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Christian Spiritual Exemplars: A Phenomenological Study of Exemplary Christian School Graduates in Hawaii

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctor of Education Program

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Christian Spiritual Exemplars: A Phenomenological Study of Exemplary Christian School

Graduates in Hawaii

Lacey Uilani Vasquez

Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Instructional Leadership

Jillian Skelton, Ed.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

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Concordia University–Portland

2019

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative-phenomenological study was to understand how Christian school graduates view their lived experiences in their high school education in relation to their Christian spiritual formation (CSF) and to understand the Christian high school experiences associated with highly developed CSF. This study was conducted amongst a nondenominational church in Hawaii. The phenomenological research approach was used to deduce from a variety of accounts of the Christian school experience, the common essences associated with exemplary Christianity as defined by experts within the community. A purposive snowball sample was used to identify the study participants who were nominated to the study based on the exemplarity of their Christian faith, their generational cohort, and their high school type. All participants graduated from Christian high schools. For the purposes of this study, semistructured interviews were conducted with a sample of four women and four men whose responses indicated that the process of CSF for the Christian spiritual exemplar was ongoing and supported by events and opportunities for CSF within the Christian high school. This study also suggests that CSF in the Christian high school is a process not independent of a greater faith community and not independent of direct mentorship from adults within the school and the faith community. A network of supports and scaffolds for the CSE exists at the intersection of the CSF and the Christian high school.

Keywords: Christian schools, lived experiences, exemplar methods, phenomenology, faith formation, spiritual formation, Christian culture

Dedication

This is foremost dedicated to God because without Him, this would have been impossible. Also, to my loving, supporting husband, Jonathan, and my firstborn son, Shiloh; you both have been my inspiration.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

Christian schools set themselves apart from schools with state-mandated, religion-neutral curriculum and outcomes by upholding their Christian affiliation and mission (Association of Christian Schools International [ACSI], 2017a, 2017b; Hawaii Catholic Schools [HCS], 2018; Rockers, 2018). However, the variety of conceptualizations of spiritual formation make observation and assessment of spiritual formation and outcomes, both apart from and directly involving Christian schools, difficult (Francis, Ap Sion, & Village, 2014; Good & Willoughby, 2014; Jackson, Entwistle, Larson, & Reiersen, 2016; MacDonald et al., 2015; Moore, 2014; Nelson, James, Miles, Morrell, & Sledge, 2017). In other words, it is difficult to know if what sets the Christian school apart from other schools is evident beyond theory.

The extant literature concerning spiritual formation primarily used quantitative—either one-shot or longitudinal survey research—or mixed methods research, to explore spiritual formation phenomena through measuring specific outcomes (Barkin, Miller, & Luthar, 2015; Good & Willoughby, 2014; Jeung, Esaki, & Liu, 2015; Lang, 2015; Moore, 2014; Twenge, Exline, Grubbs, Sastry, & Campbell, 2015; Twenge, Sherman, Exline, & Grubbs, 2016; Yocum, 2014). However, while the quantitative and mixed methods studies allowed the researchers to generalize from their findings and see trends in spirituality and religiosity over time, the studies limited the depth in which the researchers could explore the spiritual formation process independent of and including the high school experience. Some studies employed solely qualitative inquiry and uncovered a more in-depth understanding of the spiritual formation process and its outcomes within and outside of the Christian school although the findings could

not be generalized to the broader population (Alleman, Robinson, Leslie, & Glanzer, 2016; Bankston, 2015; Holmes, 2017).

While the aforementioned research provided insight on spiritual outcomes and traits that could be expected of Christian school students, researchers called for further evaluation of program effectiveness in schools, including but not limited to, more in-depth research concerning the expectations and outcomes of Christian organizations and the role of the school on student identity and faith formation (Alleman et al., 2016; Aziz, 2017; Francis et al., 2014; Horan, 2017). This call for further research points to a gap in the literature that could be filled by addressing the intersection between the spiritual formation process and the lived experiences of Christian school graduates. Lockerbie (2005) offered that the real measure of effective Christian spiritual formation is in the spiritual strength of the alumni “ten or twenty or forty years later” (p. 116). This qualitative, phenomenological study looks at the lived experiences of Christian school graduates who exemplify Christian spiritual development and constancy. The analysis of their lived experiences in the Christian high school will help understand the role of the Christian high school in their spiritual formation and help identify the high school experiences that are associated with Christian spiritual exemplarity.

Measurement and support of Christian school outcomes. International organizations like Cardus and ACSI and local organizations like HCS have missions to promote and assess outcomes of religious education (ACSI, 2017a, 2017b; HCS, 2018). Cardus, located in Canada and the United States, is organized to provide data-driven assessment of religious schools in Canada and the United States. Cardus surveys and analysis of the survey data is available online for educators and other stakeholders in religious schools to make informed choices concerning Christian education (Schwarz & Sikkink, 2016; Sikkink, 2018; Sikkink & Skiles, 2018). The

ACSI aims to promote the Christian faith in school settings by creating and hosting platforms, print, online, and in-person for collaboration amongst Christian educators and administrators (ACSI, 2017). Where Cardus uses survey data, ACSI uses online message boards and conferences to share insights on the Christian school advantages. Locally, in Hawaii, HCS provides online resources and conference-setting opportunities for teachers and administrators to help students develop their faith in the academic setting; detailed survey results, datasets, and analysis of data from surveys hosted by HCS are not available to the public through their website. Organized efforts like the ones discussed here are taking place in a climate where spirituality and religiosity is experiencing attrition rates that were not experienced between generations prior (Barry, Willoughby, & Clayton, 2015; Chan, Tsai, & Fuligni, 2015; Twenge et al., 2015; Twenge et al., 2016; Uecker et al., 2016).

Private, Christian schools in Hawaii. Hawaii has 53 private high schools (HAIS, 2017), of which nine are ASCI affiliated high schools; four of those nine are ASCI accredited high schools. The other five schools are accredited by other governing bodies but are not ACSI accredited. To be ACSI accredited, a school must uphold specific guidelines for teaching the Bible as part of the core curriculum, leading to students developing the ability to “apply their Bible knowledge in various areas of their lives . . . which will be visible in character qualities” (ACSI, 2017b). The ACSI stated that they support educators “who embody a biblical worldview, engage in transformational teaching and discipling, and embrace personal and professional growth” (2017, para. 1). The vision of ACSI is to develop schools that will “contribute to the public good through effective teaching and learning and that are biblically sound, academically rigorous, socially engaged, and culturally relevant” (ACSI, 2017, para. 1). In Hawaii, ASCI accredited high schools had an enrollment of 182 high school students in the 2016–2017 school

year, and ASCI affiliated schools had an enrollment of 756 high school students in the 2016–2017 school year (HAIS, 2017).

Private, Catholic schools in Hawaii. Hawaii Catholic Schools (HCS) make up 27% of all Hawaii’s independent schools (HAIS, 2017). The HCS governing body is dedicated to helping teachers and administrators in Catholic schools form the Catholic identity of all their constituents through discipleship (Rockers, 2018). Hawaii Catholic Schools follow the faith-based tradition, stating that the Catholic school is one that is “centered in the Person of Jesus Christ” and contributes to “the Evangelizing Mission of the church” (Rockers, 2018, p. 6). In the 2015–2016 school year, Hawaii public school enrollment was more than five times the enrollment of Hawaii private schools, effectively overshadowing private school enrollment across the state (Hawaii Department of Education, 2017). With a comparatively small enrollment, HCS has committed to an expansive, evangelizing mission.

Background of the Study

The enrollment disparity between public and private Christian schools is evident. What is yet to be fully understood are the students’ lived experiences in the two types of schooling—more specifically, the experiences that can be attributed to spiritual maturity or regression beyond high school (Horan, 2017; LeBlanc & Slaughter, 2012; Nelson et al., 2017). This study forgoes a comparison study of student experiences in the different school types and focuses on the lived experiences of Christian school graduates. Gaining insight on the connections between spiritual maturity or regression and the Christian high school experience has been an ambitious task for researchers who have grappled with many various moderating factors in spiritual formation (Jueng, Esaki, & Liu, 2015). Some researchers have conducted studies that gave insight into Christian school outcomes and approached the Christian school phenomena by

measuring moral and religious behavior and tendencies through analysis of survey data (Denton & Uecker, 2018; Sikkink, 2018; Sikkink & Skiles, 2018; Uecker, Mayryl, & Stroope, 2016).

What researchers know about the decline in Christian spirituality and religiosity.

Items like family formation, church attendance, and frequency of prayer have been used as variables to assess religiosity and spirituality for people who attended Christian schools. A study by Sikkink and Skiles (2018) found that while there were long-term effects of Christian schooling on religious beliefs and practices, there were other factors or mediators apart from schooling that made it difficult to measure the effect of Christian schooling as an isolated variable. Other studies like one done by Chan et al. (2015) found an adverse effect of Christian schooling; that is those who had high levels of religious participation in high school had low levels of religious participation by four years after high school graduation. Yet, studies in England showed that students who attended Christian schools had a notably different values profile from those who attended nonreligious, traditional schools (Francis, 2005; Francis et al., 2014).

The trend away from Christian spirituality and religiosity has been correlated with multiple other trends (Barry et al., 2015; Jueng et al., 2015; Twenge et al., 2016). Some of these trends include changes in perceptions toward spirituality and religiosity and personal hybridizations and redefinitions of spirituality and personal faith practices due to multiculturalism and generational differences (Jueng et al., 2015). There is a decline in religious practices and Christian spirituality between recent generations, specifically amongst Millennial adults (Barry et al., 2015; Chan, et al., 2015; Twenge et al., 2015; Twenge et al., 2016; Uecker et al., 2016). In other words, while the preceding generations expressed their Christian faith through certain recognizable practices like church attendance, the celebration of Christmas, and

the practice of prayer, more recent generations have chosen different expressions of their faith in different contexts. Yet separate from different expressions of faith, there has been a turning away from fundamental faith tenets like belief that the Bible is the sacred Word of God, belief in God himself, and personal prayer practice (Twenge et al., 2016). Increased ambivalence toward church and organized religion has been associated with attrition of Christian spirituality and religiosity (McGuire, 2017; Twenge et al., 2016).

What researchers know about retention of Christian spirituality and religiosity.

Christian spirituality and religiosity have generally declined across the recent generations; however, there are contexts and experiences that are associated with strong Christian spirituality and religiosity (Aziz, 2017; Carlson, 2006; Chandler 2015; Denton & Uecker, 2018). Some of these contexts include, but are not limited to, identification with and involvement in faith communities, opportunities to practice faith through expressions of love, purposeful faith-filled interactions with others, family formation, and instructional settings (Chandler, 2015; Chandler, Kiple, & Hagenberg, 2014; King, Clardy, & Ramos, 2014; Uecker, 2018; Uecker et al., 2016). There is social capital in these contexts that must be accessed and leveraged deliberately in order to have a lasting effect on members of the community (Deprez, 2017; Holmes, 2017; Manning, 2014). Christian religiosity and spirituality are not passively promoted from one generation to the next, and the effectiveness of different strategies used to promote spirituality and religiously is not fully understood partly because of all the other possible mediating factors in interconnected social contexts.

This current study looked at one social context, a part of a much larger schema of the Christian faith decline narrative, an instructional setting—the Christian high school. The Christian high school experience is important to this narrative because the school is an

organization whose mission directly involves spiritual formation of its students through education (D'Souza, 2000; Lockerbie, 2005; Wright, 2000). This mission is pursued through the culture, instruction, curriculum, community and teachers in the school. Yet, what makes the Christian high school a compelling context to explore is that high school occurs right before emerging adulthood, the life-stage transition where there is generally a notable decrease in affiliation from a specific religion or faith (Barry et al., 2015; Chan et al., 2015; Twenge et al., 2016).

Connection to theory. Faith development theories developed by Fowler (1995) and Willard (2006, 2010) orient the phenomena of the Christian high school experience within the faith development process and the Christian spirituality and religiosity decline narrative. Fowler (1995) anchored his faith development theory in *epistemology*, the nature of knowing, heavily influenced by Piaget, Kohlberg, and Erickson (“Developmental Stages,” 2016; Slee & Shut, 2003). Fowler’s faith development theory builds on and extends these theories and is delineated by structural phrases that are built around how people experience themselves and others. Fowler’s theory also focuses on how life meanings are formed in each stage of faith (Fowler, 1995). Additionally, Fowler’s stages of faith are not age specific though they have age-group correlations. These characteristics of Fowler’s faith-stages theory makes it fitting as part of the framework for this study.

Fowler’s stages-of-faith theory does not assess, nor is it meant to be an assessment of, Judeo-Christian faith development because it does not focus on distinctly Christian values. The role of Fowler’s faith stages in this study is to understand the stage of life or stage of faith where people begin to depart from the beliefs and values of the family and community and begin to form, structure, or restructure their own beliefs and values. Fowler’s theory demarcates, howbeit

loosely, young adulthood, the individuative-reflective faith stage, as the point of departure from the values and beliefs of the community that the individual was brought up in. Individuals transition out of the preceding stage, the synthetic-conventional faith Stage, when they become critically aware and reflective of the values and beliefs that were nurtured by their formative communities (Fowler & Dell, 2006). Willard's (2006, 2010) faith formation theories are directly related to Christian formation from a strictly Biblical perspective—where the will of a person is renewed to take on the characteristics of the will of God. Willard (2006) offered that both formation points of view complement one another: “the processes of spiritual formation thus understood require precise, testable, thorough knowledge of the human self. Psychological and theological understanding of the spiritual life must go hand in hand” (para. 22).

High school graduation is an important time in the faith formation process. Graduation from high school typically occurs around the time individuals transition into a more autonomous stage of believing and knowing (Fowler & Dell, 2006). This is also generally the time when Millennial individuals experience a departure from Christian spirituality and religiosity. Christian schools have a role in the Christian faith of their alumni, so a deep understanding of school-based, faith-formation strategies and the nature of the Christian school experience is merited.

The studies so far mentioned in this section approached the Christian school phenomena through an outcome-based lens, demonstrating that there are relationships between Christian schooling and a variety of conceptualizations of evident spirituality and religiosity. However, there remains the question of what specific experiences are attributed to the study participants' spiritual and religious profiles. This current study explores an element that is missing from

current literature on CSF in Christian schools—the lived experiences of Christian school graduates who are highly developed in their CSF.

Scope and span of the study. Highly developed or exemplary Christians are a unique segment of the Christian-school graduate population. Exemplars represent the part of the population who are further along the process of development than the typical individual (Bronk, 2012; Damon & Colby, 2013; King, Oakes Muller, & Furrow, 2013). A focus on the lived experiences of this cross section of Christian school graduates may be more likely to provide a perspective representative of experiences that are associated with mature CSF, rather than the typical experience. This study took its cue from Lockerbie (2005) and seeks out Christian school alumni perspectives on the intersection between CSF and their Christian high school experiences.

Statement of the Problem

It is unknown how highly-developed Christian school graduates experienced CSF in their Christian schools. Another unknown is how highly-developed Christian school graduates viewed those experiences after they graduated from high school. There is no consensus on how the Christian high school experience is perceived by Christian school graduates. Looking at these lived experiences will give insight on what Christian high school experiences are associated with highly developed CSF—beyond high school—from the perspective of Christian spiritual exemplars (CSEs) in Hawaii.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to understand how CSEs view their lived experiences in their Christian high school, after graduation. Previous researchers discuss traits and characteristics of students who attended Christian schools, but what is missing

is a discussion of the lived experiences and reflections of this students after graduation. As part of this study, community experts from one church congregation delineate nomination criteria for Christian spiritual exemplarity. These criteria were then used to identify CSEs within the church community who also matched the demographic criteria for the study, which include attending and graduating a Christian school in Hawaii and being part of the Millennial generation. Interviews are conducted with nominated CSEs to understand what the Christian school experience meant for those who experienced the phenomena and to help answer the researchable questions.

