

**MISSIONAL GOVERNANCE**

BOARDS THAT TRANSFORM

# PLAYBOOK



AN INITIATIVE OF



**CHRISTIAN  
SCHOOLS**  
*Australia*



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## **Welcome to Missional Governance: Boards That Transform.**

Our goal for this resource is to provide your board with a series of short-form, thought provoking sessions that you can work through in each board meeting throughout the year. As a board you have access to a wealth of highly technical and industry specific material that can assist you in the day-to-day governance of the school. That's not what this resource is about. What we aim to do is provide you with an opportunity to step back - just for a moment - and evaluate the **why** behind what you do. Through short videos, insightful content and realistic case studies we want to give you an opportunity you may rarely get in a governance context: the opportunity to reflect on your sacred mission.

Through each of the 8 sessions in this Playbook you will find a very simple structure. Each session should only take about 20 minute of your time and is a great way to kick-start a board meeting, and refine your overall approach to governance.

### **MISSIONAL GOVERNANCE**

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BOARDS THAT TRANSFORM

## SAMPLE STRUCTURE

- **Watch the Video** - at the start of each session there is a video that introduces the topic, and provides some “food for thought.” You can access each video by clicking on the video icon underneath the title
- **Read the Content** - for each session there is a page of thoughtful content which helps to guide your reflection on the relevant issue. You could all spend a moment reading this after the video, or ask board members to read through it before.
- **Engage with the Case Study** - for each session there is a scenario-based case study that is designed for your board to work through. Most of this can be done as a simple discussion, but the key is that you take the scenario seriously, as if it were something your school was being presented with. You can spend as much or as little time on this as needed.
- **Ask the Questions** - the session finished with some questions for you to consider. These can be “take-away” questions, for individual reflection - or they can be questions you work through together. They are a great way to summarise the whole session.
- **Pray** - finish the session with prayer, asking God to guide you in all that you do.

We know how busy a board environment can be, but rather than using that as an excuse to ignore the big questions we want to challenge you to see your busyness as a **reason** to engage with this content in all of its fullness. You can use these sessions as a way of opening up each board meeting, a way to get people thinking and focusing on the reason you are gathered together.

After all, a school board is more than just a group of overseers, you are the ones holding the vision and mission of the school. Our goal is to enable boards to engage in **missional governance**, so that they become a **board that transforms**.

# VISION

## INTO THE FUTURE



Everything rises and falls on vision.

Though most school board meetings are filled with agenda items about enrolments, compliance, finance and buildings, the primary responsibility of the board is to be a holder of the vision, mission and values of the school. Simon Sinek has reminded us that we should always “start with why” and school boards are not excluded from this wisdom. As a board member, do you know something of the history of your school? Why was it started? What motivated the founders to volunteer their time, energy and often finance to make your school community possible? Would they be pleased with the contribution your school is making, or would they feel that you have lost your way?

There is an old saying: “the true meaning of life is to plant trees under whose shade you will never get to sit.” This is the world of school governance, providing structures and environments that enable young people to grow, develop, and build up the future.

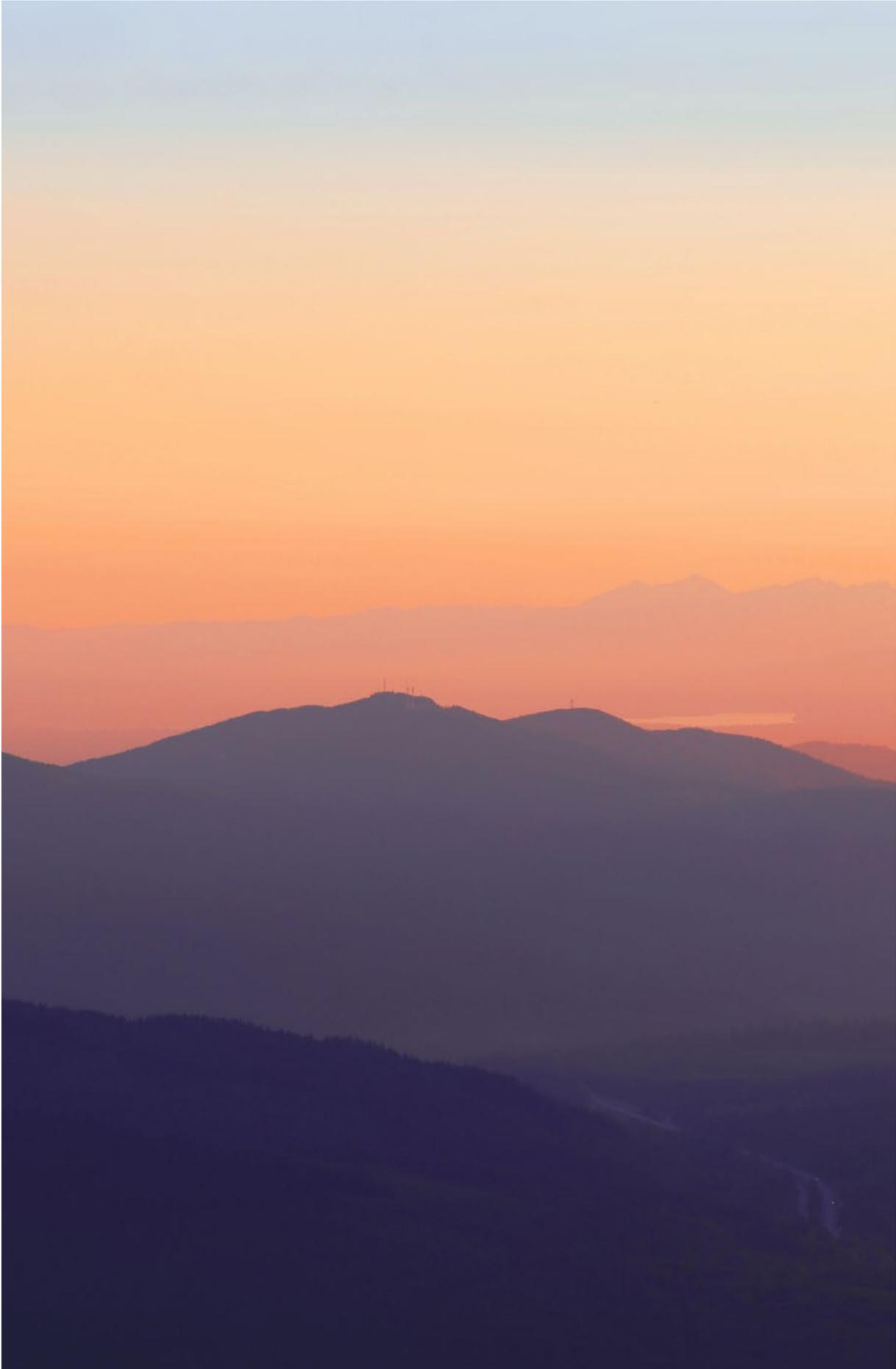
It is likely that many (if not most) of our current year 1 students will be alive at the start of the 22nd century, so they will see dramatic changes in their lifetime. Appreciative of our past, conscious of the reality of the present, and open to the possibilities of the future, good school boards revisit their vision, mission and values to ensure they remain valid and provide the appropriate direction for the “why” behind our school.

Can the vision for a school be reviewed?

