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Governance in a Christian Manner



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This book is dedicated to all Church of England school governors who are endeavouring to provide good governance in a Christian manner across all sectors.

In some instances, governors’ names have been changed.



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1

More Than a SIAMS Catchphrase

‘That’s not a very Christian thing to say!’ This accusation, even if friendly or in good humour, is commonly heard. Whilst it may sometimes be justified, it is not always fair and may even be because the speaker is reticent to accept the challenge being posed! What then is a ‘Christian thing,’ or ‘Christian manner,’ as the title of this book puts it?

Margaret James’ *A Fresh Look at Church School Inspection* introduced readers to ‘education in a Christian manner,’ a way of understanding education, particularly in church schools.¹ This text also made the case for a fresh way of experiencing a Section 48 Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS)—an attempt to reframe the language and practice of inspections in church schools.

A ‘Christian manner’ is more than a catchphrase. It has its roots in the *Church of England Vision for Education*, which is described as acting as a touchstone for Anglican church school education.² Margaret James claims:

The four strands of this vision have harmony with the education in a Christian manner that is expounded by Astley³ and which he describes as being ‘characteristic of Christianity rather than distinctively Christian.’⁴

A ‘Christian manner’ is, therefore, a phrase that suggests a way of thinking about why and how our understanding and behaviour is influenced by the person, life and teaching of Jesus Christ. It is relevant to anyone serving as a governor, at all levels of governance and particularly for those who want to develop their approach to their role as governors, trustees or directors through the lens of their faith, regardless of the school context. This could be considered a priority for foundation governors in a Church of England school/academy but may help all governors reflect on belief and practice, not least because governance is a corporate responsibility (see chapter six). With church schools focused on their theologically rooted Christian vision, all governors must consider what governance in a Christian manner looks like to ensure that the school’s vision is the lived experience of both children and adults.

Governance in Practice—Christian Values

As I reflect on how faith influences my approach to governing, it is centred around instilling values of empathy, honesty, integrity, forgiveness and love in children. The goal is to encourage them to not only love themselves but also love and care for others.

Maria Walker

After over forty years of experience of governance in various schools and academies (not all of them church schools), I am deeply aware of how often I could have been criticized for not behaving in what some might have assumed was a Christian manner—which may have crossed many a mind along the way! This concept is not about being soft and fluffy, nor does it mean behaving without conviction or pragmatism. I might have been guilty of mistakes in debating or conversation, misunderstanding other people’s contributions, or making unwise choices. Yet there have also been times when wisdom, grace and plain common sense have transformed a meeting. In this book, we will explore the underlying thinking and purpose of governing in a Christian manner which I have sought to develop, and seek to set out a path for our contributions and influence to be positive!

I recall a specifically challenging governor who would accuse us all, including me as a chair, of being wrong, no matter how we tried to reason with him. When he turned his angst on me in one meeting, I remember quietly responding with an apology—to the surprise of others who thought I had been wronged (so they told me afterwards). The apology disarmed the antagonist and the meeting continued more positively. Recollect how careful Jesus was not to respond to the taunts of his accusers and those exercising judgment on him at his infamous trial. The proverb encourages us, ‘A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger’ (Prov 15.10).

This should not imply that a Christian manner is only demonstrated through a lack of challenge or coherent argument. This book will seek to establish the variety of ways governance can benefit from a more reflective, Christlike approach—in other words, in a manner informed by a Christian mindset.⁵

In over 30 years working in school governance, I have often been surprised by the possibilities to make a positive contribution, be it bringing wisdom into a debate, the power of praying about a situation or being able to propose a more just approach to a matter in hand. As one Christian writer reminds us:

Whatever ministry we exercise, it is not, first and foremost, ‘ours’ but God’s, initiated and sustained by him. Human agents may come and go. It is the God of resurrection who works decisively, irresistibly, to fulfil his promises.⁶

2

Why Governance in a ‘Christian Manner’?

The ecological system of education has many varied and ever-changing attributes. What is emerging, across all sectors and in many contexts, is a deep desire to ensure that educational institutions and, more importantly, the staff and pupils within them, are flourishing. This will only be achieved with intention and a secure foundation to build on. It has been well argued that flourishing schools will be possible as the right kind of leaders are appointed, courageous decisions are taken that prioritize the vulnerable and an ethos is developed that enables a deep sense of belonging, with schools becoming exciting places to work.⁷

A school, or a multi-academy trust, essentially has a hierarchal leadership structure. The layer or layers of governance inevitably set everything from vision and ethos to the budget and appointment of senior staff, as well as holding the school accountable for the outcomes of the children. In a church school, the foremost responsibility is to uphold and develop the religious foundation of the school, encapsulating that aim in the school’s theologically rooted Christian vision. None of these key governance activities is for the benefit of either Ofsted or SIAMS inspections. Instead, they should be considered the governors’ moral and spiritual duty in providing for a flourishing school.