Research Questions

This study was designed to explore the intersection between the Christian school experience and Christian exemplarity. Here are my researchable questions:

1. How do Christian Spiritual Exemplars (CSEs), who have graduated from Christian high schools, perceive their lived experiences of Christian Spiritual Formation (CSF) in the Christian high school?
2. How do these experiences shape the spiritual lives of CSEs beyond high school?

These questions are qualitative in nature because they seek understanding of the phenomenon as a whole opposed to a quantitative perspective that views a phenomenon in parts (Merriam, 2001). These questions are phenomenological in nature because they seek to identify how the phenomenon is experienced (Giorgi, 2017). These questions can be investigated through phenomenology because they seek to uncover aspects of the Christian formation experience in Christian schools that are not deeply or thoroughly understood.

Methods. To conduct this study, the principal investigator used exemplar sampling strategies as described by Bronk (2012) and King et al. (2013) to identify the study subjects. The

long interview is typical of phenomenological investigations sometimes beginning with a “brief meditative activity aimed at creating a relaxed and trusting atmosphere” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). Data collection was gathered primarily through semistructured interviews that last approximately two hours or less allowing for the subjects to both develop and even contradict their own thoughts on the interview topic (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). Study participants were prepared with an activity they can complete before the start of the interview. The activity was used as a means to guide the interview; however, the researcher was prepared to completely abandon or use the activity and interview questions as only a guide or as a supplement for the interview. Data analysis was done through analytic memos and coding, following Moustaka’s process of analysis—epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis (1994).

Design. Qualitative research allows the researcher to focus on how people “make sense of their world and the experiences they have lived” (Merriam, 2001, p. 6). Phenomenology is a research design that allows for the uncovering the underlying essence of a shared experience (Merriam, 2001; Moustakas, 1994). This study used phenomenology because it lets the researcher focus on the lived experiences and the perspectives of individuals who have unique insight to the processes of spiritual formation in the Christian school (Moustakas, 1994).

Study Significance

This study adds to literature on spiritual formation from a Christian perspective. This study operationalized Christian spiritual exemplarity within a specific community and uses that delineation to identify individuals who are highly developed in that community’s perspective. This study acknowledged that various communities and cultures view spirituality—Christian spirituality not withstanding—differently. The results of this research may benefit schools and

churches by showing how Christian schools are aligned or misaligned with stakeholder ideologies and expectations. It may also benefit schools by helping them understand the elements of the Christian school experience need strengthening or are not perceived as necessary in the CSF of their students.

The theoretical significance of this study is underscored by Fowler's (1995) epistemological faith formation stages and CSF as distinct in its focus on the person's spirit. Fowler's (1995) stages of faith provides a lens through which the different phases of people's development might be understood. Faith formation in terms of CSF is a focus on the person in relation to the Spirit of God, the Holy Word of God, and the process of discipleship (Bonhoeffer, 1995; Chandler et al., 2014; Willard, 2006). This study takes both perspectives into account when seeking to understand the perspectives of the participants' individual experiences. First, Fowler's (1995) stages of faith theory is used to identify the general demographics of the study sample, and CSF as delineated by seminal authors is used to determine the specific, target study sample—individuals who model Christian faith exemplarity.

Definition of Terms

Christian schools. Schools that state spiritual formation as a main element in their school's mission or vision.

Christian spiritual exemplars (CSE). A disciple who is critically aware of his or her Christian beliefs and values and is one who embodies the character of Christ as is exemplified in the Bible through obedience to the Word of God and demonstration of spiritual virtues such as those found in Galatians 5:22–23 (NKJV): “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” within the Christian community and beyond.

Christian spiritual formation (CSF). The processes of conforming a person's individual will to "explicit obedience to Christ" (Willard, 2006, para. 15).

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

Assumptions. Despite the gap in literature on how CSEs view their experience of CSF in the Christian high school, the principal investigator engaged in this research with the assumption that exemplary Christians, who attended Christian schools, experienced CSF in the high school. Christian school theory states that the mission of the Christian school is to educate the whole child in their spirit, soul, and body (Groome, 1980, 1998; Manning, 2014). Fowler (1995) posits that it is typical of individuals ages 12 through 21 to take on the beliefs and values of those closest to them. Therefore, this study explored the intersection of the Christian high school and CSF.

Delimitations. The sample for this study was selected by using exemplar sampling strategies. Using a purposive snowball sample, the principal investigator consulted with an initial group of informants, community expert advisors, who nominated CSEs to this study. The community experts who nominated the study participants were the same community experts who developed the criteria to identify the CSEs. The principal researcher chose to delimit this study to one evangelical Christian church community in Hawaii due to the possibility that different communities would generate different criteria. This research population was also delimited to Millennials because of the church decline narrative associated with this specific generational cohort.

Limitations. The limitations of this study stemmed from the sampling strategy and research design. The study sample was limited to the social network of the initial study informants. It is possible that there were individuals who fit the criteria for exemplarity, but

because those individuals were not in the social networks of the expert advisors, they were not given the opportunity to participate in the study. Also, the principal investigator needed to rely on the trustworthiness of the expert advisor to nominate suitable candidates to the study based on the criteria. The participant's expert role is a limitation because while the participant was an expert in the construct under investigation, he or she may not have been an expert in communicating his or her perspectives (Bronk, 2012).

Another limitation that came from the data collection method is that the interviewees may not have a clear memory of the events and experiences they wanted to convey, or they may have only provided the information they were "prepared to reveal about their perceptions of events and opinions" (Alshenqeeti, 2014, p. 43). Interviewees may have also been compelled to participate and respond to the interview questions to please the person who nominated him or her to the study. To limit this effect, all nominations to the study were confidential.

Chapter 1 Summary

This chapter discussed the research problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, the significance of the study, the definition of terms, and the limitation and delimitations of the study. Chapter 2 discusses the conceptual framework for the study along with a review of literature on Christian education and spiritual or religious formation. Chapter 3 discusses the qualitative exemplar methodology and design used for this study. Chapter 4 describes the findings. Chapter 5 is a discussion of the study's conclusions and recommendations for further study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction to the Literature Review

This study explored the perspectives of a sample Hawaii's Christian school alumni concerning their Christian high school's role in their spiritual formation. Understanding how Hawaii's private, Christian school alumni view their Christian school experiences in their CSF, adds to the current body of knowledge on Christian schools and spiritual formation. It adds to the literature informing the Christian community of the Christian school experiences that do and do not have influence on the spiritual development of their children. The study also gives understanding on what specific experiences contribute to CSF.

This topic is significant because as a member of an evangelical Christian church and as a teacher at a Catholic school and former teacher at an evangelical Christian school, parents often look to the principal investigator for input regarding where they should send their children for high school. Parents want to know how the Christian school develops their child's faith and if there are effective faith development processes implemented in the schools. The principal investigator often pointed parents to other teachers who teach in Christian schools. It would benefit the Christian community to know what Christian school experiences are associated with highly developed CSF.

This section will begin with a description of the conceptual framework for this study. This discussion is followed by a review of research and methodological literature and finally a synthesis of research findings. A critique of previous research closes this chapter.

Conceptual Framework

Three concepts that frame this topic are Fowler's concept of knowing as outlined in his stages of faith, Christian faith formation from the perspective of seminal authors and scripture,

and Christian schools. Fowler's stages of faith theory offers delineations of stages that describe where a person may be in their way of knowing and interacting with others. Faith has many different definitions, so the concept of Christian faith formation is explained. Finally, Christian schools share responsibility for the faith formation of their students; it is a uniquely different from non-Christian schools because of their faith formation mission.

Faith formation. Developmental psychologist Fowler's six stages of faith development has been used as framework for exploration on faith formation and child development (Jackson et al., 2016; Neuman, 2011; Tighe, 2015). Fowler's (1995) theory of faith stages serves as part of the framework for this study to identify the different ways faith is shaped for people in different stages. Fowler (1995) argued that faith formation is a developmental process consisting of seven aspects that advance through six stages. He proposed his theory of stages of faith development against the background Piaget, Kohlberg, and Erickson.

Theoretical framework for Fowler's stages of faith. Piaget, a developmental psychologist, is known for his theory of cognitive development ("Developmental Stages," 2016). His focus was on epistemology ("Developmental Stages," 2016). Piaget and his colleagues contributed to delineating logical, sequential, formal models of knowing (Fowler, 1995; Inhelder, De Caprona, & Cornu-Wells, 2013). Piaget's four stages of knowing are (a) the sensorimotor stage, which spans from birth to two years old; (b) the preoperational stage, which spans from ages two through seven; (c) the concrete operational stage, which spans from ages seven through 12; and (d) and the formal operational stage which spans from ages 13 through adulthood ("Developmental Stages," 2016).

In the first stage, children learn through movements and interactions with people and things and make meaning based on the sensations that result from those interactions. In the

second stage, the child learns language and uses the symbols provided by language to discuss what they see and know. In this stage, the child is egocentric and believes that other people see and know the same way the child does (“Developmental Stages,” 2016). In the third stage, children can categorize, reconcile two concepts into one thought, and have render logical thought processes. At this point, the child begins to lose his or her egocentric perspective (“Developmental Stages,” 2016). In the fourth and final stage, the child begins to think logically, systematically, and abstractly. It is in the fourth stage that the subject can make choices based on morals and desired outcomes (“Developmental Stages,” 2016).

Piaget submitted that at each of the stages, the subject has a specific way of knowing based subject’s interactions with the subject’s environment. Piaget also submitted that these stages were universal. Piaget’s concept of the “active, knowing” subject’s interaction with his or her environment influenced Kohlberg’s work on moral development (Fowler, 1995, p. 46).

Kohlberg, American psychologist, built upon Piaget’s stages and submitted six stages of moral development which are grouped in to three levels—the preconventional level, the conventional level, and the postconventional level (“Developmental Stages,” 2016). Kohlberg posited that choice is not a consequence of values or feelings but rather of a rational, moral crux (“Developmental Stages,” 2016; Fowler, 1995). Kohlberg’s stages are based on cognitive development that weighs the outcomes of choices based rather than solely a subject’s interactions with others.

Stage 1 and Stage 2 are in the preconventional level where “moral decisions are based on how the individuals themselves are affected” (“Developmental Stages,” 2016, p. 314). Stage 3 and Stage 4 in the conventional level where “moral judgments are based on the conventions of society, family, religion, or other social order” (“Developmental Stages,” 2016, p. 314). Stage 5

and Stage 6 are in the postconventional level where “moral judgments are based on personal beliefs” (“Developmental Stages,” 2016, p. 314). Kohlberg’s stages addressed the formulation of moral reasoning at various stages of cognitive development (Fowler, 1995). In Kohlberg’s model, each stage builds upon another.

Erickson, developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst who was influenced by Freud’s biological approach to development, proposed the eight stages of psychosocial development and the corresponding virtues:

- Infancy—basic trust versus basic mistrust (hope)
- Early childhood—autonomy versus shame and doubt (will)
- Early childhood—initiative versus guilt (purpose)
- Childhood—industry versus inferiority (competence)
- Adolescence—identity versus role confusion (fidelity)
- Young adulthood—intimacy versus isolation (love)
- Adulthood—generativity versus stagnation (care)
- Maturity—integrity versus despair (wisdom) maturity (Fowler, 1991)

These stages are based on predictable crises that individuals face which act as gateways into the next phases of development (Slee & Shut, 2003), in other words the “maturational schedule of human beings” in conjunction with the person’s self-awareness (Fowler, 1995, p. 60). It is upon Piaget, Erickson, and Kohlberg that Fowler proposed his six stages of faith development (Fowler, 1995).

Piaget and Kohlberg contributed their epistemological focus to the six stages of faith. Fowler (1995) acknowledged five important contributions from Piaget’s and Kohlberg’s structural approach to their theories, calling them the groundwork for “faith as a way of knowing

and interpreting” (p. 98). Piaget’s cognitive development and Kohlberg’s moral development theories provided the structure through which faith ways of knowing could be explored (Fowler, 1995).

The structuralist approach to development “gives form to the contents of knowledge” (Fowler, 1995, p. 99). In other words, the stages are structures provide a way to discuss the specific contents of faith development. The descriptions of each stage of cognitive and moral development are a means through which correlations can be made with faith development stages (Fowler, 1995). Finally, the interactional approach to each of the stages lay the groundwork for faith development to be discussed as an “interchange between an active, innovative subject and a dynamic, changing environment” (Fowler, 1995, p. 100). Piaget and Kohlberg asserted that stages of development are progressively “more comprehensive and adequate than the less developed ones” (Fowler, 1995, p. 101).

Fowler’s stages of faith structures. Fowler’s (1995) stages of faith are structural phases, which are not age specific, that people transition into and out of based on the development of certain faith aspects (Fowler, 1995; Fowler & Dell, 2006). Fowler (1995) offered this definition of faith:

People’s evolved and evolving ways of experiencing self, others and world (as they construct them) as related to and affected by the ultimate conditions of existence (as they construct them) and of shaping their lives’ purposes and meaning, trusts and loyalties, in light of the character of being, value and power determining the ultimate conditions of existence (as grasped in their operative images—conscious and unconscious—of them). (pp. 92–93)

This definition does not reflect the Judeo-Christian definition of faith (Hebrews 11:1; Willard, 2006), which is problematic for some researchers who seek to measure distinctly Christian values (Deprez, 2017; Francis, 2005; Francis et al., 2014; Willard, 2006). Fowler focused on seven aspects of faith to determine a person's stage of faith: (a) form of logic, (b) perspective taking, (c) form of moral judgement, (d) bounds of social awareness, (e) locus of authority, (f) form of world coherence, and (g) symbolic function (Fowler, 1995). These aspects are useful in operationalizing Fowler's stages of faith for research purposes.

Stage 1: The intuitive-projective faith stage. This is in early childhood, ages three to seven years old (Fowler, 1995; Neuman, 2011). In this stage, meaning is made intuitively and through the imagination unbuffered by the confines of logic. Children think and learn in concrete terms; the faith of a child in this stage is influenced by the "examples, moods, actions, and stories" expressed by the adults in the child's life (Fowler, 1995, p. 133). Symbols and images contribute to the faith formation of a child in this stage (Fowler & Dell, 2006). To transition out of this stage, the subject must demonstrate "emergence of concrete, operational thinking" (Fowler, 1995, p. 134).

Stage 2: The mythic-literal faith stage. This stage is typical of childhood ages seven to 12 years old (Fowler, 1995; Neuman, 2011). This stage is characterized by the ability to begin personalizing the values and norms of his or her community through literal interpretations of beliefs and attitudes. Still, the ability to reflect on one's beliefs and values are limited, and meanings are confined to narratives (Fowler, 1995; Fowler & Dell, 2006; Ivy, 1982; Neuman, 2011). The transition out of this stage is demonstration of the ability to reflect and use "formal operational thought" (Fowler, 1995, p. 150).

