Ethics Committee
research.ethics@avondale.edu.au | +61 4980 2121

Avondale UNIVERSITY

20 September 2021

Paul Campey
220B Wells Street
SPRINGFIELD NSW 2250

Dear Paul

ETH.2021.008

The Avondale Human Research Ethics Committee considered the following submitted proposal:
Seeking God's will: the role of Christian Spiritual Discernment in Christian Schools Boards

I am pleased to inform you that the conditions for approval have been met, and the committee has agreed the proposal satisfies the requirements for ethically acceptable research as per the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. As such, the application has been approved.

Approval includes the following document as attached:

- ETH.2021.008 Application Form and related documents v2

I confirm that the Avondale Human Research Ethics Committee is constituted according to the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007* and operates in compliance with applicable regulatory requirements.

Attached to this letter is an Outcome of Consideration of Protocol form for your records.

Please note that this project, along with any resulting publications and presentations, should be reported in Avondale's ResearchOnline repository.

Yours sincerely

M. Anderson

A/Prof Malcolm Anderson
Deputy Chair, Avondale Human Research Ethics Committee

AVONDALE HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Outcome of Consideration of Protocol

Submission Number: ETH.2021.008 **Date of Approval:** 20 September 2021

Project Title: Seeking God's will: the role of Christian Spiritual Discernment in Christian Schools Boards

Submitted by: Paul Campey

Your project was considered by the Avondale Human Research Ethics Committee and approved for a period of 2.5 years from 20 September 2021 to 20 March 2024.

First Annual Review Due: 20 September 2022

Conditions of Approval:

- At regular periods, and not less than annually, Principal Investigators are to provide reports on matters including:
  - Unforeseen events that could affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project
  - Proposed changes in the protocol or research design
  - Updates of the investigators documentation
  - Continued compliance with approved consent procedures and updates of consent documentation
  - Security of records
  - Compliance with other approved procedures
- The project and resulting publications and presentations should be reported in Avondale's ResearchOnline repository.
- All published reports are to carry an acknowledgement stating, *Approved by Avondale Human Research Ethics Committee on [date]*
- Principal Investigators are to provide a final report once the project is complete

M. Anderson

A/Prof Malcolm Anderson
Deputy Chair, Avondale Human Research Ethics Committee

Appendix B

Initial *Email* to *Associations* and *Email* for *Associations* to *Forward* to *Member Schools*

Initial Email to Associations

Dear

As previously discussed with and agreed with you, I have now moved to the next phase of my PhD research in undertaking a significant survey of the majority of Christian schools in Australia and New Zealand in respect of the role of Christian spiritual discernment in decision making by School boards.

Set out below is an email along with a PDF Information Letter attachment that I would be grateful for you forwarding to the Board Chairs, Board Members and Principals of your member schools.

If you could please send out the invitation along with the PDF Information Letter to your member schools on 13 October 2021 so as to enable the survey to be co-ordinated with the other associations that are assisting.

The survey is scheduled to close on 3 November 2021.

I have also included in this email a copy of the survey for your information so you can see what participants will be doing.

As previously discussed, I look forward to sharing the findings of my research with your organisation in due course.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me by email - s19099307@student.avondale.edu.au or by phone on 0438 778 978.

Thank you for your assistance!

Kind Regards
Paul Campey
PhD Candidate
Avondale University

Attachments:

- PDF copy of survey
- Information letter to participants

Email for Associations to forward to Member Schools

Dear

Thank you for the valuable work that you do as a Board Chair, Board Member or Principal of a Christian school.

In an environment of rapid change and ever-increasing compliance requirements for Christian School boards, it is easy for boards to be increasingly focused on the compliance and regulatory aspects of their role as they seek to implement professional governance processes as required by regulators. The outcome can be that rather than being central to decision making, faith and Christian spiritual discernment, is pushed to the edges of the agenda of a Christian school Board meeting.

Accordingly, research is being undertaken on the role of Christian spiritual discernment in the decision making of Christian School boards, as Boards seek to follow God's will in the Schools they govern.

You are invited to participate in this research through an online survey to be completed by Board Chairs, Board Members and Principals of Christian schools across Australia and New Zealand. You will also be given an opportunity, if you so wish, to take part in a second phase of the research through a Zoom or in-person interview.

The survey will take you around 10-15 minutes to complete, and more information is provided in the attached Information Sheet.

The survey closes on 3 November 2021.