For a Christian governor serving in any school or academy (though with perhaps more scope within a church school context), governing in a Christian manner takes on an even deeper meaning and purpose. Each key responsibility could be interpreted and managed practically and pragmatically. Whatever measurement is used, this can be effective and provide for a successful school. However, a governor developing their approach from the foundation of a Christian mindset or worldview will bring an added dimension to their role. This may have different meanings to different people and depends on their own journey of faith. Such an understanding and application will:

...be congruent with the ends of Christianity, with the end that *is* Christ...The enterprise, in its furthest reaches, must somewhere bear the imprint of *his* touch, something of the whorls and configurations of his mark.⁸

We can conclude that governance in a Christian manner is influenced by the application of the character, teachings and thinking of Jesus. Some might

consider this as a profoundly theological perspective about which they may or may not possess a great deal of understanding. For others, there will be an awareness of values and even commands derived from Jesus' teaching, such as 'love your neighbour as yourself' (Matt 22.39). Intentionally applying an informed Christian approach when reviewing an agenda, supporting papers and other aspects of governance, can aid more effective discernment. Governing in a Christian manner is just that, at whatever depth is available to the individual.

Governance in Practice—A Former Teacher Who is a Governor

Throughout my experience working in schools, I have always treated everyone with the same level of respect, regardless of their job. This includes those who clean, serve food, perform administrative tasks, move furniture and so on. It surprises me how often colleagues do not share this view and treat some individuals as inferior. As a Christian, every person is an essential member of the school community and deserves equal respect. I have always held this belief; as I would not want to be treated poorly, so I extend the same courtesy to others.

It is essential to have this attitude and lead by example, as this will influence a governors' meeting about staffing concerns. It is essential to consider how appreciation is shown towards those paid less and prioritize their well-being, just like we do teachers.

Maria Walker

This matters to people of faith and all involved in a church school context. If the lived reality of the Christian vision is to have any meaning at all, it starts with the leadership, is modelled for—and by—all staff, and is experienced by both them and pupils. All our activities and behaviours must be demonstrated and evidenced in the questions we ask, the decisions we make and the community we build. It will be vital that the proper foundation is chosen in order to have the most significant impact.

Jesus drew the comparison between building on sand or rock. He explained how the foundation of his teaching can sustain a person's lived reality: 'Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock' (Matt 7.25).

J S Bach reportedly summed up his work, saying, 'The aim and final end of all music should be none other than the glory of God and the refreshment of the soul.' Perhaps governance in a Christian manner could be described as having a similar aim.

Foundations for Governing in a Christian Manner

3

When I was first invited to become a school governor, I took it on to serve my community. The concept of serving in a Christian manner could not have been further from my mind. As governance responsibilities grew exponentially in those early years, I was on a steep learning curve. Thanks to governor colleagues, I began to understand that governing was something God was calling me to do and began to consider how, as a Christian, I might approach its multiple challenges.

It is essential to understand that governance is a corporate activity, regardless of the school's designation. Working as a team supporting school leadership, governors can and should use their experience, skills, expertise, worldview and beliefs to shape decision-making and exercise accountability. As the late Joan Sallis used to say in conferences, 'Schools need the precious light of ordinariness to shine upon their activities.' Whether you are a parent, community member or foundation governor in a church school, it is vital to foster an environment where strong trusting relationships and mutual respect are the norm.

Governance in Practice—Graham Writes About His Experience

I hope everything I do as a chair of governors models Christlike servant leadership. Whether in routine governing business or a crisis, I bring everyone together, providing guidance and support while maintaining respect towards others. When it's necessary to challenge people, I endeavour to do so with grace, compassion and humility; ultimately, my actions should reflect my faith in Christ.

As decision-makers, we are responsible for prioritizing the best interests of the pupils' education. However, we must also acknowledge that our decisions may significantly impact others in the school community. Therefore, we should consider any possible pushback from stakeholders in the implementation process. Opposition should be handled respectfully, even if our natural response may be to become defensive. I recall numerous instances where I had to contain my personal frustration, causing me significant emotional stress, whilst maintaining a professional demeanour in my role.

Two foundations for governing in a Christian manner are a sense of vocation and relationships.

The Foundation of Vocation

Dictionary definitions all agree that vocation means a strong feeling of suitability for a particular job or career. Today this is often recognized in a secular sense but vocation originates from the Christian understanding of a calling from God. In my experience, sensing a calling to be a governor may only become clear when looking back and reflecting on the training and time invested in developing the role. Having such confidence that you are called to a particular responsibility can be a stabilizing factor—being aware of a sense of vocation or calling is the ground you are building on.

Regardless of any religious faith, many people have a sense of calling or vocation to do or be something. For Christians, this calling is rooted in their faith in Christ. Simon Sinek would describe this as focusing on the ‘why’ rather than the ‘how’ and ‘what,’ suggesting, ‘When we communicate from the inside-out (the *why*), we’re talking directly to the part of the brain that controls decision-making.’⁹ This, the argument goes, will influence our choices, behaviour and thinking.