Stage 3: The synthetic-conventional faith stage. This stage is typical of children adolescence ages 12 to 21 years old; however, this is a stage where some remain permanently (Fowler, 1995; Fowler & Dell, 2006; Neuman, 2011). In this stage, people can think in abstract terms, are able to see other people's perspectives, and are able to take a reflective perspective about his or her own thinking (Fowler, 1995; Fowler & Dell, 2006). This stage is further characterized by many different influences on the subject that extend beyond the family (Fowler, 1995). This creates a context where faith provides "a basis for identity and outlook" through the person's interactions with others (Fowler, 1995, p. 172; Neuman, 2011). In this stage, the individual typically conforms to the values and beliefs of those who are close relations (Fowler & Dell, 2006). The transition out of this stage is marked by "serious clashes or contradictions between valued authority sources" and collisions with "experiences or perspectives that lead to critical reflection on how one's beliefs and values have formed and changed" (Fowler, 1995, p. 173).

Stage 4: The individuated-reflective faith stage. This stage is typical in young adulthood (Fowler, 1995). In this stage, people become critically aware of their value systems and beliefs against the schema of diversified value systems and beliefs. The person begins to take ownership of his or her "commitments, lifestyle, beliefs and attitudes" (Fowler, 1995, p. 182). In other words, the person is "disembedded from his Synthetic-Conventional, assumptive world view" and has a conscious, active hand in forming his or her tapestry of values and beliefs (Fowler, 1995, p. 177; Fowler & Dell, 2006). Fowler and Dell (2006) submitted that individuals in this stage may ask questions of identity like, "Who am I when I am not defined primarily as someone's daughter, son, or spouse? Who am I apart from my educational, occupational, or professional identity?" (p. 41). The transition out of this stage into the next is marked by

“disillusionment with one’s compromises” and a reshaping or galvanizing of values and beliefs (Fowler, 1995, p. 183; Fowler & Dell, 2006).

Stage 5: The conjunctive faith stage. This stage is associated with adulthood, rarely prior to mid-life (Fowler, 1995). The ability to move beyond the either/or perspectives and the acknowledgment of more complex, multidimensional systems of values and beliefs typifies this stage (Fowler, 1995). In this stage, the person is more open to opposing viewpoints and able to reconcile his or her current perspectives with the ones he or she held in the past. The transition into the next stage is marked by the rare ability to relate to people who are in any of the six stages of faith and the willingness to sacrifice personal perceptions so that another can apprehend their own faith (Fowler, 1995; Ivy, 1982).

Stage 6: The universalizing faith stage. Fowler (1995) submitted that it is rare for a person to reach this stage of faith. In this stage, a person is a sage, one who interested in the eschatological nature of life as depicted in the biblical reference to the Kingdom of God (Fowler & Dell, 2006). A person in stage six understands the shared destiny of humanity and plays an active role in helping others see the shared future of humanity and the love given to all people by God (Fowler, 1995; Fowler & Dell, 2006).

James Fowler’s stages of faith is useful in this study because it delineates the different stages of faith and ways of understanding and living life. Fowler’s stages of faith generally demarcate the people who are the focus of this study. The people who are the focus of this study are those who attended Christian schools during the ages typical of the synthetic-conventional faith (stage 3), shaped by the influences beyond family, into peers and other social networks and those who are situated in the individuative-reflective faith stage (stage 4), shaped by the questioning and critical awareness of personal values and beliefs and the restructuring,

relinquishing, or reaffirming of those values and beliefs (Fowler, 1995; Fowler & Dell, 2006; Neuman, 2011). Although these two specific stages are important, it is possible that the individuals in this study are in the other stages.

The concept of faith in Fowler's (1995) stages of faith theory is not a measure of belief nor religious affiliation or Christian specific outcomes (Fowler & Dell, 2006). It is rather the way people make sense of life and the occurrences around them (Fowler, 1995; Fowler & Dell, 2006). In this study, Fowler's stages-of-faith theory is used as a framework to understand the stage of knowing and understanding of the subjects of the study. Next, the principal investigator presents the concept of Spiritual formation as formation of the spirit through discipleship.

Christian spiritual formation. American, Christian formation philosopher and writer, Dallas Willard (2006), offered this definition of *Christian spiritual formation* (CSF): "Spiritual formation in Christ is oriented toward explicit obedience to Christ" (para. 16). This is a definition consistent with other seminal writers on Christian, spiritual formation, and spiritual growth; it is the definition that is used in this study (Bonhoeffer, 1955; Hwang, 2016; Willard, 2006, 2010). Spiritual formation is a process whereby a person is transformed into the image of Jesus first through the dimension of the spirit, then the soul, then the actions of the body (2 Corinthians 3:18; 2 Peter 1:5–7; Chandler et al., 2014; James 2:14–26; Romans 12:1–2; Willard, 2006). This is because a person has a spirit, soul, and body (2 Thessalonians 5:23).

The spirit in CSF. A person's spiritual formation journey begins with an encounter with Jesus, the love and image of God (Chandler, 2015; Chandler et al., 2014; Hwang, 2016; Willard, 2006, 2010). In an encounter with Jesus, a person is presented with the choice to come to faith in Jesus or reject Jesus (Bonhoeffer, 1955; Capon, 2002; Deuteronomy 30:19). Upon coming into faith, a person begins the journey of spiritual formation through communion with God through

His spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18; Smith, 2017). Chandler et al. (2014) submitted that the spirit of a person cannot be neglected in the formation process since throughout scripture, the spirit of a person is part of the holistic image of God. It is the part of a person that experienced death in the Garden of Eden but has been restored through Christ. Those who choose to believe in Jesus become children of God and have His new nature (John 1:2; Warrington, 1997)

The formation process takes place in the person's recreated spirit (Willard, 2006). It is the spirit that has the first transformation while the mind goes through a renewing process (Corinthians 5:17; Ezekiel 36:26; Philippians 1:6; Romans 12:2). It is the spirit of a person that communes with God (1 Corinthians 2:16; Proverbs 20:27; Warrington, 1997). The objective for spiritual formation is development into the character and image of Jesus (Bonhoeffer, 1955; Chandler, 2015; Chandler et al., 2014; Willard, 2006, 2010). Christian Spiritual formation is inseparable from Jesus, who was spirit and flesh, is necessary for salvation, and can be developed and measured (2 Thessalonians 1:3; Chandler et al., 2014; Ephesians 2:8; Galatians 4:9; Hwang, 2016; Mark 11:22; Romans 10:17; Willard, 2006, 2010; Wright, 2003).

The Word in CSF. Early Christian writers and thinkers submit that spiritual formation cannot occur apart from the Word (Bonhoeffer, 1995; Capon, 2002; Warrington, 1997). Jesus is synonymous with the Word of God: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Smith (2017) acknowledged the role of the Word of God, scripture, as the final authority in all areas in the evangelical Christian tradition. The authority of scripture is in the example of the Apostle Paul who encouraged his disciple, Timothy, in the study of the scriptures, "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). It is primarily in scripture where a person is drawn to a closer relationship with God (Smith, 2017).

The scriptures are necessary for spiritual growth in the same manner milk is needed for the growth of the physical body: “as newborn babies, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2). Jesus tells His disciples that his words are “spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63–70). The Apostle Paul reminds the church in Rome that the Word of God is what creates faith, a Christian virtue necessary for living the Christian life (Hebrews 11:6, Matthew 4:4; Romans 10:17). Again, in Acts 20:32, Apostle Paul exhorts the disciples with these words: “So now, brethren, I commend you to God and the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” The Word of God is necessary for a Christian to be “complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:4). Further, the Word of God is necessary because it gives a person insight to the life and teachings of Jesus and the Apostles.

The Word also gives context for the Christian. The accounts of the life of Jesus and the Apostles serve as narrative through which Christians can navigate and grow in their lives (Groome, 1980; Hwang, 2016; Steinmetz, 2003). When the Christian can see his or her life in the greater redemptive narrative in the Bible, he or she can make meaning of the experiences that may otherwise seem arbitrary or coincidental (Steinmetz, 2003). Still, it is argued that knowing the scriptures is not enough for CSF (Bonhoeffer, 1995; James 1:22; Warrington, 1997). It is the “implanted word” that brings about conformity to God. One must allow the Word of God to transform his or her spirit through obedience (Bonhoeffer, 1995; James 1:21; Willard, 2006).

Discipleship in CSF. The last words of Jesus recorded by Matthew, before Jesus’ ascension into heaven was:

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations . . . teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo I am with you always, even to end of the age. (Matthew 28:19–20)

One would be hard pressed to argue that discipleship should not be priority in CSF.

Cherry (2016) submits that discipleship is learning the way the first disciples learned—as a process along a journey. The first of Jesus’ 12 disciples were witnesses to Jesus’ interactions with the communities of faith and were therefore told by Jesus to do the same and even greater. Jesus sent them out two by two and gave them authority to act in His stead (Luke 10:1; Mark 6:7). He was essentially preparing His 12 disciples to do what He did and even more: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father” (John 14:12).

Jesus’ disciples went on to perform miracles. Peter healed a lame person at the Temple and raised a woman from the dead (Acts 3:7–11; Acts 9:39–42). Philip did great, notable miracles in Acts chapter 8. Paul, one discipled by the person of the Holy Spirit, went on to break down racial and religious barriers the way Jesus did (Acts 9:15; Galatians 1:12). The implication is then that relationship and community are necessary in formation process. Spiritual formation is an intentional process of discipleship (Hwang, 2016; Lang, 2015; Willard, 2006, 2010).

Sustained spiritual formation requires the support of family and community (Aziz, 2017; Barkin et al., 2015; Chandler et al., 2014; Deprez, 2017; Smelley, 2013; Wright, 2000; Yust, 2017). While there are some passive elements to spiritual formation there are specific spiritual disciplines that are necessary for spiritual growth (Warrington, 1997; Willard, 2006). Discipline is part of spiritual formation. Willard (2006) submitted that “The disciplines for life in the Spirit: solitude and silence, prayer and fasting, worship and study, fellowship and confession, and the

like” are the “indirect means that allow us to cooperate in reshaping the personality—the feelings, ideas, mental processes and images, and the deep readinesses of soul and body” (Willard, 2006, para. 21, para. 22). This is exemplified in Paul’s invitation to the Corinthian church: “Imitate me, just as I imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

There is a reoccurring theme of discipleship in the New Testament. Timothy, a part Greek person, was a personal disciple of Paul (1 Timothy 1:2; Philippians 1:1). Paul disciplined the church in Galatia saying: “My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you” (Galatians 4:19). Within discipleship is the process of learning how to make application of instructions given by God:

But be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. (James 1:22–24)

Discipleship is not limited to the verbal domain, saying the right things; it is a matter of corrective demonstration and formation to the character of Jesus. Willard (2006) offered this perspective:

Spiritual formation in Christ is not simply an unconscious process in which *results* may be observed while the One who works in us remains hidden. We actually experience his workings. We *look* for them, expect them, give thanks for them. We are consciously engaged with him in the details of our existence and our spiritual transformation. (para. 24)

The New Testament has many of what Capon (2002) refers to as *acted parables* that were instructive on how to live out the commandments and instructions given in scripture. These parables reflect the fruit of the Spirit, the seen part of CSF.

Virtues in CSF. The unseen nature of the spirit complicates spiritual formation as a measurable construct. While “man looks at the outward appearance . . . the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). Spiritual growth first takes place in the unseen, yet not in the abstract. Bonhoeffer (1955) offered that there are no “abstract ethics” in Christian formation and that Christian ethics must be acted upon to reflect the act of God becoming a person on earth to act out His will (p. 86). Likewise, Willard (2006) offered spiritual formation yields observable results. The Bible offers a clear illustration of this principle. Galatians 5:22 refers to virtues of the spirit as “the fruit of the Spirit.” Fruit is something that has its genesis in the unseen, in the soil. The fruit mentioned here are “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23). Further, the parable of the sower is a picture of the character and nature of God sown on the earth. Like the seed sown, the character of God is sown on the earth and must grow in hidden places before it is expressed visibly (Capon, 1985).

Based on Willard’s (2006) definition, spiritual formation can then be expressed in acted-out ethics or Christian virtues, mainly obedience that is resultant from the Love and Image of God that marks every Christian (Bonhoeffer, 1955; Chandler et al., 2014; Willard, 2006). Chandler et al. (2014) cited Matthew 22:34–40 and Mark 12:28–34 to establish the Love of God and the principle ethic to love other as the “primary Kingdom ethic” from which ethical living comes forth in seven dimensions—spirit, emotions, relationships, intellect, vocation, physical health and wellness, and resource stewardship (p. 252).

There is a consensus amongst scholars that despite the complications of measuring spiritual formation, it is still an important construct to measure where spiritual development is an expected outcome or contributing factor to a phenomenon (Holmes, 2017; Horan, 2017; Krause & Pargament; 2017; McGuire, 2017; Sikkink & Skiles, 2018). Where there is lack of consensus is what Christian virtues look like when expressed. The spiritual formation construct has been operationalized as a religiosity, spirituality, epistemology, and sometimes a mixture of the three in both quantitative and qualitative studies (Alleman et al., 2016; Aziz, 2017; Barkin et al., 2015; Deprez, 2017; Dong, Fioramonti, Campbell, & Ebener, 2017; Yust, 2017).

Christian spiritual formation happens in various contexts. One of those contexts is the Christian school. The Christian school is unique in that it is a learning institution that it is a place where students learn; however, it is place where stakeholders “bring every thought, every theorem, every act, every axiom, every aspect of teaching and learning—with rigor and without apology—into captivity under the sovereign Lordship of Jesus Christ” (Lockerbie, 2005, p. 127).

Christian schools. Christian schools have a distinct mission to educate the whole child (D’Souza, 2000; Lockerbie, 2005; Wright, 2003). This mission acknowledges that a child has intellectual, character, and spiritual formation processes that must be addressed by the school, in concert with formation at home (Lockerbie, 2005). The Christian school is undertaken through various means; however, at its crux is a clear, focused mission and purpose and an integrated curriculum taught by Christian teachers (D’Souza, 2000; Lockerbie, 2005; Wright, 2003; see figure 1).

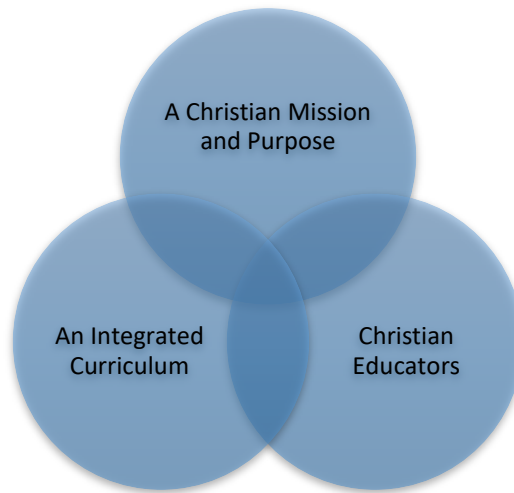


Figure 1. Christian Schools in CSF.

Mission and purpose. The primary purpose for a Christian school is to educate the child through “academic teaching and learning where Jesus Christ is honored as Lord” (Lockerbie, 2005, p. 7). This is distinct from other modes of formation. The mission of the Christian school should be easily referenced by stakeholders and even memorized by teachers to help stakeholders be continually oriented to the purpose of the school (Lockerbie, 2005). Lockerbie (2005) argued that to have a mission separate from academic learning is to be in a different sector of ministry altogether. In other words, if the point and purpose of a school is the evangelism of students or solely the spiritual development of the student, another institution other than a school would be more appropriate.

Groome (1980) offered a slightly different perspective, suggesting rather that the “metapurpose” of Christian schools is evangelistic: “when an educational activity is intended to sponsor people toward Christian faith, the overarching purpose (the ultimate, or metapurpose) of such education is the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ” (p. 35, 49). Both arguments lead to the same end. That same end is knowing Jesus, either through the study of God's creation and the reflection of the Lord in the creation or through the hearing of the Word of God.