It’s an interesting question, and the answer is probably “yes, but not casually and not too often.” In other words, vision should usually be at a high level and shouldn’t shift with passing fads or temporary misfortunes. At times we might need to have a more stretching vision. Our school might have succeeded beyond the founders’ wildest dreams, and it might now be possible to aim for things they would have considered impossible. Or we could decide that a shift is needed. For example, many Christians schools in Australia started with a vision to provide Christian Education to Christian families. Many required prospective students to provide a letter from their local church confirming that the family attended regularly. Some of those schools have shifted their emphasis and have intentionally decided to open their enrollment to all families, usually because they believe that the school can have a missional impact in their community. We live at a time when it is very difficult to persuade people who are not already Christians to attend a church, yet increasingly large numbers will send their children to a Christian school. This is a scenario most school founders did not anticipate, but it could impact the focus of the school. If a shift is agreed to, the board should lead the process. It is not something the school should simply drift into – for if they do, clarity of vision and purpose will be lost.

**They “understood the times and knew what Israel should do”**

*1 Chron 12:32.*

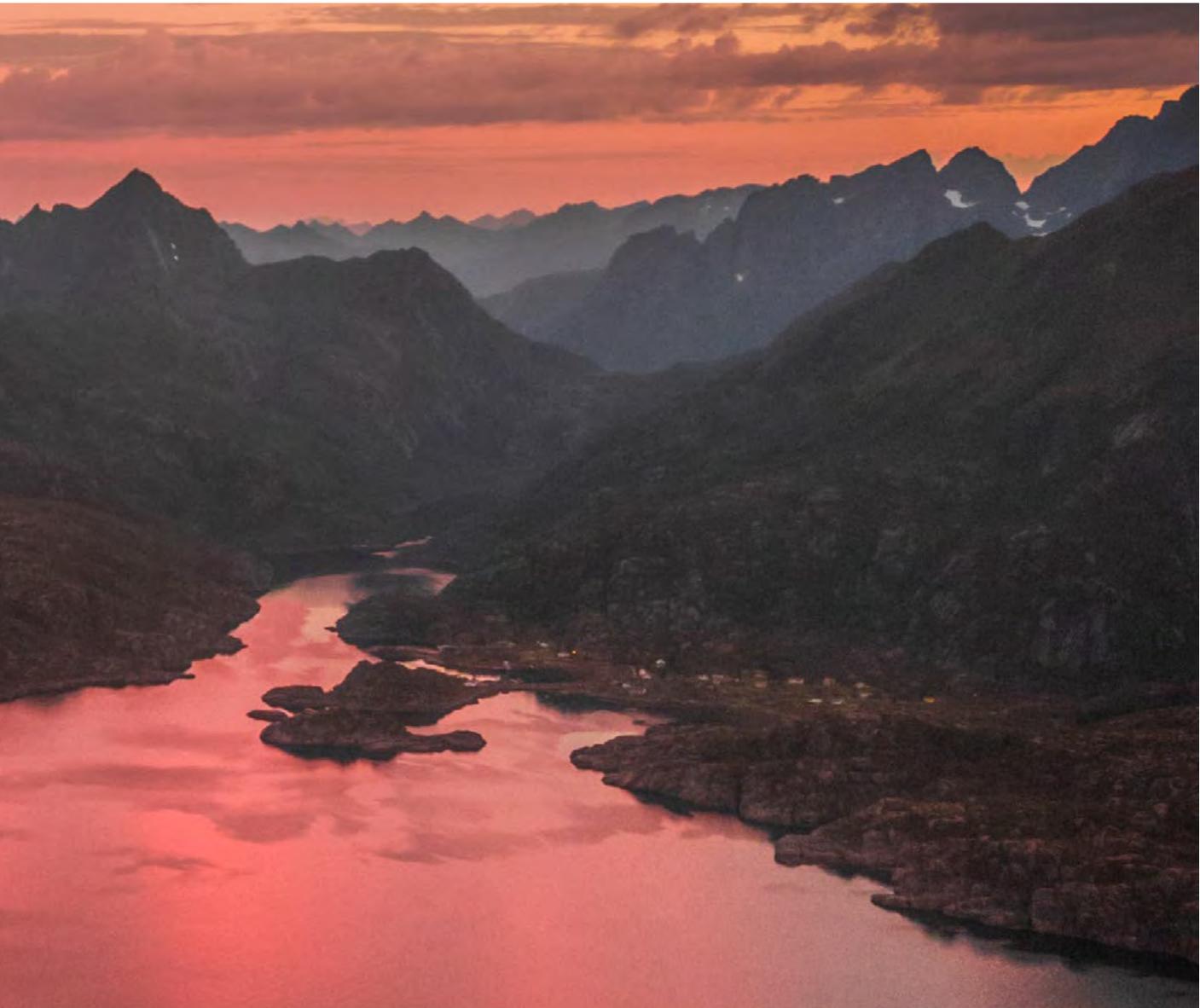




Whilst holding the vision of the school, board members know that a vision without a plan of how to attain it is simply a dream. The vision needs to find tangible expression. Most often this is done when we develop a strategic plan to guide its attainment. We can think of this as supplementing the dream with a map. We are not interested in never never land, but will make realistic plans for the journey ahead, mapping them out in a strategic plan. The strategic plan should play a major role in board meetings, helping us to ensure that we are strategically working towards our mission and vision.

Our map (strategic plan) needs to be supported by markers that indicate if we are moving in the right direction, or if we need to alter course.

We can think of this as providing a GPS system. Thinking through appropriate reporting and measuring mechanisms for our strategic plan is an important part of the board's work. It can also be amongst its most satisfying, as we see vision implemented and met. At times it is achieved so well that we dream again and hear God call us to operate on a yet most expansive canvas - for the overall vision of Christian Education is enormous and aims for God's love to impact and transform the world. It could be that your school has a more significant part in making that happen than your founders ever dreamt.



## CASE STUDY

As a board you have noted that all of the members seem jaded and overly busy. Each meeting feels like a rush to the finish line and whilst no major balls have been dropped, no one can remember the why behind what they are doing. Sure, it's about being fiscally responsible and ensuring the school stays afloat and meets its regulatory targets, but many of the board members have started to indicate that the investment of time is too significant for them to just “keep the plates spinning” so to speak.

At one particular meeting, the chair of the board suggests that the board has drifted from its “mission” and needs to get back on track.

**You are instructed to come up with a 12 month plan designed to re-invigorate the board, renewing its focus and instilling a fresh sense of mission. What do you do?**

## QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- What do you want your school to look and feel like in ten years time?
- What is your strategy for making regular “vision-time” every year?
- How can you ensure vision flows from the board into the wider school community?

# RELATIONSHIP

## MODELLING THE WAY



Board relationships matter, and the way we model healthy relationships has the capacity to influence the relational culture of the entire school.