Vocation originates from the Christian understanding of a calling from God

Reflecting on why you engage in governance is, therefore, crucial to being sustained, focused, and effective in pursuing the strategic activities of governance—the how (processes and responsibilities of good governance) and the what (outcomes) for the flourishing of the school community. Every governor’s why is based on those values they hold which drive their motivation for governing, Christians directly relating this to their faith in God and the teachings of the Bible. For those who are church school governors, understanding their why is foundational to governing intentionally in a Christian manner, a natural expression of their Christian faith in action. Others will need to work out how their beliefs and values are congruent with governing in a Christian manner.

John Sullivan described vocation as providing ‘my sense of where God wants me to be, what God wants me to do, and who God wants me to be.’¹⁰ As a Christian myself, I understand this as God walking with me in governing, just as Jesus on the road to Emmaus accompanied the disciples on their journey of discovery. Governing Christianly, therefore, means working with God to have a positive impact on the world. Jesus said, ‘You are the light of the world...let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven’ (Matt 5.14–16). A sense of vocation, therefore, can

provide a different perspective, what some might think of as a relationship with God, who walks with you, guides and equips you for the task at hand.

Governance in Practice—Stephen Manning, Co-chair of Governors

My rationale for wishing to become a school governor was, initially, simply that of responding to an invitation from my vicar. The possibility that this role might be described as a vocation, or a calling, had not entered my mind. However, understanding that vocation links identity, task and gifting, then elevates the role of school governor beyond the limits of business—important though that is—to something that much closer to responding to God’s calling.

The Foundation of Relationship

A football manager is reported to have asked his players to think about the most important influence on their journey in football. They gave various answers, to which he replied, ‘It’s the people you travel with.’¹¹ Equally important for all governing in a Christian manner are the relationships governors have with other governor colleagues, particularly with the head teacher. Just as in a football team, the importance of knowing, understanding, respecting and trusting fellow governors is vital. Alan Flintham wrote:

‘It’s not education, education, education,’ said one school leader, echoing a former prime minister. ‘It’s relationships, relationships, relationships.’ Relationships...are paramount: ‘The way I relate and communicate with people even when it is difficult; challenges being picked up and dealt with together; forgiveness of mistakes so we can put them right together and move forward.’¹²

This illustrates why strong relationships are essential to govern in a Christian manner.

Governance in Practice

Stephen Manning, after being a governor for about a year, decided to arrange to meet up with different governor colleagues to get to know them and build relationships. Having coffee with a foundation governor, the conversation turned to who might stand as a new chair, since the existing chair had indicated she would soon stand down. As the conversation developed, they each realized that they had the necessary skills to chair the governing body. So, they began to consider whether

they might stand as co-chairs. Stephen commented, 'Sometimes the timing is unexpected. God's timing is not always ours!'

Building relationships so as to lead to more effective governance takes more than attending full governing body meetings. Whilst coffee and cake can break down barriers, it is essential to engage fully and personally with others.

In his book about relationology, Matt Bird makes the point:

The difference between good and great relationship builders is the ability to be attentive to other people and be responsive to regulating yourself to achieve the best possible outcomes. When it comes to relationships one size does not fit all. The...behaviour of highly effective relationship builders is to understand others and adapt yourself.¹³

Matt suggests that we can all be guilty of listening but not hearing, of being in the room but not present. He advocates, 'The key to avoiding this is to become completely present, to engage with your eyes, mind and whole being,' and to, 'Be fully present and notice what's unique about the moment.'¹⁴

Whilst skills audits, which governing bodies ought to undertake annually, can provide some key information about individuals, they only contain part of the picture. Sharing stories about family, interests, challenges being faced, alongside what is happening at home, church and in social activities—the list is endless—will help you appreciate each other, potentially understand each other better and build a stronger foundation for corporate governance in a Christian manner.

In church schools, governors sharing what is happening in the school's parish church, in collective worship or in teaching about Christianity, may provide opportunities for all governors to gain a fresh understanding of faith, the Bible and God. The next chapter will help you consider the value of some biblical narratives, which may not only provide motivation and learning but could also contribute to relationship-building conversations.

4

Models of Leadership in Biblical Characters

The *Church of England Vision for Education* suggests:

Schools are signs of fullness of life for all...Many will enjoy the wine and not recognize where it comes from; some will, with our help, trace it to who is responsible for it; but whether our inspiration for doing what we do is acknowledged or not, it is the right thing to do—as followers of the One who came to bring life in all its fullness, to do signs that give glory to God.¹⁵

Some governors, as they work within the school's overall leadership alongside the senior leadership team, may define 'the wine' referred to above as their own personal faith and how they seek to follow the ways and teachings of Jesus. They are informed and challenged by their learning from the Bible. For example, Jesus told parables or stories based on people, situations or the natural order around him. Think of the Parables of the Good Samaritan and the Lost (or Prodigal) Son. These teachings of Jesus are the rock or foundation for many church school governors, often building on their understanding about fathers of the Christian faith such as Abraham, Moses and King David.