The link for the survey is - https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/M79CK3Z

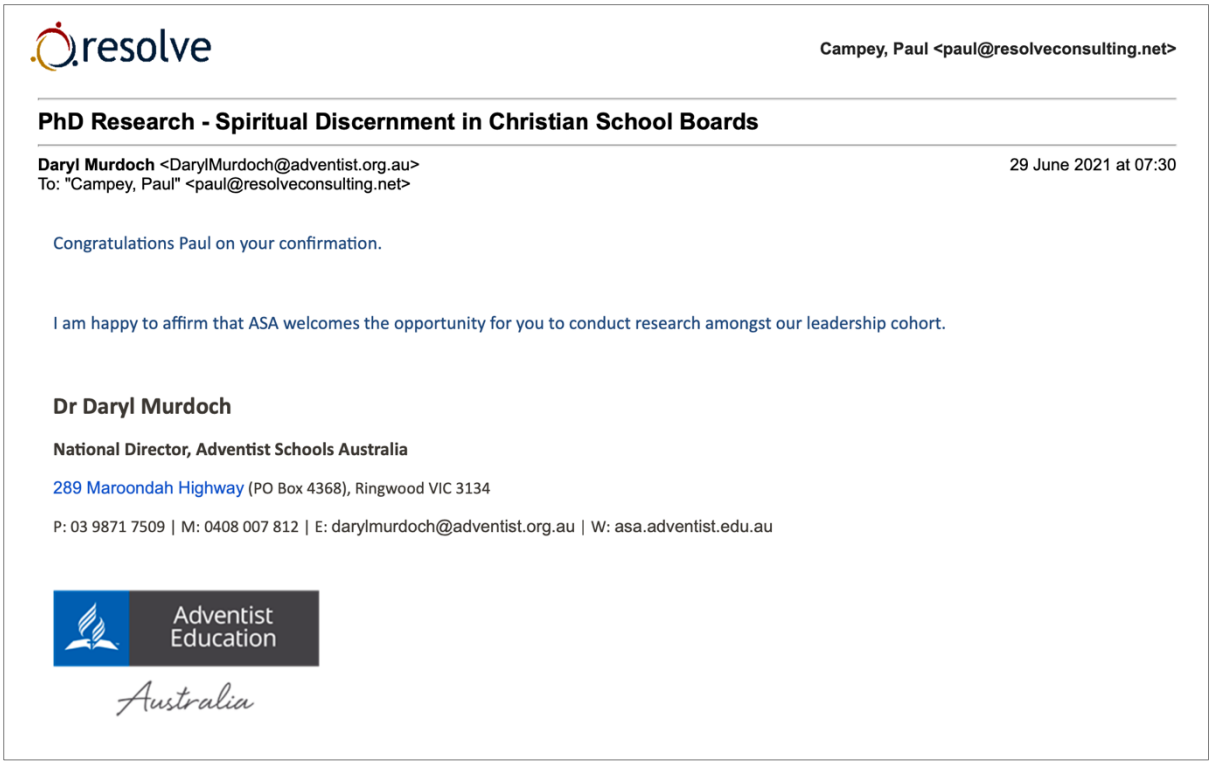
Thank you for your input in this important research.

Kind Regards
Paul Campey
PhD Candidate
Avondale University

Appendix C:

Consent to Distribution of Link to Quantitative Survey

Adventist Schools Australia



resolve

Campey, Paul <paul@resolveconsulting.net>

PhD Research - Spiritual Discernment in Christian School Boards

Daryl Murdoch <DarylMurdoch@adventist.org.au> 29 June 2021 at 07:30
To: "Campey, Paul" <paul@resolveconsulting.net>

Congratulations Paul on your confirmation.

I am happy to affirm that ASA welcomes the opportunity for you to conduct research amongst our leadership cohort.

Dr Daryl Murdoch

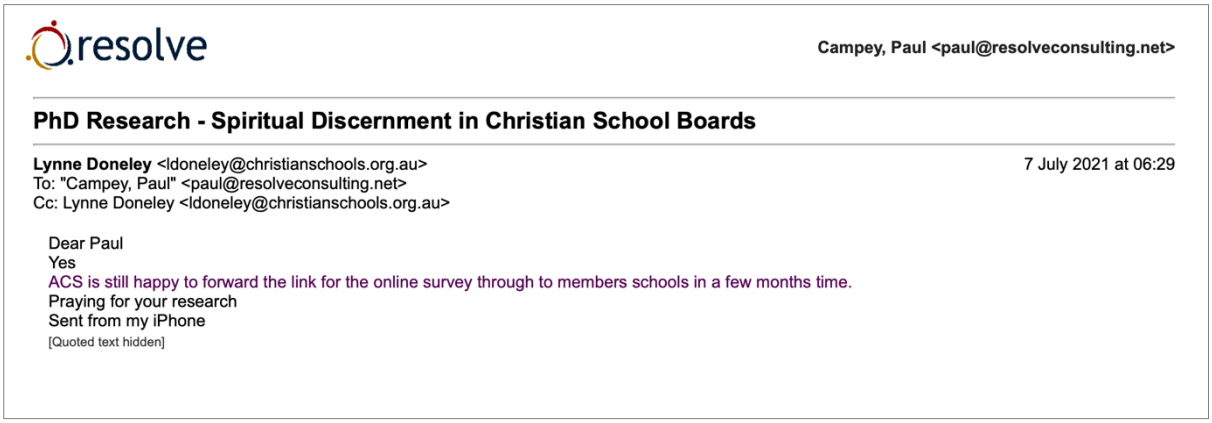
National Director, Adventist Schools Australia