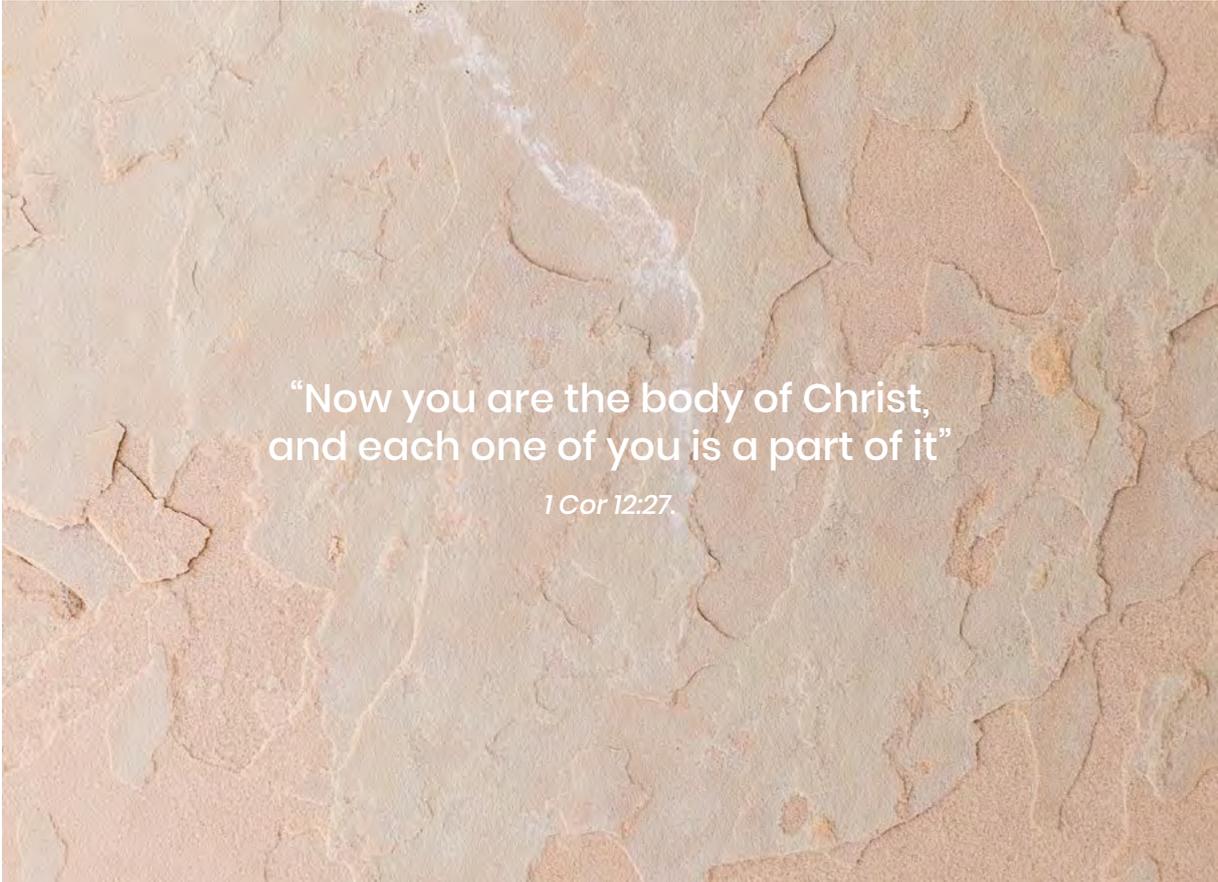
If our meetings are fractious, rude and suspicious, we are foolish to assume it won't impact the wider school community, for ultimately the board is not only responsible for the compliance and financial well being of the school, but also for its culture. However it is not simply through harmonious relationships that we model the way. Our boards should have a diversity of skills, reflecting the value of having different perspectives to guide good decision making.

An important thing to remember is that diversity of thought and opinion is a good and healthy thing. If we all agreed with each other all of the time, we'd be in trouble. We can learn the art of what Rabbi Jonathan Sacks calls "arguing for the sake of heaven", where we systematically review the merits of all approaches from different sides to ensure the best decisions are reached. Sacks differentiates between arguing for victory - where someone wants to win at all costs, compared to what the ancient Jewish rabbis called "arguing for the sake of heaven." This second approach reminds us that our arguments and discussions should not be about personal ego, but to reach the best possible decision having canvassed many different views. Christian Boards remember that their work is "for the sake of heaven" and that the board should have a culture of curiosity and respect, for without them some board members will be hesitant to participate lest their opinion is met with derision. When that happens, decisions will often be poorly informed. What matters is not that we hold different views, but how we approach our differences. For a Christian school this is of critical importance. If our faith does not inform the way we approach disagreements, people will ask what it does inform.

Board members are often selected because they have a specific area of expertise they can offer to the board. Some will have financial expertise, others are educational experts, others are skilled at managing risk, yet others are aware of HR requirements - and we could go on. It is important for the board of a Christian school to have some members with training in theology, and those with a good understanding of both education and how "not for profits" differ from "for profit" organizations. The failure to differentiate the motivation behind "for profits" and "not for profits" can cause many misunderstandings. It is about starting with "why" and always being mindful of the vision and mission of the school.

Learning how to disagree well is important, but so is moving on once a decision has been made. Regardless of the specific reasons behind each board member's appointment, board resolutions are board resolutions. For example, we can't delegate all financial decisions to the accountant on the board, for ultimately it is the board as a whole that is responsible for all agreements reached. A challenge for all boards is to get the rich mixture of skills and knowledge cumulatively held by the board to help the school reach its mission and vision. A culture of transparency and a willingness to respectfully interact with the views of each board member is important. Quieter board members should be encouraged to participate, and a good board chair knows that part of their role is to create a climate where all know that their contribution is welcome.

Take some time to reflect on the relationships within your board. Most school boards are blessed with gifted and talented members. The key question is if our relationships are such that each board member brings their best contribution to the table.



“Now you are the body of Christ,  
and each one of you is a part of it”

*1 Cor 12:27.*

## CASE STUDY

At a previous meeting, two board members had a very strong disagreement about an important issue. It got to the point where the meeting needed to be paused while they both went to get some fresh air. The issue was tabled, as further discussions at that meeting would probably have been unhelpful. During the month between meetings each of the members who were in dispute have been calling other board members to rally up support for their position. In the course of their discussions they have made false allegations about the other member and now there is significant tension among the board, as what began as a minor dispute has turned into a messy relational conflict.

One board member decides to step down as they can no longer work on the same team as the other, but this has made everyone feel uncomfortable. In recognising that modelling relationships is paramount to any Christian organisation, it has been decided that the board needs to confront this issue face to face, with all parties involved.

**You are in the meeting, discuss.**

(It might help to role play in this scenario - asking two of the board members to play the disputing members).

## QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- What is the dispute resolution process for your board?
- What tangible ways can you ensure that relationships are fostered among board members throughout the year?
- How might the board seek to build relationship with the staff and wider school community?

# DECISION

## FAITH-FILLED WISDOM



All boards make decisions. Good boards make good ones, great boards, great ones! Differentiating between them takes much discussion, debate, openness and candour. We shouldn't sweat the small stuff, but aim to discern what matters most.

There are many dimensions that go into making good decisions, and boards should think through their preferred approach. It can be as simple as asking the role that our faith has in decision making. While most boards would say that it significantly shapes decision making, we should explore what this means in practice. Sometimes the line between a faith filled decision and an irresponsible one is difficult to decide, and often boards adopt specific criteria to guide them. They may, for example, require a high level of consensus for any decision that moves them outside of the routine, working on the assumption that if God is guiding us along a new path, this will be clear to all board members.

While board members are appointed for the expertise they bring, this might need to be supplemented by external input or the insight of consultants. They can help us test the rigour of our decisions and ensure that we are informed by best practice.