Using the biblical narrative to influence and impact how relationships, duties and responsibilities of governance can be carried out is perhaps helped by this metaphor:

It's as if God is the supreme artist who invites us into his studio. He gives us a huge choice of paints and some rough sketches of what he's after (like the Sermon on the Mount or the glimpses we get in the parables). He promises to be constantly available as tutor, adviser, and friend and then he says, 'Let's paint!'...not 'painting by numbers' but rather painting 'after the style of Christ'—the artist's equally gifted Son.¹⁶

This resonates with what we saw in chapter two about bearing the imprint of *his* touch. In the next chapter, three governors explain how they understand governing in a Christian manner. Before that, we will explore in this chapter how examples taken from the life and teaching of Jesus and those who preceded or followed him can provide us with a foundation for governing in a Christian manner.

Writing in the introduction to *The Maxwell Leadership Bible*, the author of the notes and lessons on leadership provided alongside the text in that edition says, ‘The best source of leadership teaching today is the same as it has been for thousands of years. If you want to learn leadership, go to the greatest book ever written—the Bible.’¹⁷ Maxwell speaks to thousands of business and other leaders every year and claims that the primary source of the principles he teaches has always been the Bible. So here are a few principles that are pertinent to governance. You may like to read the passage referred to or take the lessons provided as a guide.

The Woman at the Well (John 4.1–26)

We do not even know this woman’s name, only that some people would not speak with her. Jesus was different, he spoke to and reached out to her. These are some of the principles that might be gleaned from this story:

Leaders:

- Initiate contact
- Establish common ground
- Listen and allow others to speak
- Arouse interest
- Accept others where they are
- Communicate issues directly.¹⁸

Applying this, a governor will be interested in the people they serve and those they serve alongside. Personal agendas become less important than being willing to know who people are, listening to them and having meaningful discussions. A priority of collegiate governance in a Christian manner will be how we engage with our fellow governors, for example, learning from the conversation Jesus had with the woman at the well, seeking the help of others, asking open-ended questions and offering positive reflection for the way forward will all contribute.

Potential in Team Members (Luke 5.10b–11, 27–28)

Have you ever thought what a diverse group of people the twelve disciples were? Maxwell asks:

Would any of us have picked Simon, the fisherman or Matthew, the tax collector, to be on our team? The former spoke more than he thought, and the latter took more than he gave. But Jesus saw them both as diamonds in the rough. Unstable Peter became a solid leader of the

church in Jerusalem, while Matthew became one of the most generous people in the gospels.

The Law of Intuition (thinking instinctively), he suggests, enables leaders to spot potential. Consider the biblical record—who would have chosen:

- A stammering Moses to be a spokesman for God?
- A shepherd boy like David to be king of Israel?
- Uncouth John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus?
- A converted prostitute, Mary, to herald the resurrection?¹⁹

When you decide to join a governing body, you might or might not be aware of the skills and attributes you bring to the role. It is understandable to feel unprepared or unsure about making a substantial contribution. Your limited understanding of school governance and any fears you may have, combined with the greater experience of others, can be challenging. However, encouraging each other to be the best we can be, contributing positively to the conversation and developing our abilities can unlock God-given potential. Focusing on positive expectations of each other is crucial for stronger and more effective governance.

Children are an Example! (Mark 9.33–41; 10.13–16)

Unbelievably, the twelve disciples were caught arguing about who among them was the greatest. It provided a learning experience when Jesus highlighted children to be example for them as leaders. Here are four lessons worth considering:

- *The greater the leader, the greater the servant:* ‘Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all’ (Mark 9.35).
- *Leaders include others when they serve:* ‘For whoever is not against us is for us’ (Mark 9.40).
- *Any service rendered will be rewarded:* ‘Anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name...will certainly not lose their reward’ (Mark 9.41).
- *Servant leaders must become childlike:* ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it’ (Mark 10.14–15).²⁰

One of the values of visiting your school, whether on a monitoring visit or for some other reason, is the opportunity to learn from the children. The example

of Jesus in respecting and referring to children is powerful. I have never liked the practice of adults expecting to jump the queue when staying for a school dinner. I usually find the conversation with the children around me in the queue to be rich, informative and a highlight of my visit.

One of the joys and privileges of governance can be the interaction with children, yet we can often miss the challenge of learning from them. Even more importantly, becoming like them, as Jesus suggested, is about exhibiting humility, wonder, honesty, innocence, trust and dependence. These attributes will contribute to governance in a Christian manner as they enable us to be listeners, ready to learn rather than jump to conclusions, and to have a serving heart rather than wanting to get our own way.

Injunctions to a Young Leader (2 Tim 2.22–25)

In *Church School Governance*, I provided a reflection or group discussion based on St Paul's words to his protégé Timothy.²¹ Maxwell suggests that Paul knew how important it was to encourage the young leader Timothy to take a stand in tough situations. He urged him to have courage and do what was right in difficult times. Courage is an essential quality for effective leadership.