289 Maroondah Highway (PO Box 4368), Ringwood VIC 3134

P: 03 9871 7509 | M: 0408 007 812 | E: darylmurdoch@adventist.org.au | W: asa.adventist.edu.au

Adventist Education
Australia

Associated Christian Schools



resolve

Campey, Paul <paul@resolveconsulting.net>

PhD Research - Spiritual Discernment in Christian School Boards

Lynne Doneley <ldoneley@christianschools.org.au> 7 July 2021 at 06:29
To: "Campey, Paul" <paul@resolveconsulting.net>
Cc: Lynne Doneley <ldoneley@christianschools.org.au>

Dear Paul
Yes
ACS is still happy to forward the link for the online survey through to members schools in a few months time.
Praying for your research
Sent from my iPhone
[Quoted text hidden]

Christian Education National

resolve

Campey, Paul <paul@resolveconsulting.net>

PhD Research - Spiritual Discernment in Christian School Boards

Michelle Dempsey <michelle.dempsey@cen.edu.au> 28 June 2021 at 14:11
To: "Campey, Paul" <paul@resolveconsulting.net>, Kathy Pereira <kathy.pereira@cen.edu.au>

Hi Paul,

We had intended to catch up at the Policy Forum, what a busy time of reuniting that was!

It would have been good to hear a bit more about your research, it sounds really interesting, but in the meantime I'm happy (as indicated before) to share the survey link with our members when you send it through. I'm glad to hear that it's progressing.

Cheers, Michelle

Christian Schools Australia

resolve

Campey, Paul <paul@resolveconsulting.net>

PhD Research - Spiritual Discernment in Christian School Boards

Darren Iselin <DIselin@csa.edu.au> 28 June 2021 at 11:29
To: "Campey, Paul" <paul@resolveconsulting.net>

Hi Paul

Congratulations on reaching this exciting milestone and yes, CSA will definitely assist you in this process. If you could provide a short overview of the study and frame the email you are hoping to be sent out closer to the time that would be ideal.

Looking forward to assisting you in whatever way I can with your research

Darren

DR DARREN ISELIN

Director of Research and Innovation

BTeach, BEd, MEd, PhD, MACE

CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS Australia

0403 381 855 | diselin@csa.edu.au | csa.edu.au

NATIONAL OFFICE | 5 Byfield St, Macquarie Park NSW 2113

New Zealand Association for Christian Schools

resolve

Campey, Paul <paul@resolveconsulting.net>

PhD Research - Spiritual Discernment in Christian School Boards

Mr Shaun Brooker <principal@hamiltonchristian.school.nz> 28 June 2021 at 15:09
To: "Campey, Paul" <paul@resolveconsulting.net>

Afternoon Paul,

All the best for the research, NZACS would be very interested in your findings and would be very happy to forward the invitation to survey to our member schools.

Blessings
Shaun Brooker

Chairman
New Zealand Association for Christian Schools.

Shaun Brooker M.EDL

Principal/Tumuaki

HAMILTON CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Appendix D:

Quantitative Survey Questions

Seeking God's Will: The role of Christian Spiritual Discernment in Christian School Boards

Introduction

This project is to research what Christian Spiritual Discernment practices and processes individuals (Board Chairs, Board Members and Principals) as well as Christian School Boards collectively undertake and how these practices and processes influence the decision making in the governance of Christian Schools in Australia and New Zealand.

You are invited to participate in this research project which is being conducted by Paul Campey, PhD Candidate, Avondale University.

This research is important given the significant growth in Christian Schools in the past 50 years, yet there has been very limited research on independent school boards and even less on Christian School Boards specifically. In addition, there has been no study on the role of Christian Spiritual Discernment in the decision-making of Christian School Boards.

WHO IS BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?
Board Chairs, Board Members and Principal of member schools in 5 Christian School Associations in Australia and New Zealand. Boards in New Zealand Schools include Proprietor Boards, Land Trust Boards and local Boards of Trustees.

CONSENT
I understand that the project will be conducted as described in the Information Statement to Research Participants, a copy of which has been made available to me. I have read and understood the information provided in the Information Statement to Research Participants.