A strength of Christian schools is that they are embedded within a broader community of faith, and they address a common goal for many people (Groome, 1980). Christian education helps students along a uniquely Christian path to CSF through “faith, belief, and discourse” and all the “duties and responsibilities entailed in such growth” (D’Souza, 2000, pp. 12, 18). In this way, while Christian schools may not have the sole focus of evangelism, Lockerbie (2005) warned that the Christian school should be ready to lead its students along the path of faith.

Integrated curriculum. An integrated curriculum is one that is infused with a biblical, Christian worldview; it avoids the piecemeal distribution of biblical truth and the isolated attempts to indoctrinate students with biblical theology (D’Souza, 2000; Groome, 1980; Lockerbie, 2005; Manning, 2014). Lockerbie (2005) asserted that unless the Christian schools’ curriculum is taught from a biblical world-view, the schools are

less than inadequate; they are a sham. If all [they] have to offer is piety, then [they] are less than a school. . . . [Christian schools] need piety, example, and academic content from the vantage of a biblical understanding of truth and reality. (p. 113)

There is no difference between the sacred and the profane, and rather that all knowledge is from God and is a means to know God (Lockerbie, 1986). In other words, what God has redeemed and cleansed, should not be regarded as common (Acts 10:14–16).

The purpose of an integrated curriculum is to address the whole student (D’Souza, 2000; Groome, 1980; Lockerbie, 2005). D’Souza (2005) submitted that it is imperative to keep in mind that while the student is natural, he or she has a “supernatural destiny” that is situated in the large scope of the biblical mission of the Kingdom of God (D’Souza, 2005, p. 14; Groome, 1980). Similarly, Wright (2000) offered that “education becomes spiritual whenever a lesson – irrespective of the subject being taught – moves beyond a mundane level to grapple with issues

surrounding the fundamental meaning and purpose of life” (p. 12). An integrated curriculum in the Christian tradition is one that seamlessly blends the forming of the mind, body, and spirit within the biblical context of knowledge (Lockerbie, 2005). Lockerbie (2005) offers that true discipleship comes because of “fusing of biblical faith and truth into every aspect of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding” (p. 62).

Biblical truth, the only truth acceptable in a Christian school, must not be isolated from other subjects in a fragmented manner. In the instances where Biblical truth and empirical knowledge may not seem reconcilable, Lockerbie (2005) held that educators must “boldly assert the existence of truth and the importance of making truth the goal of learning” (p. 13). Educators must remember that it is God who encourages humankind to seek out “wisdom, knowledge, and understanding” and that objective truth exists (Lockerbie, 2005, p. 13). If indeed, God created the world and encourages humankind to seek understanding, educators should not be afraid of the intersection between the “gift of knowledge” and “spiritual understanding and discernment” (Lockerbie, 2005, p. 12; Proverbs 4:6–7). Lockerbie (2005) said it this way:

We never have the last word on truth, but we must act by whatever light we are given. So on moral issues we accept God’s promise or declaration; on nonmoral issues we rely on evidence that conforms to principles of reason; on all doubtful matters we retain a humble attitude. (p. 13)

Manning (2014) drew from Groome's (1980, 1998) work, offering the four educable dimensions of the person. The corporeal is the body or physical part of the human. The affective is the emotions and relationships. The volitional is the will and desire of a person. The cognitive is the reasoning part of the person.

The development of the corporeal is necessary for helping students experience God through their bodies (Manning, 2014). Christians must be ever cognizant that the redeemed body belongs to the Lord:

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. (1 Cor. 6:19–20)

Manning (2014) drew attention to the necessary expression of the spiritual truths through natural means: “Bodies are not only a site of God's self-revelation to humanity; they are also the medium through which disciples respond to God and enact their Christian faith in the world” (pp. 85–86).

The development of the affective is necessary for the Christian to function within a community of other Christians and in the greater community (Manning, 2014). Emotions are real; however, they are not to supersede the love of God which compels virtues like forgiveness, patience, and kindness which are often expressed in relationships with others (1 Cor. 13:14–13). 1 Corinthians 12:26–27 gave this insight: “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.” It is a significant detail in that Jesus referred to his followers and disciples as sheep, herd animals that find safety in groups (John 10:27–28).

The development of the volitional is important in that this is the decision-making part of a person (Manning, 2014). It is the part of the disciple that demonstrates obedience and either chooses to or not to follow the Lord. Choice is a key element in CSF. Deuteronomy 30:19 demonstrated the importance of choice: “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both

you and your descendants may live.” The disciple is expected to mature into good decision making with help from educators. Discipline is present only when choice is present. Even Jesus gave people a choice to stay with Him or leave Him; it was their prerogative: “From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also want to go away?” (John 6:66–67). Manning (2014) encouraged teachers to “prompt students to make personal decisions and commitments to the faith by including class discussions and student-initiated questioning” to create authentic opportunities to practice exercising the will (p. 88).

The development of the cognitive is an important domain as it is the reasoning and thinking part of the disciple (Manning, 2014). The Bible echoes the value of the cognitive. Hosea 4:6 is a reminder to the disciple that lack of knowledge can be an utter detriment. Likewise, Proverbs 4:7 encouraged this way: “Wisdom is the principle thing; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding.” In Isaiah 1:18–19, The Lord calls His people to reason with Him. In 1 Peter 3:15, the disciples are encouraged to “always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” Again, Acts 17:1–3, presents a picture of the Apostle Paul reasoning with the Jews for three Sabbaths, “explaining and giving evidence that the Christ has to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.’” Manning (2014) offered that the cognitive domain is the domain whereby the disciple can “understand faith on their own terms, interpret its meaning for their lives, and question elements that do not make sense to them” (p. 90). This cognitive shaping is ideally delivered by a Christian educator (Mueting, 2017).

Christian teachers. There is a consensus among seminal writers on Christian education that the Christian educator is a necessary part of the successful Christian school equation (Groome, 1980; Lockerbie, 2005; Shimabukuro, 2013; Wright, 2000). Wright (2000) referenced Deuteronomy 6:6–9 as the anchor for Christian educators:

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

This passage of scripture positions the Christian parent as the ideal Christian teacher. However, in the context of the institutional school, the ideal teacher is a Christian teacher, one who fits the profile of person who first carries Christian convictions before he or she imparts the convictions into the next generation. A teacher must be able to give personal witness to the work of Jesus in His Kingdom (Mueting, 2017). Groome (1998) wrote that Christian teachers must have the capacity to “reflect in their person some of refinement carried in the arts, sciences, and humanities” (p. 256).

Teachers are part of the faith formation tradition. Jesus is the exemplar teacher; the Holy Spirit has a distinct role of teaching the people how to live the will of God, and teachers are considered one of the gifts of God (1 Cor. 12:28; Acts 13:1; Ephesians 4:11; John 13:13, 14:26; Luke 15:17; Mueting, 2017). Jesus, as the exemplar teacher, invited his disciples to follow Him as he spoke with authority on various matters and even throwing out tradition when tradition hindered the truth (Mueting, 2017). Lockerbie (2005) argued unapologetically that Christian teachers are imperative for Christian schools, citing an instance where nonrestrictive hiring of

non-Christian educators deterred the mission of the school to serve an integrated curriculum from a biblical worldview. The Christian teacher does not overemphasize bible knowledge at the expense of critical thinking and is responsible for vetting different curriculum materials and making sure the curriculum is appropriate for a biblical worldview (Bailey, 2012; Lockerbie, 2005; Muetting, 2017).

The three concepts that frame this study is James Fowler's stages of faith, faith formation in the Christian tradition—CSF, and Christian schools. Fowler's stages of faith theory is used to provide a framework for the understanding how the subjects of the study understand their experience. Christian spiritual formation (CSF) is a concept unique to the evangelical Christian focus of this study, not to be confused with Fowler's concept of faith. Finally, Christian schools serve the CSF process through a distinctly Christian mission and purpose, an integrated curriculum, and through Christian teachers.

Review of Research and Methodological Literature

To fully review the literature related to CSF in Christian school alumni, the search began with these Boolean search terms: “young adults” and “faith formation” or spirituality, “young people” and spirituality, and Millennials and “faith formation.” These searches yielded less than five academic, peer-reviewed articles. At this point, the principal investigator generalized my Boolean search to include the following: Millennials and spirituality, Millennials and spirituality and education, and Millennials and religiosity, and Millennials and religiosity and school. These searches yielded over 600 academic peer-reviewed articles; however, few were empirical. The Boolean search that began a snowball of some relevant literature began after searching for relevant literature in the following journals: the *Journal of Research on Christian Education*, the *Christian School Education*, and the *Christian Education Journal*. The reference lists for some

of the relevant articles served as start of a snowball identification of other relevant articles including the Cardus Education Reports, which are not academic, peer-reviewed articles, but provides important data and information relevant to this current study.

The search was conducted through Concordia University–Portland’s online library and through Chaminade University of Honolulu’s Sullivan Library. For empirical articles, the searches were limited to years 2014 through 2018. The empirical articles that were relevant to this current study but were published prior to 2014 are not included in this literature review except for reference to comparative studies.

Attrition of religious practice and Christian spirituality. The CSF process involves spiritual development by means of discipleship through the Word of God. It is not a process that can one person can navigate alone, as indicated in the literature (Hwang, 2016; Lang, 2015; Willard, n.d., 2006, 2010). There must be connect between generations to ensure the perpetuation of Christian faith (“Intergenerational Learning,” 2001; Lanker, 2010; Mead, 1970; Smelley, 2013). However, the current literature on spiritual decline in the United States shows there is an apparent disconnect in spiritual formation between recent generations.

There is a body of research that verifies attrition in religious practice and Christian spirituality amongst emerging adults, primarily Millennial adults (Barry et al., 2015; Chan et al., 2015; Twenge et al., 2016; Twenge et al., 2015; Uecker et al., 2016). Twenge et al. (2015) sought to discover the social factors that covaried with religious orientation and found that Millennials have a decline in “religious orientation” compared to earlier generations independent of Millennials’ “particular time period” (p. 14). The study utilized data available online from a large nationally representative sample of 11.2 million American subjects through the Monitoring the Future (MtF) that surveyed 8th, 10th, and 12th graders and American Freshmen (AF) survey

that surveyed freshmen college students (Twenge et al., 2015). Two notable findings of the study are (a) “American adolescents are now less likely to attend religious services” and (b) increased selection of “none” in the religious affiliation category on the survey shows that “more students grew up without religion and that more are abandoning their parents’ religion by college entry” (Twenge et al., 2015, p. 6).

Likewise, Twenge et al. (2016) found in their mixed-effects analysis of data from the General Social Survey (GSS) a nationally representative survey of U.S. residents over the age of 18, that “Millennials are less religious than previous generations were at the same age” (2016, p. 6). Twenge et al. (2015) analyzed 10 items from the 1972–2014 GSS survey:

1. religious preference,
2. strength of religious affiliation,
3. religious service attendance,
4. belief in the afterlife,
5. believing the Bible is literal,
6. frequency of praying,
7. belief in God,
8. confidence in religious institutions,
9. identification as a religious person, and
10. identification as a spiritual person (Twenge et al., 2016, pp. 3–4).

The researchers grouped data into five-year intervals from years 1972 through 2004 and reported years 2006 through 2014 individually (Twenge et al., 2016). Some other notable findings from this study are that confidence in organized religion has decreased by half between the 1970s and 2014, the number of Americans that have religious affiliations has decreased, personal religious

beliefs have likewise seen a decline, and belief that the Bible is sacred as the Word of God has also declined (Twenge et al., 2016). Findings from the Pew Research Center is in partial agreement with the findings of Twenge et al. (2016); the Pew Research Center has found that personal religious belief in certain subjects is in decline, yet as a whole, religious and spiritual belief is quite stable (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Chan et al.'s (2015) findings in their four-year longitudinal study corroborated with Twenge et al.'s (2016) findings—that the transition to young adulthood appears to bring about a decrease in affiliation from a specific religion or faith over time and decreases in religious identity and participation. Chan et al.'s (2015) study drew from a sample of 744 American 12th graders completed a questionnaire when they were in high school and were contacted once again four years later to complete another online questionnaire like the one completed prior the result was an analytical sample of 584 students. The questionnaires sampled the following measures: religious affiliation (not limited to Christian), religious identity, religious participation, sense of purpose and meaning, and symptoms of depression (Chan et al., 2015). Another relevant finding is that there was greater decline in religious affiliation amongst Latin American and other minority groups due to the higher Christian and Catholic religious affiliation amongst said group in the 12th grade. These findings are consistent with what Barry et al. (2015) found in their study, that emerging adults abandon some of their families' values and behaviors and retain some. According to Fowler (1995), religious affiliation typical of individuals in the high school years is influenced by those closest to the individual, including family, authority figures, and others in their social network.

Fowler's (1995) faith stages constructs offered that it is typical for adolescence and young adults to either be in the synthetic-conventional stage or be transitioning into the

individuated-reflective stage of faith. The transition marks a departure from the norm of conforming to the value and beliefs of close relations to critical reflection of personal values and beliefs against other belief systems (Fowler, 1995). However, research by Twenge et al. (2015, 2016) suggested that the church decline trend is a multifaceted narrative. Researchers look beyond the trend of church decline amongst emerging adults and look for possible correlations and contributions to the decline trend. As religion and spirituality are embedded in community, aspects of the community and community perception either strengthen or weaken opportunities for CSF.

Perceptions and personal hybridizations. It is typical of young adults in the individuated-reflective faith stage to move beyond the practices that he or she inherited from close relations. The studies discussed in this section demonstrated the distancing from familial practices and the personalizing of values and practices. Researchers who conducted the studies in this section identified the perceptions of religion and spirituality as part of the reason for the decline in religious practice and Christian spirituality. As a generation, Millennials have redefined their spiritual practices (Jueng et al., 2015; McGuire, 2017).

Barry et al. (2015) looked at the relationship between emerging adults' religious practice and sexual behavior through a longitudinal quantitative survey study of 286 college students who represented a variety of religious backgrounds. The researchers looked at four measures—personal religious practice, religious affiliation, sexually permissive attitudes, and sexual intercourse and found negative correlations between personal religious practices and sex outside of a relationship and personal religious practices and sex within a relationship (Barry et al., 2015). However, Barry et al. (2015) found that “coming from a traditional and religious family may increase the likelihood of sexual experimentation as emerging adults leave their family of

origin and are faced with increased peer and cultural pressure to experiment with sexual behaviors” (p. 169).

Jueng et al. (2015) analyzed telephone survey data drawn from the Pew Research Center’s 2012 survey. The sample analyzed by Jueng et al. (2015) included both Chinese and Japanese Americans. In the sample, 157 of the 728 Chinese Americans were under 30 years of age, and 36 of the 523 Japanese Americans were under 30 years of age. In Jueng et al.’s (2015) study of young adult Chinese and Japanese religious “nones,” it was found that Millennial young adults, “maintain spiritual practices that are unique hybridizations of their ethnic background and American upbringings” (p. 907).

For example, 57.1% of Chinese Millennial atheists and 70.2% of those who identify as “nothing in particular” celebrate Christmas (Jueng et al., 2015). Similarly, all young Japanese Americans, irrespective of religious affiliation, celebrate Christmas (Jueng et al., 2015). While this study does not speak the specific phenomenon of Christian spirituality, it sheds light on how emerging young adults may approach their personal faith practice as in McGuire’s (2017) narrative study of church decline in the lives of 21 Black young adults.