This is what Paul wrote (Tom Wright's translation, italics mine):

chase after *justice, faith, love and peace*; you'll be in the company of all who call on the Lord from a pure heart... And the Lord's servant mustn't be a fighter, but must be *gentle to all people, able to teach, able to bear evil without resentment, able to correct opponents with a meek spirit...*²²

Maxwell suggests the lessons to take from this set of instructions are:

- *Prevention* (vv 22–23)—Leaders must flee temptations, such as pleasure and power, that ruin their personal lives.
- *Pursuit* (v 22)—Leaders must chase after qualities that will build their character and integrity.
- *Portrayal* (vv 24–26)—Leaders must model right attitudes so that others will want to submit to God.²³

Imagine a governors' meeting. Having agreed at the start that there were no conflicts of interest, you begin to think a governor may stand to gain from the item under discussion. Whatever their motivation, someone must have the courage to raise the question gently and carefully. This needs to avoid being an accusation or sounding confrontational, so the language and tone used is suggested in Paul's carefully worded instructions (above) to Timothy.

Imagine another agenda item where you begin to feel the discussion is becoming rather heated and the head teacher is sounding defensive. There is good reason behind both sides of the argument and you are tempted to add your perspective robustly. Weighing up Paul's words might enable you to speak up in a more conciliatory, but nevertheless firm, way that turns the conversation.

The opportunity to be a peacemaker by bringing a pause and a more reflective contribution can often be as surprising to yourself as to others! This can come directly from your intention to behave in a Christian manner and perhaps from how Paul describes you as 'the Lord's servant' (2 Tim 2.24).

Moses! Exodus 18.19-26

From being a reluctant leader to making the journey out of captivity towards the promised land, on his father-in-law's advice Moses took several steps to ensure his leadership was manageable. Maxwell suggests:

- He became a man of prayer (v 19);
- He committed himself to better communication (v 20);
- He laid out a vision (v 20);
- He developed a plan (v 20);
- He selected and trained leaders (v 21);
- He released the trained leaders to do the work (v 22);
- He did only what others could not do (v 22).²⁴

You might see in these steps both strategic leadership and delegation, as well as the empowerment of others in shared leadership. This should be developed by a governance board because theirs is a shared responsibility with the head teacher/CEO who carry out the operational role. I would argue that governance in a Christian manner includes ensuring that each governor has their responsibilities clearly defined, and that they are encouraged and equipped through training to be effective governors.

Moses sets an example, especially for chairs of governors. What shapes this in a manner congruent with Christianity is becoming a praying person. Moses was challenged that he 'must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him' (v 19). It was a turning point in his leadership. And if you are not yet a person who prays, apart from making a start now why not enlist a praying person to support you?

Jesus

Finally, the greatest example of leadership offered in the Bible is that of Jesus, known as 'the servant leader. Just before he went to his death, we read (in the words of Stephen Cottrell) :

He rises from the table. He lays aside his outer garments and takes a towel and a basin of water. He washes his disciple's feet. The final example of leadership is one of service...He shows them that true leadership means to serve. He hits the ground kneeling.²⁵

Christ's act of service was culturally relevant and may not necessarily be useful in our context! However, the sentiment is very appropriate. Governors are being called to serve and to serve one another. Whether that is as straightforward as a kind word, an empathetic reaction or something else, being concerned about our colleagues must be relevant. This might be expressed by a commitment to pray but it could equally be demonstrated by random acts of kindness and providing practical support when there is a need.

How this is developed in your context and experience can be informed by the sort of leadership Jesus modelled, something to which we might aspire. As Cottrell continues:

This sort of leadership is learned by reflecting deeply on your own motivations, on your passions, on the examples of others who have led you and on a steady and regular resetting of the compass of your vision through contemplation and reflection.²⁶

In seeking to govern in a Christian manner we need to reflect on our practice. We are on a journey rather than a quickly reached destination. Echoing Hamlet's questioning of his own authenticity, everyone involved in school governance must resolve a similar question: 'To govern in a Christian manner or not?' Will you be an authentic school governor, true to who you are and what you believe? Will you allow what you know of the imprint of Christ, as found in the biblical narrative, to influence your thinking, behaviour, and contribution?

In the next chapter, meet three governors who have attempted to make that choice and adopt a Christian manner of governance.

Making a Difference by Governing in a Christian Manner

5

After reflecting on the inspiration of some characters from the Bible in chapter four, we turn to explore some of the ways governors have sought to demonstrate governance in a Christian manner. They do so from the foundation of a committed Christian perspective, but the principles behind their behaviours could be an example for any reader. To support those seeking to govern intentionally in a Christian manner, this chapter introduces the 6Ms framework to support your thinking.²⁷

Stephen Manning, a recently-appointed chair of a Church of England junior school believes that:

As a foundation governor, I have a crucial role to play in continuing the golden thread of Thomas Watson's vision in setting up church schools (see eD10 *Understanding Church Schools: Ideas for Today from Joshua Watson's Founding Vision*). This is consistent with a governor's core function of 'ensuring clarity of vision and ethos.' There is an inherent tension between this holistic approach to education and an inspection model that reflects a more market-driven culture within the sector. The latest iteration of the SIAMS Inspection Framework provides a healthy counterbalance and a template, as a foundation governor, for perpetuating Watson's vision in a local setting.²⁸

Given the historical perspective of the origin of Church of England schools and the reality of serving as a governor today, many challenges exist for Christians seeking to live out their faith. However, a church school ought to be a safe place for this, assuming it aims to build on its theological rootedness and therefore already has a Christian vision. Being true to yourself, particularly your faith, is not against the law. As a friend of mine has often said, 'Too often, Christians have made a contract with society not to [talk about personal faith].' The following examples may encourage you to continue to adjust your thinking and behaviour to govern in a more Christian manner.