I understand I can withdraw from the project at any time and do not have to give any reason for withdrawing.

The survey will close on 3 November 2021.

By clicking on the "next" button, I consent to complete 1 (one) online survey.

Seeking God's Will: The role of Christian Spiritual Discernment in Christian School Boards

Survey Questions

* 1. Approximately how much time in a typical week would you individually spend on the following spiritual activities?

	No time	1-10 minutes	11-30 minutes	31-60 minutes	61-90 minutes	>90 minutes
General Bible reading / devotional time	○	○	○	○	○	○
General prayer	○	○	○	○	○	○
Specific Bible reading in relation to issues before the Board	○	○	○	○	○	○
Specific prayer in relation to issues before the Board	○	○	○	○	○	○

* 2. Approximately how long would you individually spend undertaking the following activities in preparation for a typical Board meeting?

	No time	1-10 minutes	11-30 minutes	31-60 minutes	61-90 minutes	>90 minutes
Researching issues	○	○	○	○	○	○
Writing reports	○	○	○	○	○	○
Reading reports	○	○	○	○	○	○
Praying about issues or decisions	○	○	○	○	○	○
Talking to others about the reports or issues	○	○	○	○	○	○
Thinking about issues for the meeting	○	○	○	○	○	○

Other preparations for meetings, please specify what they are and how long you spend on them in minutes

* 3. Does your Board have an orientation process for new Board members that addresses the spiritual aspects of their role and responsibilities?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Not sure
- ○ Other (please specify)

* 4. Which of the following policies apply to your Board? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Board members must belong to the Church that the school is a ministry of
- ☐ Board members are required to subscribe to the School's Statement of Faith
- ☐ Board members are required to confirm a lifestyle statement that is Biblically based
- ☐ New Board Member selection includes spiritual requirement(s) for prospective Board members
- ☐ Board member removal includes failure to meet spiritual requirement(s) as a reason
- ☐ A group covenant exists that Board Members agree to that affirms the Biblical values and guiding principles governing the Board's procedures, processes and behaviours
- ☐ A group covenant exists that Board Members agree to in relation to certain spiritual activities beyond their Board meeting time together (eg. individual prayer, Bible reading, etc)
- ☐ There are a set of core values that guide the governing Board's procedures and processes
- ☐ A Biblical means of resolving conflicts among Board Members
- ☐ The Board has not adopted any specific policies that address the spirituality of Board Members individually or corporately
- ☐ Other (please specify)

* 5. Which of the following describes the main process your Board uses to come to a decision? (select only one)

- ○ Majority vote
- ○ Form a consensus
- ○ General agreement
- ○ Not sure
- ○ Other (please specify)

Seeking God's Will: The role of Christian Spiritual Discernment in Christian School Boards

* 6. If, as a Board you vote on decisions, generally the decisions you make are best described as (select only one)

- ○ Always unanimous
- ○ Nearly always unanimous
- ○ Often having 1 or 2 Board Members voting against a decision
- ○ Other (please specify)
- ○ Closely fought and we have on occasion have very close votes on decisions
- ○ Closely fought and we have on occasion a tied vote on decisions

* 7. To what extent has your Board implemented an intentional process for Christian Spiritual Discernment into its decision-making?

- ○ A great deal
- ○ A lot
- ○ A moderate amount
- ○ Other (please specify)
- ○ A little
- ○ None at all
- ○ Not sure

* 8. Which of the following practices does your Board incorporate into its agenda/decision making processes? (select all that apply)

- ☐ General prayer (eg. liturgical, spontaneous, intercession, quiet trust, etc)
- ☐ Prayer for indifference (ie. a prayer focussed on freedom from pre-set thoughts on an issue)
- ☐ Prayer for wisdom (ie. a prayer focussed on seeking God's wisdom in decision making)
- ☐ Bible reading
- ☐ Lectio Divina (the process of Bible reading and listening to God's word in the present moment)
- ☐ Fasting
- ☐ Worship/singing
- ☐ Other (please specify)
- ☐ Silence
- ☐ Examen of Consciousness (the practise of paying attention to God's presence in the circumstances of life)
- ☐ Confession
- ☐ Consolation and Desolation (practice of paying attention to a sense of life and peace versus a dis-ease and turmoil on an issue)
- ☐ Prophecy
- ☐ We do not practice any of the activities listed

* 9. Approximately how long in a typical Board Meeting would be spent on the following activities?