McGuire’s (2017) narrative research study was conducted at a private University where Black students made up less than 10% of the 21,000 full-time enrolled students. This study site had 54 either religiously or spiritually affiliated organizations, yet 29% of the student body identified as “religiously unaffiliated” (McGuire, 2017, p. 7). In his study, McGuire (2017) found that while students may not self-identify as religiously affiliated, they may live out some elements of the religious community like through going to church on Easter or praying. This may be related to Twenge et al.’s (2016) finding that one of the causes of declines in religiosity is that

fewer people have confidence in organized religion. Further, there are social costs and benefits to returning to religion (Uecker, Maryl, & Stroope, 2016).

Carlson (2016) noted that the possibility of “being judged by other believers and found wanting, or of possibly being identified as a judgmental Christian, or of being exposed as a person of faith when that faith was deep and tender, unspoken, and often unformed” plays a part in resistance to identifying as religious or spiritual (p. 705). This is similarly demonstrated in Denton and Uecker’s (2018) study that cohabitation, a practice generally looked down upon in Christian faith communities is “associated with the movement away from religion” amongst young adults while on the other hand, “marriage and childrearing are tied to religiosity even beyond the large decline in religiosity that occurs after leaving the parental home” (p. 19). Further, the transition to young adulthood appears to bring about a decrease in affiliation from a specific religion or faith over time and decreases in religious identity and participation. There are, however, exceptions in that females exhibit more stable levels of religious identity over time (Chan et al., 2015).

Strengthening of religious practice and Christian spirituality. In response to the faith decline narrative, researchers have looked at different phenomena that have contributed to religious retention. While social costs may be a community effect that adds to the church decline narrative. Social capital found in faith communities, families, and schools as faith institutions contribute to faith formation.

Faith communities. The Christian finds his or her fullest expression within a community where disciples can practice the love virtue (Aziz, 2017; Derrico et al., 2015; John 13:35; Mark 12:30–31). The practice of this virtue is where the disciple takes on the character of Christ and is transformed into His image (Bonhoeffer, 1995; Chandler, 2015; Chandler et al., 2014). It is the

love of God that compelled Him to sacrifice (John 3:16). It is this same love that is developed within the disciple and finds expression in sacrifice for others within the Christian community. The *Evangelical Dictionary of Christian Education* offers this perspective on the Christian faith community:

It is in the community that the learner discovers needed arenas of growth and in community that the learner receives insight, support, and opportunity to express his or her uniqueness as a facet of the person of Christ to the group. (“Christian Formation,” 2001, p. 135)

The community is vital for early faith formation stages (Carlson, 2006; Fowler, 1995). Family and faith communities provide the context for the strengthening of religious practice and Christian spirituality. Carlson (2016) referenced Westerhoff’s four stages of faith—*experienced, searching, affiliative, and owned faith*—as a framework for his 5-week guided conversation study with post-Baby Boomer generations. The topics in the study ranges from week-1 topics on why it is difficult to talk about faith to week-5 on sharing personally, written faith credos. In this study, Carlson (2016) theorized that people do not reach their potential for faith engagement because of a lack of language to express their faith and reflect on their faith in their affiliative faith stage through faith communities.

Carlson (2016) further concluded that communities of faith are less effective in retaining faith seekers when there is an absence of mentors in the community who have moved on to the final stage of owned faith and that postmodern faith seekers need to be reached by formation of communities that take on the mentor-mentee process of forming the next generation of Christians. This is because postmodern seekers need the language and vocabulary to navigate what they've learned and experienced in the context of Christian tradition (Carlson, 2016).

Likewise, King et al. (2014) found in their narrative qualitative study that student spiritual exemplars were able to “clearly voice their values, their beliefs, and their sense of morality” (p. 204).

Students also need the opportunity to practice their faith. For students who thrived on faith-based campuses, faith in God played a role on students’ ability to reframe negative experiences they had on campus; their faith helped them to use negative experiences to strengthen rather than stifle their faith (Derrico, Tharp, & Schreiner, 2015). Findings of prior research show that challenges may strengthen rather than inhibit spiritual growth (Benema, 2015; Hwang, 2016; LeBlanc & Slaughter, 2012; Yocum, 2014). Likewise, Krause and Pargament’s (2017) analysis of data from the nationwide, 2014 Landmark Spirituality and Health Survey (LSHS), showed that in multiple instances, stress can strengthen rather than cause a decline in faith.

King, Abo-Zena, and Weber (2017) and King et al. (2014) recognized that culture and community—that is relationships were key experiences and elements in the lives of adolescent spiritual exemplars from faiths around the world. Interactions with others through everyday occurrences and through purposeful interactions with others through community service and instructional settings were mentioned by the exemplars (King et al., 2014). Further, through observing others live their faith, spiritual exemplars in King et al.’s (2017) study grew in their faith.

Family. The family is the first context for spiritual formation. Family spiritual life plays a significant factor in enduring faith into adulthood (Sikkink, 2018). In a longitudinal study of affluent youth, it became apparent that a strong spiritual life in the family was associated with a sustained spiritual life at the age of 24 (Barkin et al., 2015). The first faith stage according to

Fowler (2005) is the intuitive-projective stage where the child essentially takes on the values and perspectives of the parents or other close relations. Deprez (2017) found in his quantitative study that grandparents played a notable role on how grandchildren viewed God through modeling, Bible reading, serving, and speaking about faith. Holmes (2017) found in her case study of five children that families have unique approaches to passing on their faith—usually through the cognitive domain with the passing on of knowledge and less frequently through “awe and wonder and spiritual experiences” (Holmes, 2017, p. 288). This alluded to an overlap in role between CSF in the family and the school. Families also play a role in the CSF of their children in their school choice (Prichard & Swezey, 2016).

Family formation. The family is also a source of Christian religious practice and spirituality through family formation, acts of Christian nurture, and the explicit passing on of Christian knowledge (Denton & Uecker, 2018; Holmes, 2017; Uecker et al., 2016). Denton and Uecker’s (2018) study on the relationship between family formation showed that “marriage and childrearing are tied to religiosity even beyond the large decline in religiosity that occurs after leaving the parental home” (p. 19). Similarly, Uecker et al.’s (2016) longitudinal study showed that “young adults who are married and childless, married parents, and single parents are more likely than childless singles to return to religious communities” (p. 404).

Uecker et al. (2016) sought to understand how family formation could predict a return to religion for young adults. In their study, Uecker et al. (2016) analyzed data pulled from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health) and found that most young adults do not maintain the same level of religious service and attendance as they did when they were adolescence. The sample size used to determine reaffiliation was 970 subjects (Uecker et al., 2016). This study spanned from 1994 through 2008 and included a sample of United States

high-school participants who were in grades 7–12 and ages 24–34, respectively (Uecker et al., 2016). While some young adults returned to their religious attendance rates customary in adolescence, 26% of the sample regress to attending religious services less than once a month through emerging adulthood into young adulthood (Uecker et al., 2016). A notable finding is the correlation between family formation and church return: “Married parents are the most likely to return at 48%, followed by 34% of single parents, 33% of both childless married adults and cohabiting parents, 25% of single childless adults, and 12% of childless cohabiters” (Uecker et al., 2016, p. 397).

The Christian finds his or her fullest expression within a community where disciples can practice the love virtue (Aziz, 2017; Derrico et al., 2015; John 13:35; Mark 12:30–31). The practice of this virtue is where the disciple takes on the character of Christ and is transformed into His image (Bonhoeffer, 1995; Chandler, 2015; Chandler et al., 2014). It is the love of God that compelled Him to sacrifice (John 3:16). It is this same love that is developed within the disciple and finds expression in sacrifice for others.

Christian schools. The Christian school is unique from other forms of faith formation as the school is a platform for forming the whole student. The Christian school mission is to educate the whole child and to be an extension of the mission of the Christian church, that is, helping young people to know Jesus through every educable domain of the person (Groome, 1980; Lockerbie, 2005; Manning, 2014). While family is the first context for the Christian spiritual formation of the child, the Christian school shares in the responsibility for CSF (Horan, 2017; Francis, 2005; Prichard, 2016; Schwarz & Sikkink, 2016). Some of the extant literature on Christian schools and CSF focus on the outcomes of Christian schooling, namely measurable, behavior trends and self-reported statements of belief.

The England example. A 2005 study in England and Wales analyzed data from a sample of 12,959 boys, ages 13 through 15 in both state-maintained, nondenominational, and independent, Christian schools found that the students who attended the independent, Christian schools had a distinctly different values profile than that of those who attended nondenominational schools (Francis, 2005). The 2005 study was followed by a more recent analysis of a larger sample of the data, 20,619 boys, used in Francis's 2005 study. The purpose of the 2014 comparative study was to determine that it was indeed school type and no other differences that affected the development of Christian values in the students. The comparative study used a multilevel linear model to control for differences in student religiosity that might have been interpreted as effects of the schools on the students. The comparative study analysis confirmed the findings of the 2005 study—that school type had a statistically significant difference in the values profile of the students:

the effects of independent Christian schools are reflected in six areas, namely better self-esteem, greater rejection of drug use, lower support for illegal behaviors, less evidence of racist attitudes, higher levels of conservative Christian belief, and more conservative views on sexual morality. (Francis et al., 2014, p. 51)

Limitations of both these 2005 and 2014 studies on the current research problem is that they were conducted outside of the United States and the data were taken from a survey conducted in the 1990s (Francis, 2005; Francis et al., 2014). Further, these studies do not speak directly to the CSF of the students after graduation.

Christian schools in the United States. Analysis of data from the Cardus Education Survey shows that Christian school influence has long-term effects on religious beliefs and practices for young adults in the United States (Sikkink, 2018; Sikkink & Skiles, 2018). Data

analysis of sample of about 245 students who attended evangelical Protestant (EP) schools showed that students who attended EP schools were more likely to be married and have children, thus influencing religious service attendance (Sikkink, 2018). This is consistent with findings from Denton and Uecker (2018) and Uecker et al. (2016) that family formation is correlated to religiosity. Students who attended EP schools also prayed, read the Bible, and integrated their faith in practical daily life regarding work and decision making (Sikkink, 2018). Similarly, Yocum (2014) found in his mixed-methods study on the intersection of spirituality and education that students believed their spirituality helped them to be more responsible and make moral decisions.

Sikkink and Skiles (2018) analyzed data from the Cardus Education Survey, the National Longitudinal Survey Youth 1997, and the National Study of Youth and Religion to examine the effect of school sector on the transition of Christian school graduates into adulthood. The findings of the analyses showed that (a) “religious school graduates are less likely to have sex in their teenage years” (Sikkink & Skiles, 2018, p. 13), (b) “religious school graduates remain more committed to marriage in their twenties” (Sikkink & Skiles, 2018, p. 13), and (c) due to increased likelihood of marriage in their 20s, Christian school graduates are less likely to participate in extended adolescence (Sikkink & Skiles, 2018).

Overall, the study found that there were significant differences found between students who attended religious schools and nonreligious schools concerning a transition into young adulthood (Sikkink & Skiles, 2018). On the other hand, research by Chan et al. (2015) showed that religious participation declines for those who have maintained high levels of participation during high school. The declines in religious participation resulted in generally low levels of participation for most individuals by four years out of high school (Chan et al., 2015).

Spiritually formative context of U.S. Christian schools. Children are in their most formative years when they are subjected to compulsory education (Fowler, 1995; Groome, 1980; Holmes, 2017). Literature on how Christian schooling cultivates spirituality and religiosity in its students shows a gap between what teachers believe to be effective and actual practice (Alleman et al., 2016; Derrico, Tharp, & Schreiner, 2015; Moore, 2014; Yocum, 2014). Alleman et al. (2016) submitted that Christian school leaders need to understand their population if they want to understand incongruencies between the school's mission and outcomes.

Alleman et al.'s (2016) qualitative study of 21 first-time students in a religious-based university showed that students looked to social supports through peers and religious leaders on campus, finding common ground with the school's moral tone on a spiritual level rather than through a doctrinal lens, and acclimating to the religious environment if not wholly accepting it. This study shows that assumptions about student spirituality should not be made. It can be taken for granted that participation in and compliance with faith practices can be equated with faith formation.

Something notable is that the classroom was not one of the means whereby students had to reconcile incongruencies between their beliefs and the beliefs and ideologies of the school. Bankston's (2015) narrative study of eight teachers showed that the teachers in her study mostly operated independent of the overall institutional framework. Bankston (2015) suggested more pre-service teacher training and an implementation of social justice programs to create a "Biblically based program" that contributes to a Christian worldview (p. 212).

Other literature on the effect of Christian schooling shows that student who attend Christian schools may find ways to matriculate through each grade without ever ascribing to the values and beliefs of the school (Alleman, 2016). This presents an opportunity for the spiritual

formation of students, as proposed by Lockerbie (1986). Derrico et al.'s (2015) longitudinal, qualitative study sought to understand the factors and experiences that caused students to thrive on faith-based college campuses. In this study, the researchers found that when teachers used stories and illustrations and were passionate about the subject and authentic students are more apt to being engaged. Also, when teachers were perceived as more approachable, there was a positive effect on student learning. Further, Derrico et al.'s (2015) study showed that relationships and community had a significant influence on students' ability to thrive on faith-based campuses. Likewise, the value of relationships in student success is echoed in Horan's (2017) study on the development of effective spiritual formation programs.

Horan's (2017) study surveyed teachers of ASCI schools to appraise the effectiveness of their spiritual formation programs on campus. Over 50% of the respondents reported that personal one-on-one relationships were key in developing spiritual growth in Millennial students (Horan, 2017). Similarly, Moore's (2014) study on the teacher characteristics related to student spiritual formation showed that teachers modeling of spiritual disciplines and teachers demonstrating attitudes and behaviors consistent with Christlike behaviors were effective in helping students along their spiritual formation journey.

Relationships and one-on-one mentoring is infrequently implemented in spiritual formation programs at the surveyed Christian schools (Horan, 2017). Rather, other programming such as Bible classes, chapel, and community service were implemented for spiritual formation (Horan, 2017). Outside of family, discipleship is the aspect of CSF that provides the one-on-one and close relationships that foster accountability through "concentrated time, energy, and attention in a relatively small number of students" ("Discipling," 2001, p. 209). The literature demonstrates that this aspect of CSF is under-utilized in schools. There is a gap in the literature

that looks at former students' perspectives on programming and experiences that were significant in their long-term spiritual formation after high school.

Extant literature research methods. Much of the research surrounding this topic is done using quantitative research methods, primarily survey research, either one-shot or longitudinal. One of the strengths of quantitative survey research is that it allows the researcher to make broad generalizations about a topic from a sample of a target population as seen in Moore (2014) and Nelson et al. (2017; Creswell, 2014; Lodico Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Another advantage of survey studies is the economy of the design (Creswell, 2014). Once researchers identify their target population and either develop or choose an instrument, the data collection process is faster than data collection through interviews or observations characteristic of qualitative studies. The economy of survey research is attractive to researchers who are working with a large study sample as seen in MacDonald's (2015) study of over 4,000 subjects across eight countries. Other strengths of survey research are that the studies can be replicated across various populations and certain variables can be controlled for during analysis (Creswell, 2014).

The longitudinal survey study design used by Chan et al. (2014), Francis et al. (2014), and Good and Willoughby (2014) is useful for tracking trends in perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs over time (Lodico et al., 2010). King, Clardy, and Ramos (2014) recommended that longitudinal studies be conducted to track changes in perception towards religion and spirituality. Time and resources may be drawback for longitudinal studies; however, datasets published by organizations like the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the United States Census Bureau make longitudinal data available for analysis by researchers.