The London Institute of Contemporary Christianity (LICC) has developed the 6Ms' framework (used here with permission) to support believers in identifying how to live more clearly Christian lives. The 6Ms guide people to Model godly character, Make good work, Minister grace and love, Mould culture, be a Mouthpiece for truth and justice and a Messenger of the gospel.

Each example demonstrates different possibilities or intentions within the contribution of those who are seeking to govern in an authentic and holistic Christian manner. These may not all apply to you but will hopefully provide food for thought for your own life and governance.

Governance in Practice—Case Study 1

Suanna is a lay minister in training and a foundation governor.

In her governance role, she was asked to assist the school in creating its Christian vision. Due to her positive impact, the board decided to change their structure so that they now have three foundation governors, including the *ex officio* vicar and herself, which has proved to be a great benefit!

Suanna now chairs the board and seeks to lead in a Christian manner. The school is prayed for not only by the three foundation governors but also through strong links with the local parish church. This is done through public intercessions as well as private prayers.

She also ensures that the school receives support through prayer and discussions at the parochial church council (PCC) meetings. The church is available for the school to use as an additional learning space when needed and is used for a termly act of collective worship. At one point, a new foundation governor was required; following prayer, a candidate came forward with suitable gifts.

Suanna describes how she believes the 6Ms help her focus on governance in a Christian manner:

1 Model Godly Character

Active listening is crucial to ensure that everyone's voice is heard, especially staff and in governance meetings. Allowing everyone to express their opinions without interruption is essential to make every person feel wholly valued. As chair, she sometimes needs to insist on this.

2 Make Good Work

Suanna works hard to ensure meetings run smoothly by reading the papers and being well-prepared. She strives to improve and do her best within time constraints.

3 Minister Grace and Love

Welcoming and supporting new governors who can find governance daunting is vital to her, so she aims to walk alongside them in their developing role.

4 Mould Culture

The role of a head teacher can be quite isolating. As a critical friend, Suanna often visits the school, and has a cup of coffee with the head. This is not necessarily for governance purposes but to check in personally and see how she is doing. Well-being is part of the school's ethos and needs to be modelled everywhere.

5 Mouthpiece for Truth and Justice

When dealing with a difficult parental complaint, it is of course essential to be guided by the school's complaint procedure and its Christian vision. Suanna believes that listening to the person's concerns, valuing them and avoiding dismissing even vexatious complaints is essential. Issues should be dealt with professionally and never swept under the carpet.

6 Messenger of the Gospel

Sharing about her faith during the school's collective worship is very important to Suanna. To strengthen the link with the church, she started to organize collective worship in the church once a term.

Governance in Practice—Case Study 2

Ruth Hale is the chair of a Church of England Primary School and of a community School in Essex.

She was a primary school teacher before having her children, then became a part-time SENCo (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) at the local church school as they grew up. Her journey into school governing began as a staff governor; when she retired, she was co-opted onto the board.

Thinking about how her 6Ms demonstrate governance in a Christian manner, Ruth described her aims:

1 Model Godly Character

As a Christian, Ruth believes in valuing each individual and has always encouraged everyone to contribute to governors' meetings. Now, usually, everyone participates. Apart from meetings, she spends time with the staff and other governors, having coffee and engaging in conversations. When in school, she makes sure to talk to as many people as possible. She always tries to be positive and express gratitude, whether it is to teachers, TAs, cleaning staff, catering staff or the head teacher.

2 Make Good Work

Ruth is guided by the biblical text, 'Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters' (Col 3.23). She prays as she drives into school and starts every meeting with prayer. It is also why she does training, intending to be the best chair of governors and governor that she can possibly be. As a recent example of good work, she helped produce an induction pack for new governors to ensure that they also can become the best they can be.

3 Minister Grace and Love

Sometimes Ruth's role is to be a peacemaker. In her non-church school governing context, a well-being survey revealed all sorts of issues. With the head teacher, she talked through how best to meet the obvious needs, such as prioritizing spending time with people, being relational and valuing people for who they are.

4 Mould Culture

In helping shape the vision of the church school, governors discussed ideas, read extensively, sought advice from the diocese, and aligned the school's vision with the *Church of England's Vision for Education*. Together they ensured that the vision was also written in a language that the children could easily understand.

Ruth also had some input into the vision for the non-church school where she was a governor. She was pleased that the concept of valuing every child and every school community member was included, as this reflected her 'thinking in a Christian manner.'

5 Mouthpiece for Truth and Justice

For many years, Ruth was heavily involved with a Kenya Schools Partnership, visiting several times to develop the relationship. There have been many opportunities to advocate for their needs and demonstrate their shared values.