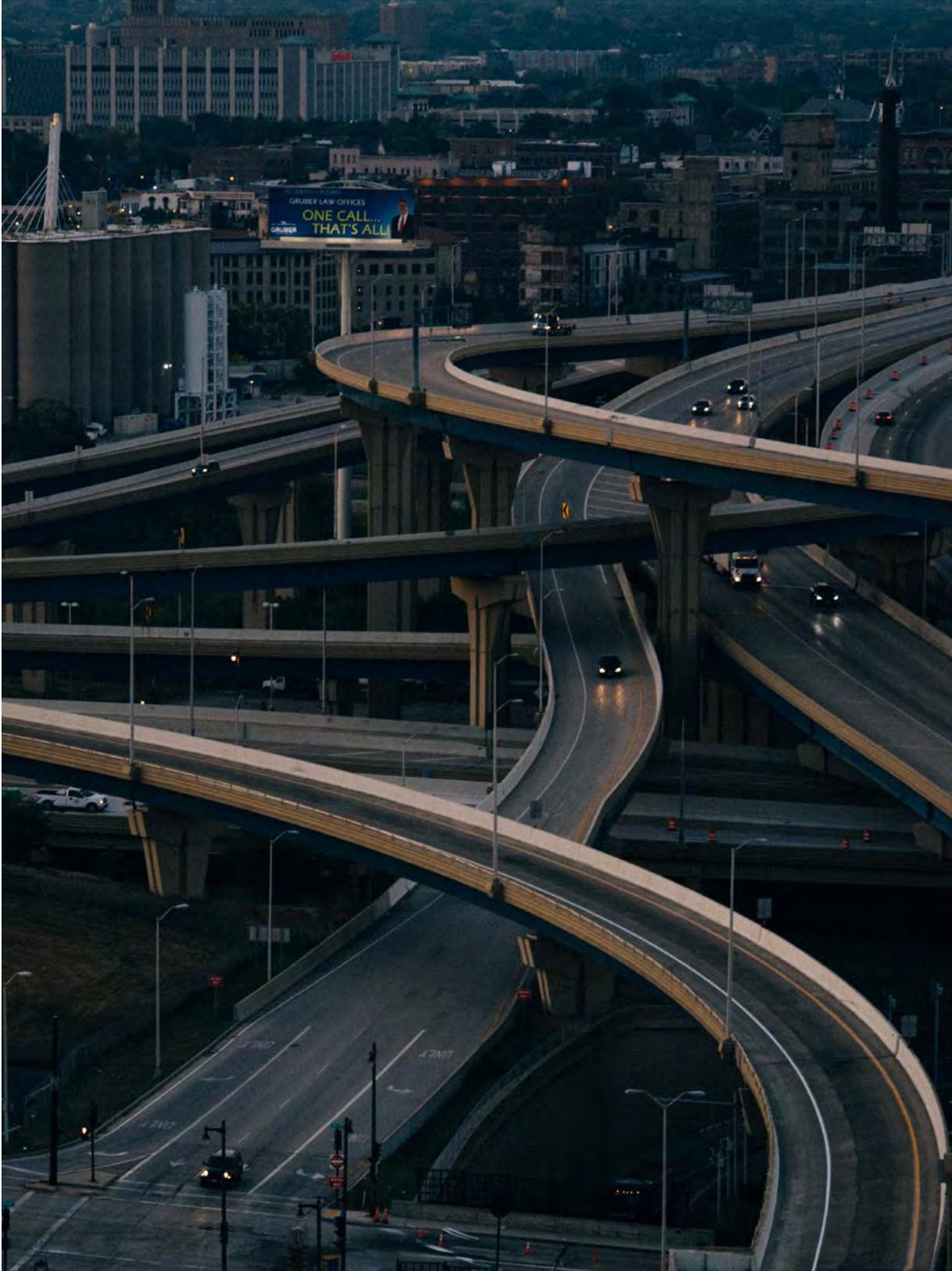
When there is lack of clarity as to who is responsible for what decisions, board conflict can result. Boards often work with a decision making matrix which clearly indicates who is responsible for what decisions. While ultimately responsible for all the decisions of the school, the board must ensure that delegated decisions remain delegated, and that they do not lapse into micro-management or second guessing routine decisions.

Even when we conclude that we have been mistaken in some of the things we have agreed to, there is much to learn, for a board willing to review both its successes and errors becomes ever stronger.

Our appetite for bold decisions is often shaped by the size of our vision. Without a compelling portrait of the future to guide us, we might become timid. Perhaps like the fear filled one-talent servant of Matthew 25 we might think it's safest to bury what we have lest it is lost - even though that anxiety caused the servant to lose what they had. The dance between being "bold" and being "responsible" can be complicated, but just as the steps of a complex dance can be unpacked and learnt, it is possible for the board to follow robust decision making processes without scaling back the size of their vision. Boards willing to consult widely and to review their decisions while having clarity of vision and purpose, are in a good position to make sound, faithful and faith-filled decisions.

**"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."**

**- James 1:5 (NIV)**



## CASE STUDY

It's one week before the final exams for graduating students and a number of things have gone wrong, requiring board approval on a best pathway forward.

Over the weekend there was a massive storm which caused significant damage to parts of the school, most significantly the IT servers (including the Learning Management System) which will now take around 3 days to fix. Along with that there have been a handful of unexpected cases of COVID-19 in the community causing the state government to implement a partial lockdown until it is under control. Under the lockdown rules, schools are still able to operate (if necessary) but masks must be worn and students must be socially distanced at all times. One of the COVID cases is a relative of one the students (although they haven't been in contact for a number of weeks).

The leadership team is divided on the best approach, and have presented two options to the board for emergency deliberation and approval.

The first option is to shut the whole school except for the graduating class, bringing them in with a small handful of teachers, to complete their final revision classes before exams.

The second option is to petition the government to postpone the exam schedule, allowing students to stay home, but delaying the exams and exacerbating the pressure they are already under.

**Discuss the pros and cons of each situation and justify your best pathway forward.**

## QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- Some decisions are made with the future in mind, others are required to respond to immediate situations. How is your board structured to deal effectively with situations that require quick and efficient decisions?
- What do you do when there is widespread disagreement among board members? What process is in place to deal with dissent and disagreement?



# COMMUNITY

## THE POWER OF CULTURE



Culture is like a river that flows through an organisation. It provides the unseen nourishment that allows everything around it to grow, weaving its way through every boardroom, classroom and playground.

The challenge for a board is that they are rarely present for the day-to-day functioning of school life and so it is easy to assume that the “culture” of the school is the responsibility of the principals and staff. Like everything else however, culture is born and sustained from leadership, which means that boards are responsible for setting the tone that flows down to everyone else.

When a school is struggling to host a healthy culture the impact can be subtle. Team members find it difficult to get along, morale begins to decline, performance management becomes necessary. It’s easy to miss that these things all form part of a system that operates well only when people feel culturally secure.

Poor culture can flow from lack of clarity about what really matters. We may say that our school’s mission is to help students and staff reach their God given potential, but then allow a culture that tolerates second best and indifferent performance. It can simply be that we are reluctant to confront difficult situations, but the reality is that you can’t correct what you are unwilling to confront, so a culture of avoidance invariably undermines even the noblest of missions.

The school board must work closely with the principal to decide what culture the school should work towards. If we do not intentionally help drive culture an “accidental” culture will develop - things being achieved not because they were intended but because they just turned out that way.