	No time	1-5 minutes	6-10 minutes	11-30 minutes	31-60 minutes	61-90 minutes	>90 minutes
Opening prayer	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Bible reading/ devotions	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Prayer on specific decisions	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Closing prayer	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

* 10. Does your Board have an annual or regular Board Retreat?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Not sure
- ○ Other (please specify)

Seeking God's Will: The role of Christian Spiritual Discernment in Christian School Boards

* 11. If you do have a Board Retreat, the activities on your Retreat typically include (select all that apply)

- [ ] Purpose/Vision/Mission discussions
- [ ] Strategic planning
- [ ] Board training
- [ ] Extended Bible reading/devotions time
- [ ] Extended prayer time
- [ ] Other (please specify)
- [ ] Board relationship building activities
- [ ] Team building activities
- [ ] A regular Board Meeting
- [ ] None of these activities

* 12. In relation to the decisions that the Board will make at its meetings, I generally come

- ( ) With a very clear sense of the way I will vote on decisions
- ( ) With no real sense of the way I will vote, I want to hear what others think
- ( ) I nearly always have questions that will determine how I will vote
- ( ) I want to participate in spiritual discernment with other Board Members before I decide how I will vote
- ( ) Other (please specify)

* 13. I often feel rushed into making decisions at a Board Meeting

- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No
- ( ) Not sure
- ( ) Other (please specify)

* 14. When we are in the midst of discussing a significant decision in a Board Meeting I often (select all that apply)

- [ ] Feel completely at ease in the process
- [ ] Want more time to reflect on the decision
- [ ] Want to pray about a decision in the meeting but we do not do so
- [ ] Other (please specify)
- [ ] Want to pray about a decision in the meeting and we do so
- [ ] Not sure

* 15. If we have a significant decision to make and we stop to pray in the midst of a Board Meeting, the following often happens (select all that apply)

- [ ] We make the same decision we were already headed for
- [ ] New perspectives/ideas emerge after a time of prayer
- [ ] We completely change direction on the decision we were going to make
- [ ] The nature of the decision is clearly better than before we prayed about it
- [ ] Other (please specify)
- [ ] It helps unite the Board around the decision we are making
- [ ] The atmosphere in the Board Meeting changes for the better
- [ ] We do not stop to pray in the middle of decision making

Seeking God's Will: The role of Christian Spiritual Discernment in Christian School Boards

Board Information

* 16. How many Board Members do you currently have on your Board?

- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- Not sure
- Other (please specify)

* 17. What is the maximum number of Board Members you can have on your Board?

- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- Not sure
- Other (please specify)

* 18. In a typical year, how many times does your Board meet?

- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- Not sure
- Other (please specify)

* 19. What is the duration of a typical Board Meeting?

- <1 hour
- 1 hour
- 2 hours
- 3 hours
- 4 hours
- 5 hours
- > 5 hours
- Not sure
- Other (please specify)

20. Any other comments in respect of Christian Spiritual Discernment and Christian School Boards or any other matters related to questions in this survey?

Seeking God's Will: The role of Christian Spiritual Discernment in Christian School Boards

General Demographics

* 21. Please select your current main role in the school

- ○ Principal / Head of School
- ○ Board Chair
- ○ Board Member
- ○ Other (please specify)

* 22. What is the cumulative length of time you have held your current main role at this school?

- ○ <1 year
- ○ 1-5 years
- ○ 6-10 years
- ○ 11-20 years
- ○ 21-30 years
- ○ 31-40 years
- ○ > 40 years
- ○ Not sure
- ○ Other (please specify)

* 23. The age of the school

- ○ <1 year
- ○ 1-5 years
- ○ 6-10 years
- ○ 11-20 years
- ○ 21-30 years
- ○ 31-40 years
- ○ 41-50 years
- ○ > 50 years
- ○ Not sure
- ○ Other (please specify)

* 24. The number of students currently enrolled at the school

- ○ <100
- ○ 101-300
- ○ 301-600
- ○ 601-900
- ○ 901-1,200
- ○ 1,201-1,500
- ○ 1,501-1,800
- ○ >1,800
- ○ Not sure