Qualitative research was less frequently used in the reviewed literature. When used, researchers used a purposeful sample as opposed to a random sample, forgoing greater

generalizability for samples that were rich with information, providing an in-depth study (Patton, 2002). The samples are smaller as in Bankston's (2015) study of eight teachers and Alleman et al.'s (2016) study of 21 students; however, each study yielded more depth of perspective to the topic of study. King et al. (2014) and King et al. (2017) utilized an exemplar methodology. Exemplar methodology "involves the intentional selection of individuals, groups, or entities that exemplify the construct of interest in a highly developed manner" (Bronk, 2012, p. 1). This allowed the researchers to study subjects at the latter end of spiritual development, identifying subjects using criteria for nomination. The sample size is relatively small due to the rarity of highly formed individuals; however, the sample enables researchers to study correlations between the exemplars and certain "experiences and characteristics" (Bronk, 2012, p. 3).

Researchers used mixed-methods with the least frequency. Mixed-methods allow the researcher to leverage the benefits of both quantitative and qualitative data to "develop a stronger understanding of the research problem or questions" (Creswell, 2014, p. 215). Yocum's (2014) use of surveys, focus groups, and one-one-one interviews provided a broader understanding of the correlation between spirituality and ethical behavior. The more common instruments for spirituality and religious constructs are surveys and questionnaires because of the ease of administration; however, qualitative methods capture the individual experiences and relationships that contribute to a phenomenon, namely, CSF.

Review of Methodological Issues

Much of the literature concerning spiritual formation grappled with the challenge of measuring spirituality apart from behaviors, morals, values, and religiosity that may occur independent of CSF (Francis et al., 2014; Good & Willoughby, 2014; Jackson et al., 2016; MacDonald et al., 2015; Moore, 2014). Also, definitions of spiritual formation were inconsistent

and varied between constructs of religiosity and spirituality, sometimes overlapping in places. The methodological issues discussed in this section are operationalizing terms and instrumentation for measuring Fowler's faith stages.

Operationalizing terms. One study acknowledged the interchangeability of terms *religion* and *spirituality* and defined spirituality as “an awareness of interconnectedness involved in work/life experiences that enrich overall performance” (Nelson et al., 2017, p. 389). Nelson et al.'s (2017) definition was closely related to Fowler's (1995) definition of faith. Similarly, Wright (2000) offered this definition of spirituality “the relationship of the individual, within community and tradition, to that which is – or is perceived to be – of ultimate concern, ultimate value and ultimate truth, as appropriated through an informed, sensitive and reflective striving for spiritual wisdom” (p. 104). Another study defined spiritual formation as “a process through which an individual accepts Jesus Christ as Savior and continually becomes like Him” (Moore, 2014, p. 266). Moore's (2014) definition was closely consistent to Chandler et al.'s (2014) definition of CSF. Another defines spiritual formation as “the life-long transformational self-analytic and relational process where individuals become more like Christ through the Holy Spirit and Biblical guidance resulting in a relationship with God” (Horan, 2017; p. 56). MacDonald et al. (2015) offered this definition of spirituality: “spirituality is a natural aspect of human functioning which relates to a special class of non-ordinary experiences and the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that cause, co-occur, and/or result from such experiences” (p. 5).

The variety of definitions and studies on spirituality and religiosity has spurred a variety of instruments to measure spirituality. The Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale (SIBS) is a 26-item scale survey that measures four factors—(a) the external or ritual, “items that address belief in a greater external power, as well as spiritual rituals and actives,” (b) the internal and

fluid, “items that assess for internal spiritual beliefs as well as spiritual growth and progression,” (c) the existential and meditative, “items relevant to existential issues and meditation practices,” and (d) humility and personal application, “the extent to which spiritual values influence daily life choices” (Dong et al., 2018, p. 170). Dong et al. (2018) found that this instrument was a “promising measure for evaluating the spiritual beliefs and involvement of college students during an intake session and throughout the counseling process” (p. 181). However, the tool does not account for CSF.

MacDonald et al. (2015) tested the validity of the Expressions of Spiritual Inventory (ESI-R), an instrument that measures five dimensions of spirituality: (a) cognitive orientation, (b) experiential/phenomenological dimension, (c) existential well-being, (d) paranormal beliefs, and (e) religiousness. The first iteration, the ESI, was a 100-item measure. The ESI-R is a 32-item version of the ESI. While this instrument was validated across various cultures, the focus of this instrument was not CSF.

King et al. (2014, 2017) avoided some of the challenges of operationalizing terms by using the exemplar and consensual qualitative research method. This method allowed the researchers to first identify subjects along the upper echelons of spirituality, working backwards to identify the different dimensions of spirituality and experiences that existed in the lives of the subjects. Exemplar methodologies can address operationalizing terms by consulting with community experts and literature. Exemplar qualitative research is a viable option for identifying high school experiences that contribute to CSF.

Instruments for Fowler’s faith stages. Parker (2006) reviewed three different tools that used James Fowler’s stages of faith as a framework to operationalize faith formation—the Faith Development Interview (FDI), the Faith Styles Scale (FSS), and the Faith Development Scale

(FDS). The FDI is in in-depth interview. The FSS and the FDS are survey tools. Of the three, the FDI was preferred by Parker (2006).

The FDI is an in-depth interview that includes (a) a general life review, (b) a review of experiences and relationships that shaped the subject's life, (c) "a description of present values and commitments" which focus on purpose and ethics, and (d) specific questions about spiritual disciplines and religion like prayer and Bible reading (Parker, 2006, p. 338). According to Parker (2006), the FDI is the "best validated of the instruments designed to measure Fowler's faith stages" (p. 341). Some of the limitations however are the length of time it takes to administer and transcribe the interview and the scoring favors the "cognitive elements of faith development" (Parker, 2006, p. 341).

The Faith Style Scale (FSS) is another instrument that measures faith development. The FSS is a survey that helps the researcher identify thinking patterns that correlate to the first five stages of Fowler's theory (Stephen, 2006). Some of the benefits of this instrument is that no special training is necessary to administer the survey, and it would easily be transferred to an electronic survey. Further, this instrument allows the researcher to place the subject in different faith stages based on the scores. A weakness in the FSS instrument is that the findings from the FSS and FDI instruments vary significantly. Another instrument created based on the Fowler's stages of faith development is the Faith Development Scale (FDS), a questionnaire that is a "forced-choice, paired item scale" much like the FSS (Stephen, 2006, p. 343). While it does offer ease of administration, the instrument has not yielded scores correlative to the FDI (Stephen, 2006). Parker (2006) found that the best tool to measure faith formation is the Faith Development Interview (FDI) developed for Fowler's research (Parker, 2006).

Synthesis of Research Findings

Based on the relevant literature, there are some things that are known about spiritual formation independent of Christian schools and within the Christian school. It is a construct that is measurable and has been measured by researchers (Bonhoeffer, 1955; Holmes, 2017; Horan, 2017; Krause & Pargament, 2017; Lang, 2015; McGuire, 2017; Sikkink & Skiles, 2018; Willard, 2006). Spiritual formation is understood to be distinctive from CSF, yet both have been operationalized and measured similarly to include elements of religiosity—that is actions that signify mature, spiritual behavior (Bonhoeffer, 1995; Chan et al., 2015; Chandler et al., 2014; Jueng et al., 2015; McGuire, 2017; Willard, 2006). Religiosity is used as a proxy for spirituality because the spiritual part of a person is evidenced in the actions of individuals.

Church attendance is one variable that researchers have observed to measure Christian values, religious participation, and spirituality (Barkin et al., 2015; Chan et al., 2015; Francis et al., 2014; McGuire, 2017). However, church attendance does not signify CSF (Jueng et al., 2015; McGuire, 2017; Yocum, 2014). Yet, the church provides context through teaching the Word and discipleship, so the measure is justifiable for quantitative purposes (Beagles, 2012; O’Neil, 2013). The church attrition narrative has been explored by researchers who have found that there is indeed a disconnect between the emerging young adults, namely the Millennials, and generations prior (Chan et al., 2015; Twenge et al., 2015).

Researchers have also explored phenomena that is believed to contribute to the spiritual formation of groups of individuals—family, community, schools (Denton & Uecker, 2018; Derrico et al., 2015; Holmes, 2017; Lang, 2015; Sikkink, 2018; Sikkink & Skiles, 2018; Uecker et al., 2016; Yust, 2017). The family, schools, and extended faith community all have a role in CSF. The child’s first stage of faith—the intuitive-projective, is typically experienced within the

immediate family unit (Fowler, 1995). In this stage, the child's ideas about God comes from parents and other close relationships (Deprez, 2017; Holmes, 2017). Family continues to have an impact on an individual beyond the first faith stage; however, the community begins to have more impact in stages two and three in Fowler's (1995) stages of faith development.

Stages 2 and Stage 3 of Fowler's faith stages involve the school-aged years where the community can be an extension of the family in faith formation (Sikkink, 2018). Research has shown that the Christian school influences the values profiles and perspectives of their students (Francis, 2005; Francis et al., 2014; Horan, 2017; Schwarz & Sikkink, 2016). The modes of influence are through Bible classes, chapels, one-to-one mentoring, and through a family emphasis, which is correlated to church attendance (Denton & Uecker, 2018; Horan, 2017; Sikkink, 2018; Uecker et al., 2016).

Family formation typically occurs in the fourth and fifth stages of Fowler's (1995) faith stages—emerging young adults and adults. In these stages, individuals may become emancipated from the system of beliefs and values they once held to and may modify their beliefs and values to fit their experience (Fowler, 1995; Fowler & Dell, 2006). This faith formation process speaks to the church attendance decline narrative. Research concerning the church decline trends have found that religious practice has declined for Millennials more than any generation prior (Chan et al., 2015; Twenge et al., 2015). Additionally, Millennials have participated in hybrid practices of their faith—like attending special services at church while cohabiting (Jueng et al., 2015; McGuire, 2017). This alludes to the possibility that after the high school years, entering Stage 4—the individuative-reflective stage, individuals are not finding a consistency between what they were taught and what they have experienced (Fowler, 1995).

The extent to which Christian schools contribute to emerging adults' adherence to CSF through programming, curriculum, or other channels of CSF after transitioning out of the synthetic-conventional stage is unknown. The transition out of stage three—the synthetic-conventional stage, is characterized by “clashes or contradictions between valued authority sources” which lead to critical reflection—the abandoning or reestablishing of perspectives (Fowler, 1995, p. 173). This intersection of lasting CSF and Christian high-school faith residuals is under explored. Researchers have recommended further exploration of

- teachers' roles in student spiritual formation (Francis et al., 2014),
- longitudinal exemplar studies to understand “key information about the processes prior to and during adolescence” (King et al., 2014, p. 208),
- professional development training for spiritual development and mentoring and evaluation of program effectiveness (Horan, 2017),
- exploration of the relationship between “institutional and student identities and expectations,” with specific regard to “denominational traditions” (Alleman et al., 2016, p. 183),
- the use of qualitative methods to examine the “processes behind religious change” during the family formation years (Denton & Uecker, 2018, p. 20), and
- “the processes that should be in place or are currently in place” that may contribute to positive youth development (Aziz, 2017, p. 6).

These researchers' recommendations for further research alludes to opportunity to explore this present research—the study of Hawaii's Christian school alumni's perspective of their Christian high school's role in their spiritual formation. The lack of recent empirical

literature related to CSF at the high school level provides occasion to explore the intersection between CSF and Christian high schools.

Critique of Previous Research

Sampling is one of the challenges faced by researching studying the spiritual formation construct. A challenge stemmed from the generalizability of research findings. To provide basis for broad generalizability, some researchers chose to use data collected by organizations that conducted large-scale surveys (Jeung et al., 2015; Twenge et al., 2015, 2016; Uecker et al., 2016). A drawback of this sampling method is that during analysis, the issue of instrument validity arises. Other researchers, like Horan (2017), Jackson et al. (2016), and Moore (2014), used convenience samples could not generalize their findings to larger populations and had to address bias in the data. Researchers, like Alleman et al. (2016) and Yocum (2014), used qualitative or mixed methods research designs also used convenience samples, forgoing generalizability with other advantages such as simplicity and efficiency of data collection, especially with target population and specific phenomena being explored. The literature most relevant to this study is limited to studies overseas in England or was conducted through a faith-based institution, the Cardus Education Survey (CES), administered in partnership with the University of Notre Dame (Francis et al., 2014; Sikkink, 2018; Sikkink & Skiles, 2018). The studies provide large, generalizable results that were descriptive of the state of spiritual formation at the time of the study.

The measurement challenge starkly revolved around operationalizing spiritual formation. Researchers like Barry et al. (2015), Twenge et al. (2015), and Francis et al. (2005) recognized that religion and spirituality often overlapped, and study subjects may not have discerned the difference between the two. Further, some researchers overlooked the difference between

religiosity and spirituality, operationalizing and measuring each construct as the same construct as seen in Barry et al. (2015) and Twenge et al. (2015). Also, some researchers chose to forgo the “long and arduous process” of creating an original instrument and opted to analyze existing datasets (Creswell, 2015, p. 156). Researchers could choose which variables to isolate and analyze to study specific constructs of spirituality and religiosity. While this data collection method saved the researchers’ time required otherwise to create their own survey instrument, the researchers were limited on how they could operationalize the religion and spirituality constructs based on the survey items collected in the datasets. Further, using data gathered by intact instruments for studies outside of the researchers’ questions brings up the challenge of validity—does the instrument measure what it is intended to measure? (Creswell, 2014).

Francis et al.’s (2014) comparative study of Francis’s (2005) prior study was a critique on the data analysis of the 2005 study. Francis et al. (2014) acknowledged that the analysis in the 2005 study could not differentiate between the differences in values profiles of the students that were the effect of the school from the effects that may have come from “influences of other personal, contextual, or psychological factors” (p. 39). Thus, a new analysis using a multilevel linear model was used to make causal inferences. Other studies did not look for causation, but rather looked for correlations between spirituality and religiosity and a phenomenon.

Chapter 2 Summary

Christian schools share in the responsibility of the Christian spiritual formation of its students. Yet, Christian schools in Hawaii make up only a small portion of the private schooling on the island, with Hawaii public schools enrolling five times more students than Hawaii private schools (Hawaii Department of Education, 2017). The Christian school faces the stark challenge

of forming spiritually mature individuals in a climate of nationwide church decline and decreased religiosity amongst emerging young adults (Chan et al., 2015; Twenge et al., 2016).

The concepts framing this study are James Fowler's stages of faith theory, Christian spiritual formation (CSF), and Christian schools. Fowler's stages of faith theory provides a framework to understand the epistemological stages of this study's target population—emerging young adults and young adults. Christian spiritual formation, understood to be distinct from other types of spiritual formation in that it involves the spirit of a person and the Spirit of God, the Word of God, and a process of discipleship—all of which are expressed in Christian virtues (Bonhoeffer, 1955; Chandler et al., 2014; Willard, 2006). Christian schools are a unique context where CSF takes place with attention to the spirit, soul, and body, through what Manning (2014) refers to as the educable parts of the person—the corporeal, the affective, the volitional, and the cognitive.