**“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart,  
as working for the Lord”**

*Colossians 3:23*

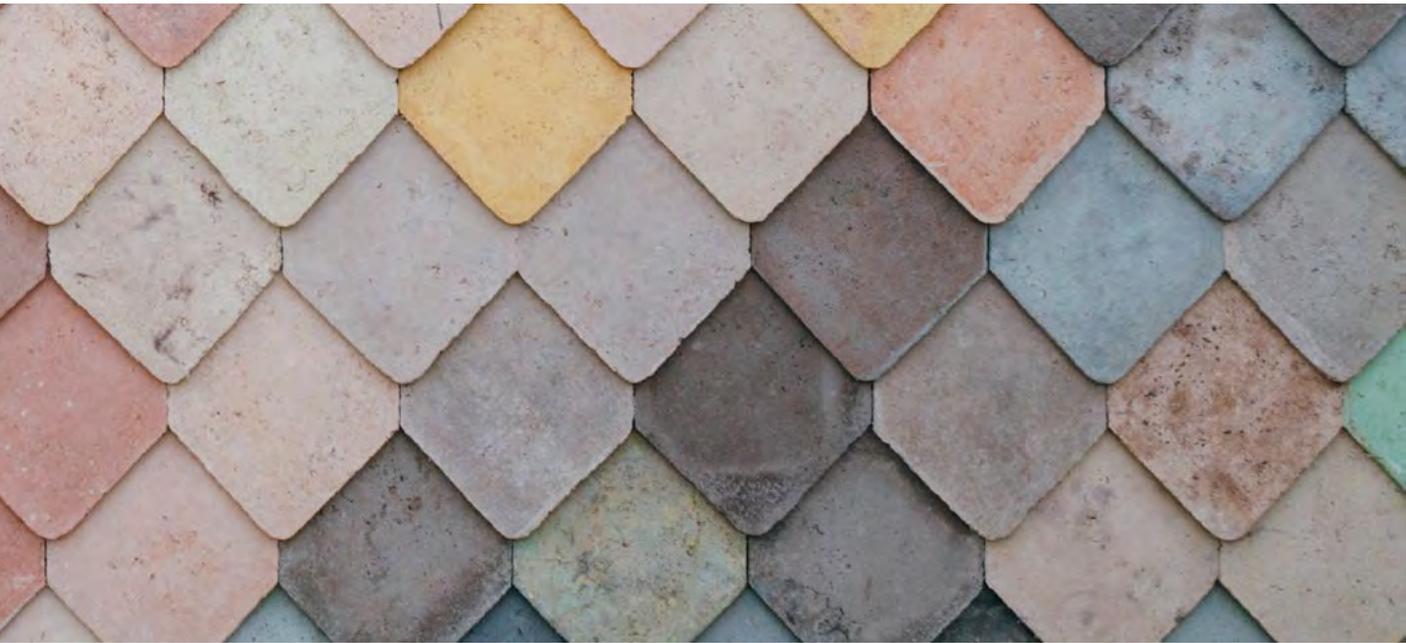




The board should discuss its own culture and think of ways to measure it. Colossians 3:23 provides an inspiring standard: *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord.* A healthy board culture is usually characterised by:

- Curiosity - the board is interested in what is happening at the school and interacts with the material presented at board meetings. You spot the interest because good questions are asked at board meetings.
- Candor - the board honestly expresses its opinions, rather than dancing around topics and saying things so indirectly that the point is missed.
- Compassion - while candid, board members have the emotional intelligence to frame and express their concerns within a just, kind and compassionate framework. Fairness matters, and the board is conscious of the human stories behind problems the school might face, while it remains alert to workable ways forward.
- Creativity - the board isn't locked into a mindset that is only willing to consider one possibility.
- Courage - as the board takes its vision seriously and genuinely attempts to make a difference. This includes the courage to be forward thinking, and acknowledging that change is a constant that should be constructively and hopefully embraced.
- Commitment - as the board gives its best to ensure the school can fulfil its mission and vision. A committed board inspires the school community. When the board is committed, staff follow suit.
- Accountability: while quick to praise the principal and staff team who make the achievements of the school possible, the board accepts that it is finally accountable for the school, and is willing to accept responsibility when things do not turn out as hoped.

Culture cannot happen by accident. It must come through intention, focus, and leadership. As a board, that leadership starts right here.



## CASE STUDY

As with most Christian schools, over the last decade the demographics have been changing. Whilst many of the families at the school would consider themselves “Christian,” church attendance is sporadic and others seem to have dropped off altogether. At least for these families, their attraction to the school has more to do with its academic standing and the pastoral care it provides than its Christian values.

Recently a small group of parents have formed a group and circulated a petition. It only has a small number of signatures but the principal has brought it to the attention of the board because one or two of the signatories are influential parents and frequent donors to school projects. The petition reads:

*“This school started out with a STRONG CHRISTIAN MISSION but now we have caved to worldly pressure by allowing ANYONE in just to keep the \$\$\$\$. We want to return to our BIBLICAL ROOTS and stop appealing to the whims of culture. If you are at this school you live by CHRISTIAN VALUES. No compromise. Sign this petition and support us as we take back our school for Jesus.”*

## QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- What does it look like for your school to have a “student-centric” approach to community?
- What strategies are in place to foster a healthy board culture?
- How might the board navigate the frequent tension that arises between Christian values and community concern?

The school has a strong Christian ethos, and all families, regardless of their religious beliefs or background, agree to this on enrolment. All teachers are required to submit pastoral references as part of their job application, although there are some who are not weekly church attenders. The majority of the tension seems to focus on a recent climate protest, which a small number of the school’s students attended. Whilst not directly supportive of the absences, the school has chosen not to discipline the students as it wants to be a place that generates a strong commitment to critical thinking and diversity. Some families seem to have taken this move as an indication that the school is moving away from its core values.

**As a board how will you approach the concerns of the group of complainants?**

# PLACE

## OUR SHAPE IN THE COMMUNITY



If asked who made the world, most would quickly reply, “God”. It’s a solid answer, but it leaves an important aspect out. While God assuredly made the world, there were parts left incomplete. Animals and birds had no name. This task was assigned to the first person created. According to Gen 2:19, God watches on with interest, keen to see what name Adam decides best fits each creature. It’s an important reminder, given right at the start of the Bible, that God works together with humans. Our decisions count, and we have an important role to play. Names matter, and the Bible underlines their importance on many occasions as it tells of someone who was given a new name – a name which usually marks a new start and stage in their spiritual journey.

Most board members get a real sense of delight and pleasure as they see the development of their school’s property, for our buildings are a tangible sign of our growing maturity as an educational presence in our area. But there is more to bricks and mortar than this. The buildings we design and the grounds we create around them all make a statement about what we value and the kind of community we hope to foster. Perhaps we can think of it like this. God gives us our property and assets as a trust. What we make of them – the name we give to them – is our gift back to God.

The buildings the board signs off on make a statement about our attitude to the environment, our stewardship of financial resources and our aesthetic priorities. They highlight the programs we think matter – and those we think can take their

place further back in the line. Our buildings flag if we are nostalgic for the past or facing towards the future. Some buildings are coldly functional – others invite us to linger and to build community. Some buildings are designed to ensure that our paths cross often, others keep people at a distance. Provision of shady spots and talking hubs in our grounds alert that we want people to linger, rather than to hurry away.