* 25. The country the school is located in

- ○ Australia
- ○ New Zealand

* 26. Location of the school

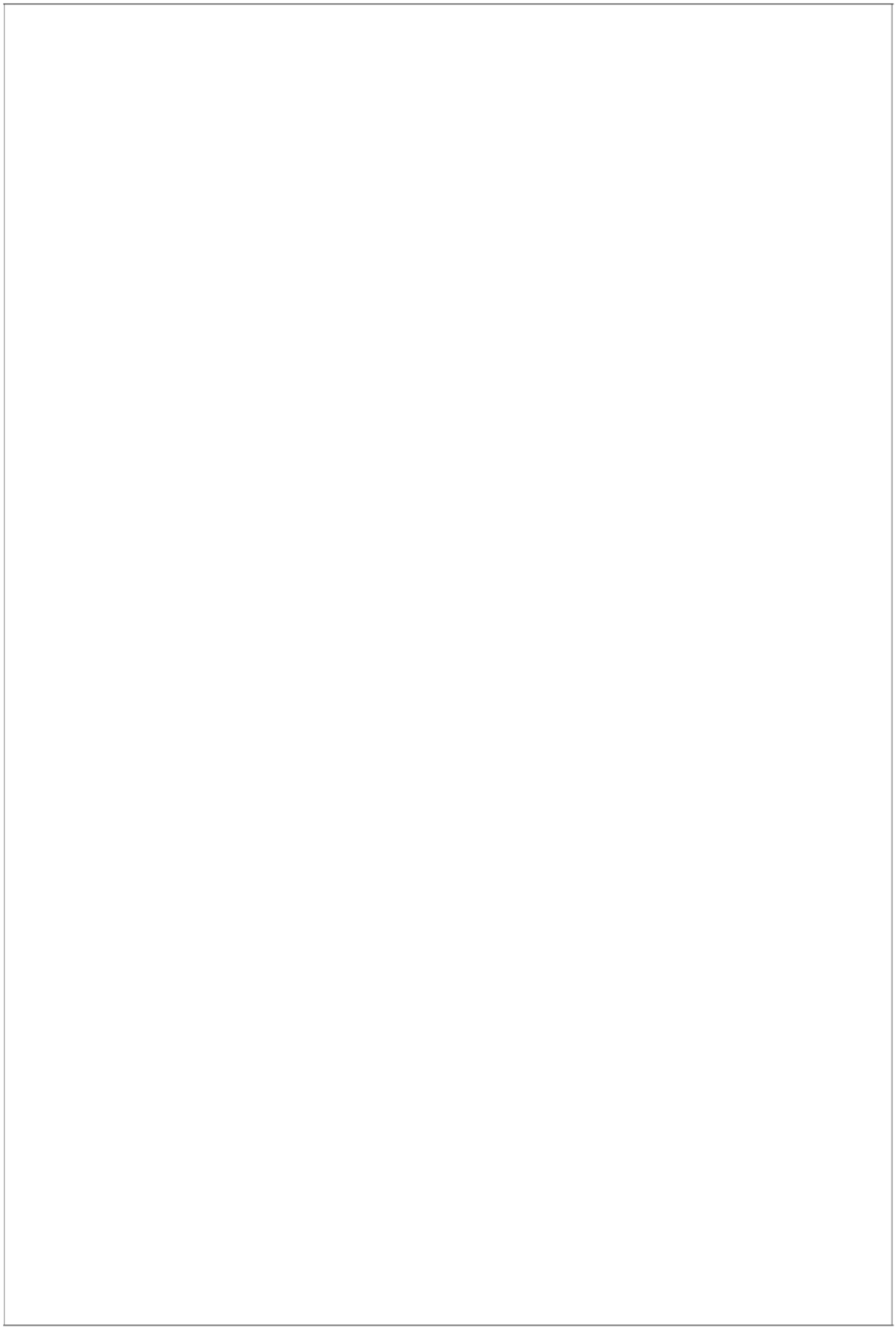
- ○ Capital city / metropolitan / suburban
- ○ Regional city
- ○ Rural / country
- ○ Other (please specify)

* 27. Affiliation(s) of the school

- ☐ Adventist Schools Australia (ASA)
- ☐ Associated Christian Schools (ACS)
- ☐ Christian Education National (CEN)
- ☐ Christian Schools Australia (CSA)
- ☐ New Zealand Association for Christian Schools (NZACS)
- ☐ Association of Independent Schools (in your state)
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Other (please specify)

* 28. I would be prepared to volunteer to be available to undertake the second phase of the Research Project being an in-person or Zoom based interview of approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. Not everyone who volunteers will be selected to participate in Phase 2.
The interview is planned to be conducted in the first half of 2022 and will explore further Christian Spiritual Discernment and Christian School Boards.

- ○ Yes
- ○ No



Seeking God's Will: The role of Christian Spiritual Discernment in Christian School Boards

* 29. The following are my contact details which are only provided for the purposes of follow up for involvement in Phase 2 of the Research Project on Christian Spiritual Discernment and Christian School Boards

Name	
School	
State	
Country	
Email Address	

Thank you for participating in this survey and contributing to this Research Project, it is greatly appreciated!

Appendix E

Information Statement for Research Participants

INFORMATION LETTER

Seeking God's will: The role of Christian Spiritual Discernment in Christian School Boards

To research what Christian Spiritual Discernment practices and processes individuals (Board Chairs, Board Members and Principals) as well as Christian School Boards collectively undertake and how these practices and processes influence the decision making in the governance of Christian Schools in Australia and New Zealand.