While the literature identified some trends in church attendance and emerging young adults and adults, the literature fell short of identifying elements in the Christian high school experience that contribute to retention of distinctly Christian spiritual maturity. Literature fell short of exploring the CSF construct in a highly developed form which would have allowed the researchers to explore effective pathways to CSF. Researchers have explored different modes of spiritual formation; however, the intersection between the residuals of the Christian school experience and mature Christians is an opportunity for additional current research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction to Methodology

This qualitative phenomenological study was inspired by the mission of Christian schools to partner with parents in the whole-person development in their children. Likewise, this study was inspired by parents who have invested in Christian education and have entrusted Christian schools to support their family objectives concerning spirituality. The primary investigator's role as an educator in a private, Christian school and as active member in a local church, stirred an exploration of Christian school outcomes.

This study used the qualitative phenomenological approach along with *exemplar sampling*, a sampling strategy that helps identify a sample of individuals who are highly developed in CSF, to understand the characteristics and processes associated with fully developed or mature Christian spiritual formation in lives of Christian school alumni. This chapter outlines the design and methods of this study. It provides the rationale for this study's qualitative, phenomenological design and provides background of the exemplar sampling strategies. This chapter also connects the conceptual framework to the study methods.

Research Questions

This study was designed to explore the intersection between the Christian school experience and Christian exemplarity—thus, my research questions:

1. How do Christian Spiritual Exemplars (CSEs), who have graduated from Christian high schools, perceive their lived experiences of Christian Spiritual Formation (CSF) in the Christian high school?
2. How do these experiences shape the spiritual lives of CSEs beyond high school?

These questions are qualitative in nature because they consider context and environment of a loosely defined concept, spirituality. They are phenomenological in nature because they explore a shared, lived experience: Christian high schooling.

Purpose and Design of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand how CSEs view their lived experiences in their Christian high school, after graduation. Choosing a phenomenological design came after contemplating the benefits and disadvantages of each design. Research concerning spiritual formation have utilized mixed-methods, quantitative, and qualitative research designs. A qualitative method was used because the principal investigator wanted to see the phenomena as a whole instead of in parts. A phenomenological approach was used because the principal investigator wanted to know what the experience meant for a group of individuals.

Mixed methods. Mixed methods research takes advantage of both quantitative and qualitative data, giving a comprehensive view of the research problem (Creswell, 2014). The mixed-methods approach enabled some researchers to benefit from the time-efficient data-collection methods in quantitative designs while still allowing for some depth of understanding of individual perspectives that were given through interviews and short-response surveys (Lang, 2015; Yocum, 2014). However, because of the likelihood of a sample size of less than 10, mixed methods research was not appropriate for this study. Also, the principal investigator expected to collect through interviews the same information that would be collected in surveys.

Quantitative. Quantitative research is a research approached used to explore different variables and their relationships (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative designs have been used in studies that measured various mediating factors in spiritual formation. The benefits of using quantitative

designs, particularly longitudinal, is that researchers can track trends and changes over time using time-efficient data-gathering methods (Chan et al., 2014; Good & Willoughby, 2014). Quantitative studies were able to explore relationships between variables and generalize to a greater population; however, they were not able to get an in-depth look at the topics investigated (Jeung et al., 2015; Twenge et al., 2015, 2016; Uecker et al., 2016). The principal investigator chose to forgo quantitative research designs because this study focused on context and complexity of a particular human experience; it did not attempt to create categories that can be reduced to measurable variables.

Qualitative. Qualitative research designs are ideal for studies that seek to understand experiences and meanings shared by groups of people (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2001). The methods involved in qualitative inquiry allow the researcher to focus on the meaning of an experience from the participant's perspective. The qualitative research approach starts with looking at individual's meanings and builds into broader themes. Researchers who used qualitative designs to explore spiritual formation rendered through their methods detailed descriptions of individuals' perspectives and experiences (Holmes, 2017; McGuire, 2017).

Qualitative methods of data collection and analysis assisted in the understanding of how CSEs make sense of their Christian school experiences. Qualitative methods allowed me to describe elements of CSF that could not be quantified or isolated for exploration. Further, while quantitative research looks at a phenomenon in parts, the qualitative perspective looks at the relationship between a phenomenon and respective experiences; this was the aim of this study (Merriam, 2001). The qualitative methodology allowed for a more in-depth revelation of participant experiences that would otherwise be unknown if explored through mutual exclusivity in quantitative data collection.

Design: Phenomenology

The principal investigator used a phenomenological approach for this study to capture the essence of a shared experience. A phenomenological approach provided the in-depth experience of multiple individuals; this allowed me to see the common points in the shared, lived experiences of multiple individuals (Merriam, 2001). Phenomenology focuses on how a person perceives an experience irrespective of how the phenomena is actually experienced (Giorgi, 2015). The goal of phenomenological research is to give a description of what a lived experience meant for the people who went through the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology helps to uncover a common or shared structure of the experience in the multiple accounts of the phenomena. The descriptive aspect of this approach is the assumption that there is a “‘given’ that needs to be described precisely as it appears, and nothing is to be added to it nor subtracted from it” (Giorgi, 2012, p. 6).

Other Designs Considered

The other designs the principal investigator considered, but chose to forgo, were grounded theory, case study, and narrative research. Grounded theory was a viable option for this study because it looks at experiences and processes that happen over time (Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, & Morales, 2007). Also, the data for grounded theory is primarily collected through interviews and is used to extend a theory (Creswell et al., 2007; Patton, 2002). The aim of this study was not to extend a theory based on the views of the study participants, so the principal investigator chose to forgo grounded theory.

Case study lends itself to research questions that ask how and why and aims to “expand and generalize theories” (Yin, 2003, p. 10). This design appealed to this study because of the focus on process and discovery and also the all-encompassing design that includes “logic of

design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis” (Yin, 2003, p. 14). Data collection strategies for case study research are interviews, observation, and analyzing documents (Merriam, 2001). The drawback of using a case study design for this study was that observation of the participants in the target environment was not possible. Additionally, because of the time lapse since participants graduated high school, documents would not be available for analysis.

Narrative research was appealing for this study because of its focus on detailed stories of individuals (Creswell et al., 2007). The narrative research design asks questions of the participants’ life experiences and how the experiences take place over time. The source of information is in the storied narratives of the research participants (Creswell et al., 2007). The analysis of narrative research involves putting the participant stories in chronological order and restorying participants’ narratives (Creswell, 2014; Creswell et al., 2007). Narrative design was also a possibility for this study because of the focus on experiences of one or a few individuals; however, for this study the principal investigator wanted to focus on understanding a shared experience or phenomenon, which is purpose of phenomenology (Creswell et al., 2007; Merriam, 2001).

Research Setting and Population

The scope of this study was limited to individuals in one church community in Hawaii. The decision to focus on one church community was to support cultural consistency within the sample. One of the methodological challenges in the literature on spirituality was the operationalization of the construct—spirituality. This is because different denominations within Christendom have various ideas of what constitutes Christianity, spirituality, and faith formation (Phan, 2008). The varieties of Bible interpretations and church culture contributes to the

diversity of the operationalization of spirituality as a construct in research (Phan, 2008). A 2014 study showed that Hawaii's diverse, religious landscape was 63% Christian; however, there were multiple denominations within that category (Pew Research Center, n.d.). The principal investigator attends a multi-campus evangelical Christian church that provided knowledge of the cultural norms and expressions associated with spirituality. The principal investigator also had access to this population for interviews to both formulate nomination criteria and gather data from exemplars.

This study focused on the Millennial population, individuals born between years 1977 and 1995 as delineated by Fromm and Garton (2013) for two distinct reasons. The age correlation with Fowler's (1995) stage four, individuative-reflective faith makes the Millennial population attractive for this study. Transition out of the stage prior, the synthetic-conventional faith stage, is typically marked by critical reflection of the contradictions between experiences and beliefs, typically the values and beliefs acquired from those who are close relations—in this study, relations in the school setting (Fowler, 1995; Fowler & Dell, 2006). The Millennial generation cohort situates the study to target the intersection between highly developed Christian faith formation and the Christian high school.

Another reason for targeting this generation is because of the research that shows spiritual decline specifically amongst this generational cohort (Barry et al., 2015; Chan et al., 2015; Twenge et al., 2015, 2016; Uecker et al., 2016). Further, exploration of other generational cohorts is beyond this current study. Individuals in stage five, the conjunctive faith stage, is rarely reached before mid-life, so this mid-life-and-beyond population extends beyond the church-decline narrative that this study hopes to contribute to (Fowler, 1995). Similarly, individuals rarely reach stage six, the universalizing faith stage, and those who do would be

outside the generational scope of the study (Fowler, 1995; Fowler & Dell, 2006). While stages five and six are the stages that show exemplarity, a decision to “lower the threshold of exemplarity to garner a sufficient sample size” is acceptable (Bronk, 2012, p. 8). Millennials may be in an earlier faith stage, stage three—the synthetic-conventional faith stage. Some remain in stage three; however, because of the typical nature of this stage for individuals between ages 12 and 21, in this study, individuals in this stage do fit into the highly developed threshold (Fowler, 1995, Fowler & Dell, 2006, Neuman, 2011).

Sampling Method

A review of recent literature revealed research that described only a part of the intersection between Christian schools and CSF. The population samples in recent quantitative studies described the general or the typical therefore the correlations between the phenomena and the construct are limited by the general and typical (Chan et al., 2015; Francis et al., 2014; Sikkink, 2018; Sikkink & Skiles, 2018; Yocum, 2014). Without studying the lives of exemplars, what researchers understand about the developmental process of a construct is incomplete (Damon & Colby, 2013; King et al., 2013). This is because exemplars “characterize the leading edge of development, and their lives can be generalized in a developmental sense” (Bronk, 2012, p. 8).

According to King et al. (2013), the exemplar sampling strategy is characterized more upon the selection of the sample than it is the analysis of the data, thus emphasizing the importance of the sample selection. According to Magnusson and Merecek (2015), “there is no ideal number of participants, no ideal sample size for a study; the focus should be on answering the research questions and identifying participants who are able to provide insight to the phenomena being explored” (p. 37). One strategy to select the sample is by asking people

familiar with the target population to nominate potential participants; this is what Magnusson and Merecek (2015) referred to as “targeted nominations” (p. 38). This is a very specific type of purposeful sampling which lends to the exemplar methodology of my topic. The principal researcher chose to forgo a comparison sample because the aim of this study is not to distinguish CSE from typical individuals who did not attend Christian high schools, nor is it the purpose of this study to distinguish CSEs from typical individuals.

The exemplar sampling strategy is a research technique that focuses on sample selection. It involves the “intentional selection of individuals, groups, or entities that exemplify the construct of interest in a highly developed manner” (Bronk, 2012, p. 1). The exemplar sampling strategy positions the participant as an expert in the field as they bring personal interpretations of their “actions, commitments, and ideals” to the study (King et al., 2013, p. 45). This is consistent with the coresearcher status that Moustakas’ (1994) convenes upon study participants. The participants are understood to be experts in the field because of nomination criteria that are used to identify the participants.

While underutilized for exploring CSF, an exemplar sampling strategy gave a more complete look at CSF in the context of the Christian school experience by “engaging the exemplar participant as a collaborator in investigation” (Bronk et al., 2013, p. 2). This study aims to reveal the elements of the Christian school experience that are perceived by CSEs as important in their CSF process. While this approach has been used to study spiritual formation, the focus was not distinctly CSF in prior studies (King et al., 2014).

Nomination Criteria

Creating the nomination criteria is the first step in exemplar sampling (Bronk, 2013). This was used to identify the participants who were qualified to participate in the study. Different approaches to creating the nomination criteria include:

- the expert approach—using the expert conception of the construct under exploration,
- the lay-perspective approach—a broader and more biased conception of the construct under investigation,
- the definitional approach—the use of definitions and conceptions of the construct in literature on the construct under investigation, and
- the outcome approach—the use of an individual’s resume of awards, recognition, and participation in certain acts as criteria for nomination. (Bronk, 2012)

According to King et al. (2013), nomination criteria is originated in the existing literature, definitions, and theory surrounding the construct; it is then revised and refined with the input of “various diverse and (hopefully) culturally informed experts” who “revise and refine criteria to maximize cultural sensitivity” (p. 46). For this study, the principal investigator used both the expert and definitional approach to create the nomination criteria. While the lay-perspective allows for a “broader and more representative” sample (Bronk, 2012, p. 23), an exemplar, not typical, sample was the aim of this study.

The definition of a near fully developed Christian was derived from this study’s conceptual framework. The framework offered these definitions of CSF and individuative-reflective faith, respectively:

- Definition of CSF: The processes of conforming a person’s individual will to “explicit obedience to Christ” (Willard, 2006, para. 15).

- Fowler’s (1995) delineation of Stage 4, individuative-reflective faith: critical awareness and personal formation of one’s beliefs and values and the personal ownership of one’s “commitments, lifestyles, beliefs and attitudes” (p. 182).

Fowler’s faith stage is distinct from CSF, describing an individual’s stage of knowing and ways making meaning and sense of life and its occurrences (Fowler, 1995; Fowler & Dell, 2006). It is not a measure of Christian faith or belief, hence the definitional contribution of CSF to the definition of the Christian Spiritual Exemplars (CSE): A CSE is a disciple who is critically aware of his or her Christian beliefs and values and is one who embodies the character of Christ as is exemplified in the Bible through obedience to the Word of God and demonstration of spiritual virtues such as those found in Galatians 5:22–23 “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” within the Christian community and beyond. This definition was the nexus of the nomination criteria (see Table 1).

Table 1

Initial CSE Nomination Criteria

Nexus for criteria	Criteria
Is a disciple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is accountable to a mentor or leader • Shares his or her faith with others • Responds with a positive attitude to guidance and correction • Disciples others or is on a pathway to disciple others
Critical awareness of Christian beliefs and values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can articulate his or her Christian faith • Can defend his or her Christian faith • Can explain controversial aspects of his or her faith • Can articulate his or her role as a disciple in the Biblical narrative of redemption
Embodies the character of Christ through obedience to the Word of God	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reads the Bible daily • Prays daily • Attends church weekly • Tithes regularly

(continued)

Nexus for Criteria	Criteria
Lives out Biblical Christian virtues within the Christian community and beyond	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteers in the church as needed or as requested by leadership • Is easily approachable by others • Has healthy family relationships • Has healthy friendships within the church community • Has healthy friendships outside the church community • Is respected in the community

These criteria were presented to expert advisors for revision and refinement until a final nomination criteria list was finalized for the CSE nomination process.

According to Bronk et al. (2013), the nomination criteria must be “as concrete as possible, and at once narrow enough to be descriptive of a particularly highly developed group” (p. 4). One of the challenges researchers faced with operationalizing the spirituality construct had to do with the difference between religiosity and spirituality (Chan et al., 2015; Deprez, 2017; Jueng et al., 2015; McGuire, 2017). In this study, religiosity was an acceptable proxy for spirituality due to the visible nature of faith (Bonhoeffer, 1995; James 14:26; Willard, 2006). Thus, the nomination criteria had action elements integrated.

Also, this study was limited to graduates of Christian schools who have attended a Christian school at least two consecutive years. This minimum number for years of Christian school attendance was to broaden the range for sampling. My experience as a Christian school educator in Hawaii has shown me that it is common for students to enroll in private schools in their junior and senior years.