Most board members take the development of their schools’ facilities seriously. It is a tangible indicator, and provides a face to the community. Board members will ask questions about the financial implications of each build, and the expertise of those contracted to do the work. They will work towards a marriage of functionality, affordability and aesthetic positioning. They should also ask if their buildings can have a wider use in the community. Boards committed to missional governance might explore ways in which the school’s facilities can assist their mission. They might be guided by the biblical motif of hospitality – where what we have is also used to benefit those who are not part of our school community. In this way we might bless not just the families of those connected to the school, but also those who perhaps cannot afford our services. We are blessed to bless, and responsible stewardship requires that we examine ways to use all our assets for good.

It is said that “you shape the building, and then the building shapes you.” How does your board ensure that its facilities further its vision and mission?





**“Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.”**

*Gen 2:19-20*

## **CASE STUDY**

Over the last 12 months the board has had numerous discussions about the desire to build for the future. This includes many aspects, but one of them is to secure a portion of land where the school can gradually grow and expand over the next decades. The board has started a sub-committee called “Legacy” which has been evaluating the school finances and possibilities. They have reported that a realistic goal for the school would be to look at purchasing a block of land that is 20 hectares in size (although there is nothing currently available), and the budget would be up to \$6 million. This would ensure there is ample space to grow, and the finances would not put the school under any undue strain.

Recently, a developer found out that the school was looking to purchase new land and contacted a board member. The developers have a patch of land that was about to settle, but the deal fell through. They have now offered it to your school.

The land is 10 hectares, and is situated very close to the school’s current location. The price for the land is a firm \$7.7 million. The sale needs to happen within the next 3-4 months otherwise the developer will look for another party

Whilst the size of the land would allow for significant future growth, and the location is perfect, the price would mean that the school would be under significant financial pressure in the short-mid term. As a board you have to weigh up the desire to create a sense of place and community, with the challenge of both time and finance.

**You dedicate a meeting to figuring out what the best plan for the future could be.**

(assume the price and time frame are non-negotiable).

## **QUESTIONS TO PONDER**

- Take a moment as a group and ask yourself the following question: *what does our building/space say about who we are?* Discuss what came from your answers, and what you might like to see in the future.
- What is the board’s plan for the future, in regard to property and its impact on the community?
- Money is always a factor, and often schools don’t enjoy the luxury of fancy new buildings or ambitious building projects. What are some small ways that the school can cultivate a sense of place without big and expensive projects? How might the board encourage this?

# STEWARDSHIP

## CARE AND RESPONSIBILITY



The best boards recognise the close link between finances and their vision and mission. Without adequate finance, even the loftiest vision is nothing more than a dream. The questions we ask in relation to our finances can shift the way we see the world. Some boards ensure the school has a significant nest egg to guard against a rainy day, others build one to enable them to rise up to new opportunities. While it is artificial to view these as opposite goals (we need funds for both) you quickly sense which boards view finance as a means to attain important goals and those which view the schools secure financial base as an end in itself.

Christian boards should be alert to the biblical imperative to be good stewards of the resources God entrusts to us - and remember, the resource base of most Christian schools is considerable. Schools often own valuable tracts of land, significant buildings, and costly fittings. Their annual budget runs into millions of dollars, and for larger schools, this can be tens of millions. In addition, they employ a gifted and talented staff team - a team usually serving from a sense of call to work in Christian education. We are blessed to be a blessing (Genesis 12:3), and there is much we must account for.

The Bible's attitude to finance is fascinating. It is clear that God owns the cattle on a thousand hills, or as the Psalmist puts it in Ps 50:12 "If I were hungry, I would not ask you for food, for the world and everything in it is mine." God's mission in the world is not usually blocked by lack of money but by lack of faith and vision. Shifting our focus from "what can we afford" to "what do we need to do to grow", can enable us to see new opportunities. The first question can come from a focus on constraints, the second, from a focus on opportunities. Financial limitations can force greater creativity if we ask the right questions.

However, it is equally possible to have adequate finance but not to have attached it to a stretching and worthy vision. Matt 25 discusses a servant entrusted with one talent of his master's wealth, who thought it more prudent to bury it than to use it. His master was unimpressed. The dance between financial prudence and pursuing a worthy vision can be difficult.

Most boards set specific indicators to provide feedback on the schools financial performance. Usually board members can tell you the desired staff student ratio, the acceptable level of debt per student and when future builds are required. These are routine matters and demonstrate a board's awareness of its financial obligations. Better boards are able to tell you what they plan to do if they exceed their targets. They have a baseline plan, but they aspire to more. Luke 16:10 reminds us that those who are faithful with little, can be entrusted with much. Equally important, those who squander their opportunities will lose them.

If money were not the issue, what would your board like to do? It is worth thinking about it, for when we have a clear vision and well ordered priorities, we often find that what once seemed impossible is actually attainable. Faithfully following a vision over an extended time period can produce results well beyond what our founders imagined. Boards engaged in missional governance will take an audit of the human and financial resources available to their school. What impact could they have if they were well aligned with a worthy and stretching vision for the school? What dividend do you hope your school will produce for God's Kingdom?



A close-up photograph of a green leaf, showing its intricate vein structure. The veins run parallel to each other, creating a rhythmic pattern across the leaf's surface. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture and color of the leaf.

**“All the animals in the forest are mine  
and the cattle on a thousand hills”**

*Ps 50:10 (GNBUK)*

## CASE STUDY

Over the past few years the school has enjoyed rapid growth in enrolments which has led to significant financial growth. There has also been a number of unexpected donations from families who believe in the mission of the school and as such there is a sizeable 'nest-egg' that the school has accrued.

You are at a board meeting to decide how to best steward this unexpected resource. One member wants to see it reinvested directly into staff appointments and salaries, another believes that a new technology building should be commissioned,

although a number of other board members - recognising the instability of the current political climate - suggest keeping the money where it is for 2-3 years and just allowing interest to accrue. Each person is convinced that their plan is the best and most responsible way to steward the money.

**Discuss what you, as a board, would do in this situation. (It might be good to allocate different members to argue different perspectives! A bit of role play never hurt anyone!)**

## QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- The future is reached one step at a time and may require paradigm shifts along the way. What is the trigger to check the direction and timing of each step, and the possible impact to financial viability?
- How can the board proactively explain changing directions to the funding of the vision that will alleviate concerns about reactions made to the demands of the present?
- At what point should measures be implemented to reduce the capital tied up in accruals? What are these?

# EDUCATION

## REDEMPTIVE LEARNING



Given that the task of Christian schools is to provide an educational experience shaped by the Christian faith, it is surprising that school boards often know more about the schools financial stability, building projects and current enrollment than they do about the schools approach to education. While it is the responsibility of the principal to oversee the schools educational program, the board should take an active interest in the pedagogical philosophy of the school, and ways in which it furthers (or hinders) the mission of the school. While most school boards have some external educational experts to assist them in their task, given that the focus of Christian schools is Christian education, this is something all board members should take an interest in. Just as we would expect board members of the local footy team to have some interest in the game, board members of Christian schools are expected to have some commitment to and understanding of Christian education.