INVITATION

You are invited to participate in this research project which is being conducted by Paul Campey, PhD Candidate, Avondale University.

PURPOSE AND IMPORTANCE OF THIS RESEARCH

The purpose of this study is to examine "What role does Christian Spiritual Discernment play in the Governance of Christian School Boards in Australia and New Zealand?"

This research is important given the significant growth in Christian Schools in the past 50 years, yet there has been very limited research on independent school boards and even less on Christian School Boards specifically. In addition, there has been no study on the role of Christian Spiritual Discernment in the decision-making of Christian School Boards.

WHO IS BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

Board Chairs, Board Members and Principal of member schools in 5 Christian School Associations in Australia and New Zealand.

WHAT DOES PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete an anonymous online quantitative survey in respect of the Board of the Christian School you are involved with. In addition, if you volunteer and are selected, undertake an in-person or Zoom based interview that further explores Christian Spiritual Discernment and your Christian School Board.

Excellence in Christian Higher Education since 1897
582 Freemans Drive (PO Box 19), Cooranbong, NSW, Australia, 2265
Telephone: +61 2 4980 2222
ACN: 108 186 401 | ABN 53 108 186 401
A member of the worldwide Adventist system of universities and colleges

HOW MUCH TIME WILL IT TAKE?
The online questionnaire should take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

The interview is expected to last approximately 45 minutes to an hour.

POSSIBLE RISKS OR INCOVENIENCES

It is believed that the only inconvenience will be the time needed to contribute to the data collection processes.

BENEFITS
We cannot and do not guarantee or promise you any individual benefits from participating in this research, we do, however, hope this research will shed light on improving the decision making of Christian School Boards and the integration of faith in this process.

CONFIDENTIALITY, ANONYMITY AND DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION
All names will be removed from the data and you will be allocated a numerical code which will be used for all observations, interview and questionnaire data.

The data will be stored for five years on a password protected cloud server. At the end of the five-year period after the conclusion of the research, hard copies will be shredded, and electronic data will be erased from discs, servers and hard drives.

All aspects of the study including results will be stored securely and only accessed by the researchers unless you consent otherwise.

USE OF INFORMATION COLLECTED
The information collected will be analysed and reported in a thesis, research papers, journal articles, training materials and professional conferences. Confidentiality of individual participants and organisations will be assured. In any publication, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified. Participants will be sent a summary of the final results.

FREEDOM OF CONSENT
Participation in this research is entirely your choice [or voluntary]. It is completely up to you whether or not to participate. Only people who give their informed consent will be included in the study. Even if you agree to participate you may withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

Please read this information statement and be sure you understand its contents before you consent to participate. After you have read this information, Paul Campey is available to

discuss it with you further. If there is anything you do not understand, or you have questions, you can contact the researcher.

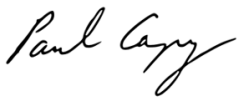
If you would like to participate please complete the quantitative survey and this will indicate your consent.

FURTHER INFORMATION
If you would like further information, please contact:

Paul Campey
Chief Investigator
s19099307@student.avondale.edu.au

If you have a complaint or concern about this research project or the way it is conducted, contact Avondale's Research Services Office at PO Box 19, Cooranbong, NSW, 2265 or phone +61-2-4980 2121, or email: researchoffice@avondale.edu.au. You may also wish to discuss your concerns with the researcher.

Thank you for considering this invitation.



Paul Campey
Chief Investigator

Lisa Barnes
Supervisor

Appendix F

Qualitative Interview Consent Form

Avondale

AVONDALE RESEARCHERS
here for good

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM
QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW

SEEKING GOD'S WILL: THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT IN CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS BOARDS

RESEARCHER - PAUL CAMPEY - s19099307@student.avondale.edu.au

I agree to participate in the above research project and I give my consent freely.

I have read and understand the information provided in the Information Statement.

I understand that the project will be conducted as described in the Information Statement, a copy of which I have been given to keep.

I understand I can withdraw from the project at any time and do not have to give any reason for withdrawing. I will not be disadvantaged in anyway by withdrawing.

The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction.

I consent to:

- Participate in an interview that will be video and/or audio recorded

I understand that my personal information will remain confidential to the researcher.