As a former SENCo, Ruth strongly believes in inclusion and has spent numerous years fighting funding issues with the local authority. She always encourages schools to be as inclusive as possible, believing that every child deserves the best education available. As a governor, she believes it is important to challenge senior leaders if needed, to ensure that all families are welcomed into the school community and provided with the best opportunities.

6 Messenger of the Gospel

A Christian youth organization goes into all the primary schools around the area, which Ruth believes is a positive way to help children understand the Christian faith. She is always prepared to share her own Christian faith in school when there is an opportunity.

Ruth has also encouraged the involvement and development of children in leading collective worship, which they now do with guidance from a teaching assistant who is a Christian.

Governance in Practice—Case Study 3

John and the long term view.

A former trustee of a multi-academy trust and now chair of a Church of England school governing body, John has been on a constant learning journey. As a governor grappling with the responsibilities and requirements of the role, John's Christian governance is inspired by the dedication of St Paul in Phil 3.13–15, 'I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.'

Rather than seeking the applause of colleagues or Britain's system of awards, John looks for a greater, long-term goal. Tom Wright sums this up (with my italics):

What you do with your body in the present matters, because God has a great future in store for it...What you do in the present—by writing, preaching, singing, sewing, praying, teaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, loving your neighbour as yourself, *governing, educating*—all these things will last into God's future... They are part of what we may call building for God's kingdom.²⁹

The Christian mindset is informed by keeping at least one eye on a promised future whilst living life committed to the task or tasks in hand. Christian hope is not the power of positive thinking but based on the promises of God.

This is what John believes informs his practice as a governor as described by the 6Ms:

1 Model Godly Character

John's intention is summed up by St Paul in Phil 3.17, 'Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.' With God's

help, he tries to provide a model others would want to mirror, with such attributes as kindness, honesty and forgiveness, amongst others.

2 Make Good Work

John aims to keep his promises, deliver on delegated tasks and be faithful in his relationships—to be dependable. It is not always easy, although his innate characteristic of responsibility perhaps makes it natural to do his very best in undertaking tasks well and on time, encouraging all to aim for this.

3 Minister Grace and Love

Responding in a way consistent with his faith can be challenging. One parent became very hostile towards the school because he disagreed with a historic decision made by the governing body (before John became chair). Whilst John never had a direct conversation with him, the parent continued to stir up the issue and make false accusations against John, the former chair and the governing body. On numerous occasions, when this parent saw governors outside the school, they were met by a torrent of verbal abuse. It was hard to remain composed in the face of this onslaught, but John knew it was important to lead by example with integrity.

As a Christian, John believes in the importance of grace and reconciliation. Whilst apologizing for any upset that may have been caused, he could not apologize for the decisions that the governing body made, which were in the school's best interests. He acknowledges that reconciliation requires a willingness from both sides to move forward, which may take more work to achieve.

4 Mould Culture

John's wife is a local church leader and regularly invited into school to lead collective worship. Consequently, the staff and pupils know them both. The church school, with its governors and school leaders, is often the closest many in the school community get to church. When a member of the school staff became seriously ill, John and his wife were that teacher's only link with Christian faith. Knowing he was dying, the teacher asked them both to visit, later asking John's wife to officiate at his funeral. Consequently, they had conversations in the hospital with the teacher, his spouse and their family. Acknowledging that he did not have any faith before he became ill, the teacher's whole framework changed in facing death and he died peacefully. John summed it up, 'There was hope in that funeral, which is what the Christian faith is here to bring.'

5 Mouthpiece for Truth and Justice

A formal staff restructuring is one of the most demanding processes governors may be involved in. John finds that honesty, collaboration and compassion are key to restructuring in a Christian manner, but it takes work to seek a just outcome for as many as possible who are affected. John quotes the example of finding a different source of funding to open a breakfast club, which enabled some teaching assistants to take up that employment opportunity to replace their existing role. Genuine support and care for staff was matched by seeking a just outcome for those involved in the challenging restructuring process.

6 Messenger of the Gospel

John refers to the sentiment, 'Christians have always changed the world. Sometimes deliberately and sometimes through unintended consequences.' This is a view that informs how to build on the relationships which being a governor provides. When questions arise—sometimes tongue in cheek and quite often almost as an accusation—he is more than happy to follow the instruction to, '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 Pet 3.15). Equally, a timely word, a positive attitude or an act of generosity can lead to the unintended consequence of interest in his motivation and what, or rather who, informs his choices.

The Purpose and Impact

Keeping these examples in mind, alongside those you have observed in others and even yourself, what might we hope to achieve?

When asked about the probable impact of church schools and how, as governors, the impact can be explored, the Revd Patrick Gilday, a student on a church school governors' course, wrote:

I have concluded that church schools can only be a 'gift to the nation' in a post-Christian world if school leaders are prepared to own Christianity openly and be confident in it. This is a real challenge, especially for teachers who may not have personal Christian faith...I have worked hard as a foundation governor to deepen the relationship of trust with those staff who aren't Christians, so they are more inclined to lean on the parish's external wisdom and guidance. I think this is important as, in an increasingly difficult world, children of all faiths and none deserve the chance to explore their own spirituality in a holistic and

varied way, and teachers are often underconfident in enabling this or simply have too much else to do.³⁰

Clearly, Patrick has grasped something of what it means to ensure he lives out his calling as a parish priest in the school and governs in a Christian manner.