Christian Schools Australia (CSA) has devised a program to assist in this. Known by the acronym of PeRLS (Pedagogies enabling Redemptive Learning), it explores the vision and philosophy of Christian education, offering four lenses to use in evaluating the appropriateness of a pedagogical approach.

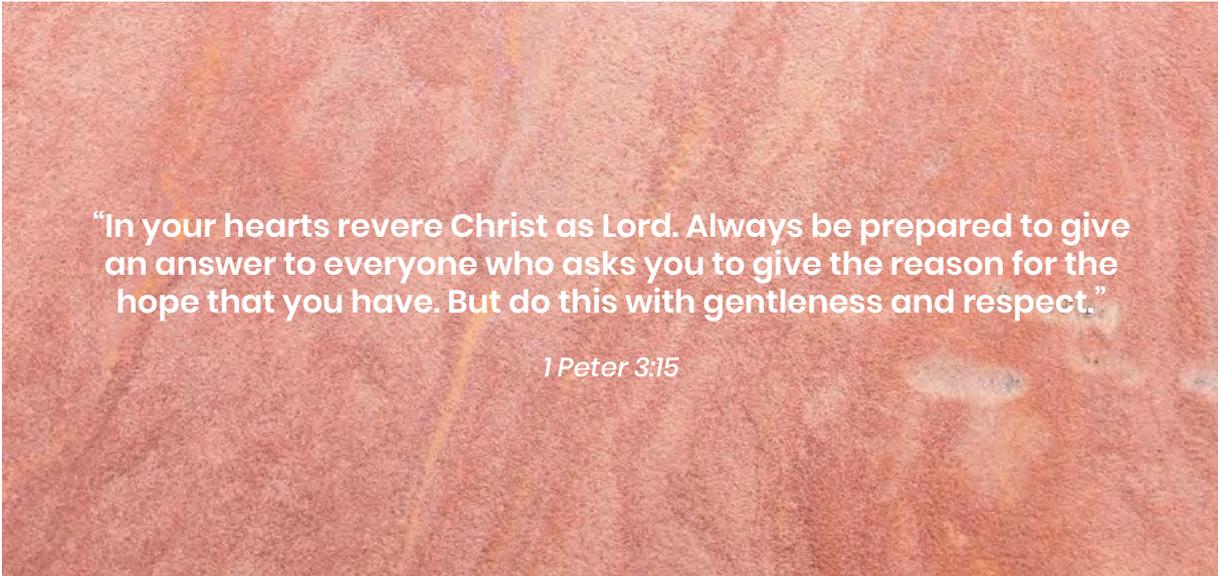
These are:

- Connection
- Inclusion
- Justice
- Voice

Just how these four indicators work their way out in the classroom differs depending on stage

(primary, middle or secondary school) and discipline (humanities, sciences). They remind us that the Christian faith is not primarily about statements of belief but practices that work their way out in life, and in the classroom as a small laboratory of life. The Board will also be actively involved in setting the educational priorities of the school. Some have a special focus on providing education for at-risk students, others on academic excellence, yet others on producing graduates who will become community leaders. Smaller schools sometimes offer very focused experiences, while larger schools may be able to offer a broader range of opportunities. Many schools believe that the provision of excellent pastoral care helps their students flourish, while others might believe that providing more stretching opportunities will better serve the schools vision and mission. There is room for diversity, but the approach should not be entirely dependent on the whim of the latest principal. Naturally the board appoints the principal because of their ability, and should allow the principal freedom to operate without having their decisions second guessed. However, this does not mean the board is not engaged in the educational approach of the school, for while they are unlikely to dig into the day to day detail of the program, they should actively engage with high level discussions of the schools pedagogy and the research and convictions which lie behind it.

Christian education is best served when the boards of Christian schools understand and help champion its key commitments and priorities. We are on mission together.



“In your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”

1 Peter 3:15

## CASE STUDY

In order to ensure strong academic achievements, and the security and safety of local families, your school has – over the last few years – adopted a very strong disciplinary process which addresses students who don’t follow the rules or those that actively go out of their way to cause trouble. Whilst not enjoyable, over the last two years a number of students have had to be removed from the school in order to ensure that the community at large was kept safe and happy.

Your principal has approached the board and suggested a radical revision of the disciplinary process in place. On the surface it looks like a “softening” of the rules, a process which might allow students to ‘run wild, unpunished’ (as one board member put it). When asked about it however, the principal has said that their desire is to create a school where all students feel safe, supported and welcomed. The principal made the following statement:

*“Behaviour is not an indication of academic ability or personal capacity, it is usually an indication of something else – family trouble, trauma, difficulty at home, bullying. By punishing students so severely we are neglecting our gospel-mission to ‘look beyond behaviour’ and care for these struggling students. I propose we, together, come up with a plan for restoratively managing the difficult students so that we can still keep everyone safe, but also empower all young people to flourish.”*

**As a board, where might this sit in your overall vision/mission? Spend some time considering the risks/benefits attached to this proposal.**

## QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- The line between governance and management can be easily crossed. With the intention of *supporting*, not *managing* the principal, how can the board increase its understanding of and engage more effectively in the educational direction and outcomes of the school?
- While the principal (and senior school leaders) should arguably be involved in developing the school’s strategic plan, it is the board’s responsibility to lead and direct this process. How could the board transition from a position of ratification of the strategic plan to one of active leadership and participation in the process, ensuring that the efforts of the principal to lead this in the past, are honoured.
- If part of the role of Christian school boards is to “*support the delivery of Redemptive Learning and Transformative Education*”, have a candid conversation around your table about how well you think you as a board are doing in this. Where are you getting it right; where could you do better?

# RISK

## FAITH AND PRUDENCE



There is an inherent tension in risk management. Risk cannot be avoided, and the most risk averse often fall into a greater danger, that of irrelevance and obsolescence. Many Christian schools were founded by pioneers willing to take significant risks to ensure that their school went ahead. They took their risks faithfully, believing they were acting in obedience to God as they entered into land purchases and building projects that required some to mortgage their homes and risk their savings.

Responsible boards discuss their appetite for risk. Sometimes at the earlier stages of a school's development they might be willing to risk more – for there is little to lose. At a later stage they might be more cautious, for they have much to account for, and must be responsible stewards.

We should not confuse accepting risk with being reckless or irresponsible. We cannot avoid risk, but we can devise risk management strategies which are appropriate for the stage of our school's development.

School boards are legally obliged to ensure that their schools are compliant and meet registration standards. Working together with the principal, they will ensure that processes are in place to monitor compliance, and that action is taken to rectify deficits. This is an ongoing task, for standards change, and what was once compliant may no longer be.