Name	Signature	Date

Appendix G

Qualitative Interview Questions

Qualitative Interview Questions – Interview - # _____

Name: _____

School: _____

Date: _____ Start time: _____ End Time: _____

Consent Form Received: Yes/No – if no, verbal consent given to being recorded – Y / N

Do Intro about the PhD

	QUALITATIVE QUESTIONS	RQ	Notes
1	Tell me about the practices you individually undertake in preparation for a Board Meeting.	1	
2	Has there been discussion amongst the Board about individual spiritual development including the spiritual wellbeing of Board Members? Please explain your answer.	2	

3	What are the main spiritual practices that you undertake together as a Board during a meeting?	2	
4	Do you think the Board has changed its prayerfulness and seeking of discernment in your time on the Board? If so, how?	2	

5	What are the spiritual practices that you think should be included in the Board's decision making, if any?	2	
6	Have your Board's spiritual practices changed over the time you have been involved in the Board? If so, how?	3	

7	Do you believe that spiritual discernment practices have an impact on your Board's decision-making? If so, how?	3	
8	What do you think characterizes a good Christian School Board? Please explain your answer.		

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA			
9	What is your current major role in the school? - Head of School / Principal - Board Chair - Board Member - Other (please specify)		
10	The age of the school (in years) - < 1 year - 1-5 years - 6-10 years - 11-20 years - 21-30 years - 31-40 years - 41-50 years - >50 years - Don't know		
11	Number of students currently enrolled in the school - < 100 - 101-300 - 301-600 - 601-900 - 901-1,200 - 1,200-1,500		

	- >1,500 - Don't know		
12	Country the school is located in - Australia - New Zealand		
13	School location - Capital City / Metropolitan / Suburban - Regional City - Rural / Country - Other (please specify)		
14	Affiliation of your school (select all that apply) - Adventist Schools Australia (ASA) - Associated Christian Schools (ACS) - Christian Education National (CEN) - Christian Schools Australia (CSA) - New Zealand Association for Christian Schools (NZACS)		

	- Association of Independent Schools - Not sure / Don't know - Other (please specify)		

Appendix H

Research Dissemination Activities

Articles (non-peer reviewed)

Campey, P. (2021). Seeking God's will in board meetings, *Sight Magazine, https://sightmagazine.com.au/sight-seeing/sight-seeing-seeking-god-s-will-in-board-meetings/*

Conference Presentations

Campey, P. (2020, May). *Christian spiritual discernment and board decision making*. Paper presented at the Christian Ministry Advancement 2020 National Conference, online.

Campey, P. (2021, March). *Seeking God's will: The role of Christian spiritual discernment in Christian School boards*. Paper presented at the Christian Education Research Centre 2021 Symposium, Cooranbong, Australia.

Campey, P. (2021, April). *Seeking God's will: The role of Christian spiritual discernment in Christian School boards*. Paper presented at the Christian Ministry Advancement Board Training Day, Sydney, Australia.

Campey, P. (2021, July). *Seeking God's will: The role of Christian spiritual discernment in Christian School boards*. Paper presented at the Associated Christian Schools Governance Series, online.

Campey, P. (2022, March). *Seeking God's will: The role of Christian spiritual discernment in Christian School boards*. Paper presented at the Association of Christian Schools International Global Council Conference, San Diego, USA.

Campey, P. (2022, May). Seeking God's will: The role of Christian spiritual discernment in Christian School boards. Paper presented at the 2022 ASA Research Symposium, online.

Campey, P. (2022, August). *Community governance and spiritual discernment*. Paper presented at the International Network of Churches 2022 Leadership Conference, Gold Coast, Australia.

Campey, P. (2022, October). *Christian spiritual discernment in school decision making*. Paper presented at the Christian schools 2022 National Business Conference, Gold Coast, Australia.

Campey, P. (2024, March). *Christian spiritual discernment*. Paper presented at the Greenville University 2024 Leadership Seminar, Greenville, USA.

Campey, P. (2025, March). *Governance & Seeking God's will*. Paper presented at the Associated Christian Schools 2025 Governance and Leadership Masterclass, Brisbane, Australia.

Campey, P. (2025, October). Seeking God's will: The nature of Christian spiritual discernment and the role it plays in Christian school Board decision making. Paper presented at the October 2025 Avondale University Soap Box Shorts Seminar, online.

Campey, P. (2025, November). *Seeking God's will: Christian spiritual discernment in Christian School boards*. Paper presented at the Association of Christian Schools International Western Canada 2025 Board and Administrator Conference, Banff, Canada.

Campey, P., & Phan, A. (2024, July). *Governance and God*. Paper presented at the Christian Venues Association 2024 National Conference, Stanwell Park, Australia.

Campey, P., & Trudel, J. (2021, September). *Developing board members, strategic and engaged governance*. Paper presented at the Christian Ministry Advancement 2021 National Conference, online.

Campey, P., & Trudel, J. (2022, February). *Seeking God's will: Spiritual Discernment and board decision making.* Paper presented at the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities 2022 International Forum, Dallas, USA.