A suggested reflective task in the final chapter may help you to redefine or develop your own role in a manner similar to these examples.

6

Conclusion

Fulfilling any role can be overwhelming when you are challenged to consider the manner in which you do it, as this book has sought to encourage you to do. As a school governor, you have many and varied responsibilities to become familiar with, and there is usually a steep learning curve. It might feel like a lot to manage, especially as a voluntary role and given the limits of your capacity. But here are three key reminders:

A: Right Foundation

Understanding your calling and foundation will significantly affect how you govern. Chapter two's metaphor of building on the right foundation acknowledges that Jesus specifically applied this image to following his teaching. Identifying your foundation and some of the principles that you build on can be both life-enhancing and provide a means by which you can face any challenges. I remember being commissioned for a new opportunity in my early twenties. In the church service, the preacher spoke about how my sense of a calling would be essential to continuing and being sustained in the role I was stepping into. This continues to be true over forty years later!

B: Corporate Responsibility

There are many ways to help governors develop a Christian manner as they fulfil their commitment to serve the school in this capacity. Governance is a collegiate activity. No governor has personal responsibilities unless delegated explicitly by a governing body decision. For example, even being chair or safeguarding governor does not immediately confer any individual right to determine or decide anything. All governors are accountable to the governing body for any actions or involvement they may have undertaken. As Rom 12.4–5 reminds readers, 'Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others'—a Christian concept which informs the collective responsibility of school governance. As the *Governance Handbook* clearly states:

As the accountable body, the board...may delegate operational matters...in some cases to individuals, but the board as a corporate entity remains accountable and responsible for all decisions made.³¹

C: Relationships

It is challenging when a diverse group of people come together as a governing board, not knowing others around the table. Building trusting relationships and understanding others should be part both of their induction and the ongoing development of the board. Often attending training together will make a valuable contribution to this. One of my favourite sayings is, 'As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another' (Prov 27.17). This might lead you to consider how, as governors, you support each other in your learning and development in the role. Identifying who can be a trusted mentor, buddy or source of advice may be helpful. Even those experienced in other fields of work or school governance find enormous value in talking things through (bearing in mind the necessity for total confidentiality) with someone who can bring some wisdom to their thinking.

It can also be supportive when a friend or your church leader is enlisted to be a confidential prayer partner. Knowing that someone is committed to supporting and praying for you can be a source of strength. When St Paul was under house arrest, he not only prayed for the Ephesian church, but also wrote to them, saying:

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Eph 4.1–3).

Each of these practices would make for more effective meetings and enable governance in a Christian manner. The famous Nolan Principles are a good start: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.³² The examples highlighted in this book are also intended to give us new insights and enable us to govern in a more Christian manner.

Reflecting on How You Might Develop Governing in a Christian Manner

You might like to use these ideas for personal reflection. During a governor's meeting they could be discussion topics. Alternatively, why not discuss them with a colleague governor and go on the journey together? Or, find a trusted

governor from a different context, or a friend, you can talk to who will be truthful and provide insight to help you.

Steps for Reflection

- Ask a governor colleague to give you honest feedback about how you come across to others and their attitude to you. Identify and consider the strengths and weaknesses you have in your role as a governor.
- Take the 6Ms from chapter five and describe in one or two sentences how you feel you meet some, or all, of the headings. Try adding an example to them. Identify an area where you could focus and develop.
- Go back to chapter four and select at least one of the biblical characters, read the Bible passage provided, then identify how the leadership lessons are derived from it. Consider how this will change and enrich your own thinking and behaviour.
- If you pray, use each of the 6Ms (maybe one per day) to ask God to help you improve your intentional Christian manner as a governor.

Notes

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- 27 Used with permission from the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity.
- 28 S Manning, in an essay for the Church School Governance Course, Liverpool Hope University, 2023.
- 29 T Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (London: SPCK, 2007) p 205.
- 30 P Gilday, in an essay for the Church School Governance Course, Liverpool Hope University, 2023.
- 31 Department of Education, *Governance Handbook* (London: Crown Publishing, 2020).
- 32 The UK Government's advisory body, the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) was established by John Major in 1994 to advise on ethical standards in public life. In 1995, under the chairman, Lord Nolan, they established the Seven Principles of Public Life, known as the 'Nolan Principles.' They are recommended as guidance for school governing bodies.

The Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools' Framework is based on the understanding of education and inspection in 'a Christian manner.' But what does 'a Christian manner' mean for governors? This book will help them reflect on how the concept can inform their approach to governance roles and responsibilities, providing helpful examples and applications. It aims to help governors think about their role and to enable them to serve their colleagues and schools in 'a Christian manner.'



Having been a governor for over forty years, **Mike Simmonds** is currently supporting governance in the Dioceses of Chichester and Chelmsford. He writes and provides training and support for governors in those dioceses, tutors on the Liverpool Hope University governors' course and

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