While some schools view compliance with a sense of resignation (so many boxes to tick!), this is unhelpful. Being compliant is one of the most effective risk management strategies – for the standards required of schools help to ensure that they provide a safe environment. A Christian school should view risk management as an act of loving care – for we should look out for the well being

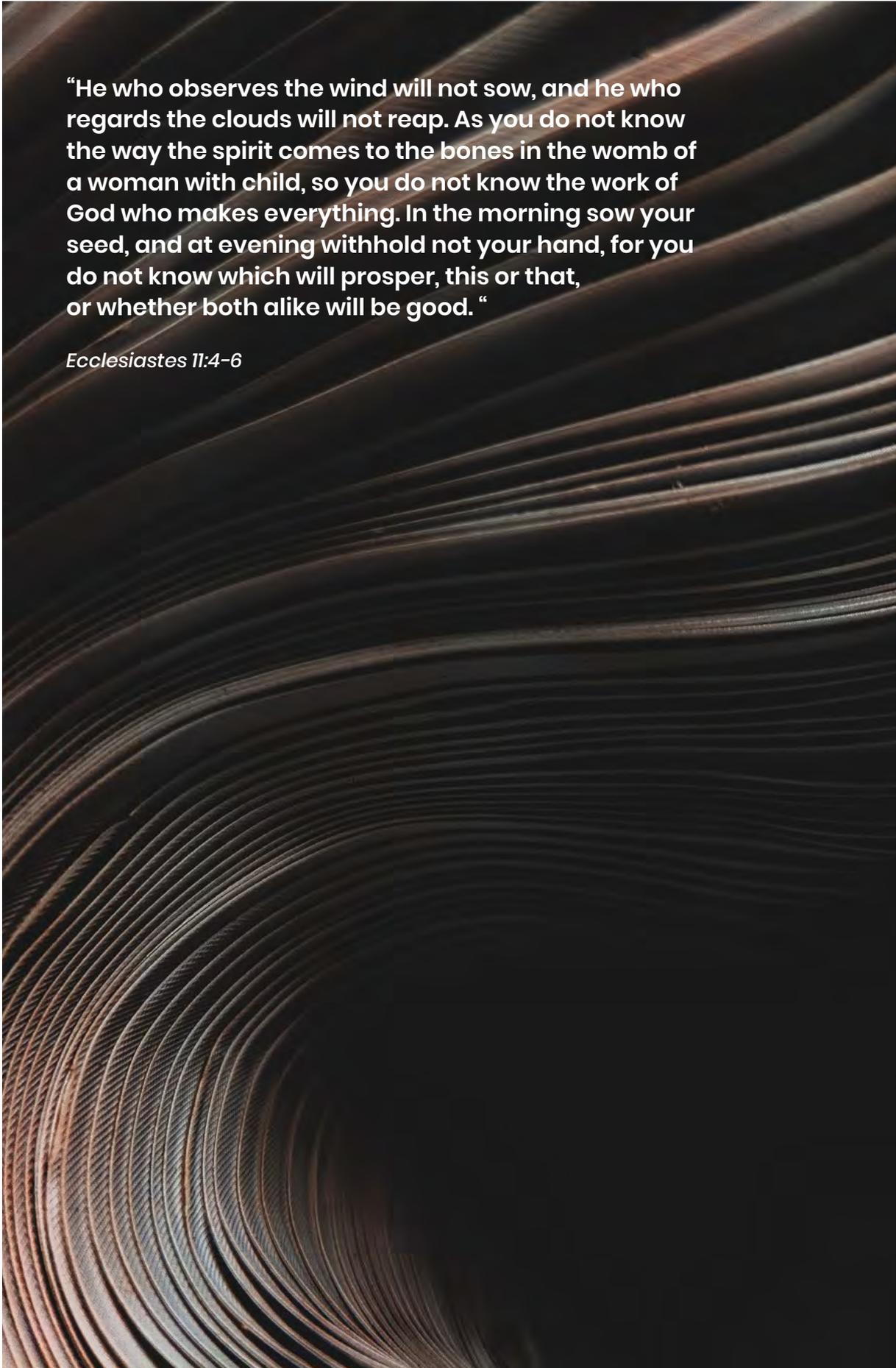
of all entrusted to our care. While this includes ensuring safe buildings and environment, we should also ensure that our students have an excellent education, for they and their parents have trusted us to help prepare them for life. We must take this privilege with the utmost seriousness.

Risk identification is an important task, enabling the Board to ensure there is planning to avoid unnecessary risk, and then to minimise the adverse impact if the risk eventuates. The very process of thinking through and identifying the key risks actually enables them to be reduced.

A failure of the Board to adequately manage risk can severely compromise the school, its staff or students and expose the school and the Board to legal liability. The capacity of the Board to think strategically, deeply and courageously about the organisational risks is significantly enhanced by a diversity of expertise, experience and perspectives on the Board.

This is a delicate balancing act, for the board must recognise and guard against the danger of doing nothing because of the fear of what could go wrong. The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 is helpful to consider. It reminds us that God expects us to be good stewards of the resources entrusted to us. Ultimately we will be expected to give account for how we have used them. The passage makes it clear that burying our talents in the ground is not an acceptable option.

What is required is faithful risk management. We need to be faithful to our students, their parents, our founders, our constituency and most especially to God. James 1:5 reminds us that if we lack wisdom we should ask God. And we should – for our board rooms should be places for serious planning, serious conversations and serious prayer.



**“He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap. As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything. In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand, for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good.”**

*Ecclesiastes 11:4-6*



## CASE STUDY

The current principal has been in place for just over a decade, and was the foundational principal when the school began. It was the second school that this principal has pioneered and there is a general feeling among the board that whilst he is particularly suited to the task of founding and kick-starting a new school, he is less equipped to handle the tasks of a larger organisation.

He is a highly relational leader whose motto is “everything is about the kids!” As the school has grown he has struggled to make the transition from leading students, to leading the staff – a shift that is essential in a growing organisation. His lack of attention to detail combined with a fairly casual approach to organisational structure has meant that many of the teachers are becoming confused about their place, or unhappy with their development. The overall educational standards of the school also seem to be slipping, as reflected in the most recent academic reports.

The principal is, however, well loved among the school’s community. His name has become synonymous with the school and it’s identity. As a board you are aware that any change in leadership would come with significant community backlash, however you are also aware that unless he can significantly modify his leadership approach, the school and its stakeholders will all suffer.

**You gather to discuss options. Evaluate the risks associated with continuing on with the current principal, as well as those that come with trying to find a replacement. What might be the school’s liabilities? What is the impact on the vision of the school?**

## QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- Many of the case studies throughout this manual contain aspects of risk. Why not work through the one that is most relevant to your school at the moment, and evaluate the risks that it presents?
- How are errors of judgement documented to ensure that the same, or similar mistakes are not repeated in the future by different people?
- Consider what Jesus’ ministry would have looked like if he avoided taking risks.

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

As well as providing these sessions there are also two additional videos:

## 1. Why Serve?



This session is an induction video designed to help those new to a board setting, or those considering answering the call, to understand the philosophical foundations of what it means to serve on the board of a Christian school.

This video is ideally used to either provide a potential new board member with some context for what a Christian school board is really all about, or alternatively it can be used to help an already inducted new member to get a helicopter view of what their new role might entail.

## 2. Key Relationships: CEO & Board Chair



This session explores one of the most important relationships that exists in a school environment, the one between the CEO and Board Chair. Presented by those currently involved in executive leadership or board governance, it seeks to provide a strategy for navigating this relationship in a way that ensures the long term health and success of the school.

This video is ideally used to help the CEO and Board Chair navigate their complex relationship, but it's really only the starting point. It could also be used whenever there is a change in personnel in either of these positions. This video is designed to start the conversation – the rest is up to you!

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These additional resources have been prepared because we know just how complex and multi-faceted the work of school governance truly is. We hope they provide you with a good foundation for fostering healthy relationships, and building the kingdom of God in your local area.

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[csa.edu.au](http://csa.edu.au)



They were produced in partnership with **AVENIR Leadership Institute.**

[avenirleadership.org](http://avenirleadership.org)

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