Sample Nomination Criteria Protocol

This criteria protocol helped to generate the list that was used for the CSE nomination process. Since the reliability of a study heavily hinged on how well the construct was

operationalized, this protocol helped to increase the reliability of the study (Damon & Coby, 2013). This was the protocol for developing the nomination criteria:

1. Receive full Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Concordia University–Portland.
2. Meet with each advisor one-on-one.
3. Explain the purpose of the study and the role of the nomination criteria.
4. Present the initial nomination criteria table (see Table 1) to the advisor in hardcopy format.
5. Explain that the initial criteria were derived from the literature and theory surrounding the construct.
6. Ask for any changes, additions, or subtractions to be given in that meeting (the length of the meeting determined by the advisor).
7. Write down changes and make clarifications to the nominations during the meeting.
8. Read back each modification to the advisor and allow the advisor to see the modifications on the document.
9. Tell the advisor that the principal investigator will be meeting with other advisors to go through the same process and will give him or her the final criteria for additional iterations in paper format.
10. Permit each advisor to make additions, subtractions, and modifications up to three times.

Each advisor had an opportunity to make changes up to 24 hours after being invited to make changes. Invitations to second and third iteration changes were given after each advisor gave his or her additions, subtractions, or modifications in the subsequent iterations.

Field Experts: Identifying Expert Advisors

In a similar study, King et al. (2014) gathered a diverse group of 19 advisers to generate nomination criteria. The group of advisers included those with the following religious affiliations: “Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Native American, mixed-religion, or secular” (King et al., 2014, p. 192). The diversity of expert advisers catered to the culturally and religiously diverse target sample of the study. In this study, the same attention was given to cultural sensitivity. Further, King et al. (2013) submitted that the context of the nomination criteria is as important as the criteria (King et al., 2013).

The criteria that may apply in one culture may not apply in another, even within one church culture. One way for criteria to be sensitive to the culture of the sample or study setting is to consult with local experts or experts within the culture to generate the criteria (King et al., 2013). Expert advisers of this study were a purposive snowball sample of church leaders and pastors of the church of the sample population. There were at least 24 church leaders who had direct oversight of at least 12 other leaders in the church organization. For this study, the principal investigator aimed to consult with at least 12 expert advisers.

The principal investigator used non-probability, purposive-snowball sampling to identify the expert advisers. After receiving permission from the senior pastors of the church to do research amongst the church population, the principal investigator asked them to identify key leaders who could help operationalize Christian spiritual exemplarity. This was a purposive sample because of the need for a specific group of experts who could operationalize a construct within a specific church community. This was a snowball sample because the experts were referred from another informant.

Exemplar Selection

The expert advisors who helped to create the nomination criteria were the same individuals who nominated the exemplars. A new set of expert advisors or even people in the general population could be identified to nominate CSE based on the nomination criteria; however, they could have put stronger emphasis on certain criteria or could have utilized criteria unrelated to the finalized nomination criteria. Also, a new set of expert advisors could have interpreted the criteria differently than the advisors who created the criteria; this concern could not be ignored (King et al., 2013). While a new set of nominators could have promoted equal weight and attention to each criterion, the benefits of using the same advisors for nomination outweighed the drawbacks (Bronk, 2012). The researcher hoped to gather at least 10 participants without respect to gender or socioeconomic status.

Having the criteria advisors double as nominators leveraged some benefits. First, it eliminated the need to orient the expert to the study. Secondly, the experts who created the nomination criteria understood the criteria and the nuances they might have not verbally expressed in the criteria. Furthermore, these advisors were able to apply the unexpressed nuances of the criteria in their nominations (Bronk, 2012). Another benefit to having the criteria advisors double as nominators was to limit the number of church leaders who could have become distracted by the study. The principal investigator hoped to consult with at least 12 expert advisors to generate nomination criteria.

Nomination Protocol

Once the nomination criteria were finalized, the principal investigator asked each criteria advisor to use a digital nomination form to nominate anyone who was born between the years 1977 and 1995; graduated from a private, Christian school; and attended that same Christian

school for at least two consecutive years before graduation. Nominators remained confidential throughout the study to guard from possible power dynamics that could have lead to coercion. After nomination, the principal investigator verified if the nominee's school was a Christian school based on this study's definition: Christian schools are schools that state spiritual formation as a main element in their school's mission or vision. If the school was verified, the principal investigator contacted each nominee by email with a letter of invitation to participate in the study and to schedule an interview.

Instrumentation

The principal investigator used a survey and semistructured interviews to collect data for this study. The survey was not the tool the principal investigator used to collect the data to analyze Christian spiritual exemplarity in relation to the Christian school experience. While the survey was an efficient means to gather data, it did not give access to the depth and breadth of experience that was significant to the construct under investigation. The principal investigator used a digital survey to gather contact information and demographic data for expert advisors and also to gather information for study nominees such as birth year and year of high school of graduation. The digital survey link was given to each expert advisor along with the nomination criteria. The digital survey helped to expedite the nomination process instead of waiting for a face to face meeting with the expert advisor for his or her subject nominations. Moustakas (1994) recommended gathering data through dialogue and open-ended questions. In exemplar research, the researcher is expected to be immersed in the "life, perspectives, and opinions of the exemplar" (King et al., 2013, p. 50). This is not possible through the survey method. Thus, the principal investigator used the semistructured interview to gather data.

The semistructured interview format allows for the participant to develop his or her thoughts on a topic at their own discretion (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). The semistructured interview has the structure and flexibility to allow for rich and thick data to explore themes while allowing for the “flexibility to identify unique characteristics and experiences that highlight sources of cultural and contextual influence” (King et al., 2013, p. 49). Phenomenology hinges on the first-person reports of those who lived through the experience under investigation (Moustakas, 1994). The interview questions are less about gathering information and more about understanding the experiences and the meanings the participants attribute to the experiences.

Original interview questions were created specifically for this study, and they meet these criteria:

- The interview items are ones the participant can talk about (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015);
- The interview items are relevant to the topic (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015);
- The interview items are not identical to the research questions (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015; Yin, 2003);
- The interview items are accessible to the participant with attention to conversational tone (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015);
- The interview items are open ended and address one idea at a time (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015; Saldaña, 2011);
- If the interview items are yes or no questions, they had follow-up questions that were open-ended (Saldaña, 2011);
- The interview items gave access to the “values, attitudes, and beliefs” of the participants (Saldaña, 2011).

As recommended, the semistructured interview questions were pilot tested with one of the expert advisors to ensure cultural and contextual sensitivity (King et al., 2013; Magnusson & Marecek, 2015).

Conducting the Interview

After full approval from the IRB, a letter of invitation was given to each nominee to participate in the study. In this letter, the participant asked to create a timeline of five to 10 school-related events or experiences that the participant felt had a significant impact on his or her CSF. A similar step was taken in Clardy's (2012) pre-interview process in her study on adolescent exemplars. In Clardy's (2012) study, the events were discussed at the onset of the interview. Likewise, for this study, the timeline was used to start the conversation about the participant's Christian school experience.

An interview protocol was used to create consistency between interviews, and it added credibility to the study (see Appendix G). The interview protocol included elements suggested in the literature on interview methods (Creswell, 2014; Magnusson & Marecek, 2015; Saldaña, 2011):

- a heading with the following information: date, location, interviewer, and interviewee,
- standardized instructions for the interviewer to follow,
- an icebreaker to help the interviewer and interviewee to acclimate to the process,
- the introductions and explanation of the study at the beginning of the interview,
- the interview questions and probes,
- pauses between questions to allow for notetaking and making memos,
- a conclusion with a thank you statement,

- and instructions for wrapping up the interview at the site.

The interview time and location was at the convenience of the participant (Magnusson & Marececk, 2015). Since the participants in this study are spiritual exemplars, the church building or somewhere near their church location or former school may be ideal for the interview. The location like a church or a former school may allow the participant to refer to locations or events that are triggered in the participant's memory because of certain physical buildings or cultural symbols.

Data Analysis Procedures

The role of data analysis in exemplar research is not to build nor substantiate a theory; it is rather to construct categories that highlight and reveal themes in rich data (Merriam, 2001). According to Giorgi (2015), in phenomenology, all collected data from the interview must be analyzed. This study did not employ Giorgi's (2015) descriptive, qualitative data analysis procedures; however, the principle of reading data for a sense of a whole was integrated in the process throughout. Moustakas' (2014) data analysis processes, along with Saldaña's (2011, 2013) data analysis procedures, framed the entire analysis of the data. Researchers who used Moustakas' (2014) analysis processes utilized coding and other analysis procedures discussed by Saldaña (2013) to complete the processes (Harper & Newman, 2016; Koops, 2017; Nelson & Cutucache, 2017). To support the analysis of all the data, analytic memos and coding was used.

According to Moustakas (1994), there are four essential processes in phenomenological research—epoché, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis. The first step, epoché, is the step of taking on a naïve perspective toward the data. The researcher must let go of all presuppositions and judgments built from prior experiences and knowledge. The second step, phenomenological reduction is “describing in textual language just what one sees, not only

in terms of the external object but also the internal act of consciousness, the experience as such, the rhythm and relationship between phenomenon and self” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 91). The third step is imaginative variation—seeking “possible meanings through the utilization of imagination,” that is seeing the same thing from different views (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97; Patton, 2002). The fourth step is synthesis—an “intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100).

Epoché. The first step is achieving epoche, that is to “let go of all presuppositions and judgements built from prior experience and knowledge,” is important for a phenomenological researcher (Moustakas, 1994, p. 91). To achieve this suspension of presuppositions and judgements, the researcher must identify the experiences that affect his or her perspectives that may influence the research. The principal investigator in this study has been a Christian since she was six years old. She attended the same church since about the same time she became a Christian and is an active volunteer in the church. She attends church services typically all day on Sunday, from morning until evening, and on Wednesday evenings. The principal investigator attends a discipleship group at least once a week where a group of women meet with a mentor, and this study’s principal investigator leads a group of women in their spiritual formation journey. She also teaches at church retreats and has taught multiple adult discipleship classes. She does not consider herself religious and knows that active church membership is not synonymous with spiritual growth.

Up until the review of theoretical and empirical literature on spiritual formation, the principal investigator of this study did not know there were many approaches to operationalizing the construct of spiritual formation, yet she knew what she thought spiritual formation was more

than what is captured in the literature she had read. The literature she read on CSF felt incomplete, which is why she choose design elements in this study that relied on expert perspectives and not solely on personal interpretation of the literature. In this phenomenological study, the principal investigator maintained self-awareness and suspended what she thought she knew or had previously thought to be true about CSF in the context of Christian high schools as was necessary for phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological reduction. The next step is phenomenological reduction. The goal of this step is to give a textural description of the experience. This occurred after transcription of the data. According to Saldaña (2011, 2013), the analysis of data begins at transcription. It is during transcription that the researcher becomes aware of how the data is interrelated (Saldaña, 2011). It was not imperative to transcribe verbatim since the principal investigator was not doing a discourse analysis (Saldaña, 2011). This means she did not give excessive attention to misspellings or punctuation. After the interviews, all data were manually transcribed with the support of voice dictation applications, and the principal investigator wrote analytic memos in the margins of the data that helped her recognize data correlations. The transcripts from the interviews were also sent to the participants for member checking at which point the participant verified and validated the interview. The principal investigator also highlighted parts of the interview that could have led to deductive disclosure and asked the participant if he or she wanted that information or details included or deleted from the transcript.

After transcription, the principal investigator began bracketing and *horizontalizing*, identifying “key phrases and statements that speak directly to the phenomenon in question” (Patton, 2002, p. 485). The key statements that were related to the topic were set apart from the rest of the transcript and then *horizontalized*—that is, all the bracketed statements were treated

with equal value (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). As the data were horizontalized, all the “repetitive or overlapping” statements were deleted from the analysis (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97).

The statements that remained were the horizons of the study.

Two separate coding processes were used in this part of the analysis—process coding and in vivo coding. These two coding methods are *First Cycle Coding Methods*, “processes that happen during the initial coding of data” (Saldaña, 2013). Process coding uses gerunds to capture action in the data (Saldaña, 2011). This was useful because the study looked at experiences as factors in spiritual formation process. Creswell (2014) suggested that the researcher use codes that readers would expect to find. These codes could be generated through common sense but could also be based on past literature on the topic. The principal investigator used literature to identify process codes for this phase of coding.

To capture other non-action elements, the principal investigator used in vivo coding. The in vivo codes were taken from the “actual language of the participant” (Saldaña, 2011, p. 99). These codes were then put into quotation marks and are placed into similar categories based on the “nature of the codes” (Saldaña, 2011, p. 101). The categories were based on the researcher’s interpretation. The principal investigator used in vivo coding and process coding because these coding processes captured the language associated with CSF and captured the process of the lived experiences of the participants.

The data were then clustered into themes. This process employed *Second Cycle Coding Methods*, “advanced ways of reorganizing and reanalyzing data coded through First Cycle methods” (Saldaña, 2013). Focused coding is part of the second cycle of coding, usually following both in vivo and process coding methods (Saldaña, 2013). Merriam (2001) offered some guidelines for creating categories: they should “reflect the purpose of the research,” be

“exhaustive,” “mutually exclusive,” “sensitizing,” and be “conceptually congruent” (p. 183–184). Categorizing is the process of organizing and ordering the data, effectively reducing the number of codes into categories and subcategories from which themes can emerge (Saldaña, 2011, 2013). In this phase, groups of codes were unified based on shared characteristics (Saldaña, 2013). The new codes were outlined and visually represented in categories and subcategories and compared with the data from other participants (Saldaña, 2013). The process of analytic reduction, such as is customary in phenomenological analysis, helps to make meaning from the data (Moustakas, 1994). The next step was imaginative variation.

Imaginative variation. Imaginative variation is the process of seeing the data from different views (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). The goal of this step is to provide a structural description of the experience. In this process, the researcher searched for “exemplifications that vividly illustrate the invariant structural themes and facilitate the development of a structural description of the phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 99). This step enabled the researcher “to derive structural themes from the textural descriptions” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 99). From this process came a “synthesis of the meanings and essences of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 144). It is a reflective process that was supported by analytic memo writing.

Analytic memo writing is an important part of data analysis because of the process helps the researcher grapple with and reflect upon the data, eventually leading to the discovery of themes. According to Saldaña (2013), analytic memo writing and coding are complementary processes, so memo writing occurred through all three phases of the data analysis. Further, it is not recommended that coding alone be used for analysis (Saldaña, 2013). The principal investigator wrote down the highlights and whatever was directly related to the topic (Saldaña, 2011). The principal investigator made note of how any data influenced other data to prepare for

coding through highlighting and making marginal notes. These analytic memos were for the principal investigator's reference only, to guide how she made connections between the data. The analytic memos were used to make interpretations of ambiguities, holding to the principle given by Giorgi (2015): descriptive phenomenology "only responds to what can be accounted for in the description itself" (p. 127).

Synthesis. Synthesis is the final step in Moustakas' data analysis process. This step entails the "intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). In other words, the researcher provided a textual description of what happened to the participants and how it happened. That description along with the descriptions from all the other participant data were used to create a composite description of the phenomenon.

Limitations of the Research Design

There are limitations of the research design of this study. There is a limitation in the transcendental element of phenomenology in the removal of prejudgments on the part of the researcher. There are limitations in the sample size and in the demographics of the study because of the study's focus on exemplarity. The setting and population also pose limitations because the study cannot be generalized from the context of one church with a unique culture. The sampling strategy is also a limitation because it positions the participants in experts in the study, and while they are experts, they may lack the ability to communicate their ideas and perspectives.

Phenomenology limitations. One limitation of the phenomenology is the transcendental element: it tries to remove prejudgments and presuppositions that may affect how the researcher understands the truth of an experience according to the fresh, new perspectives provided by the participants (Moustakas, 1994). This transcendental element of phenomenology can be difficult

to navigate when the researcher is passionate about the research questions (Moustakas, 1994). Giorgi (2015) clarifies that this transcendental perspective or as he refers to it—a *psychological attitude*—is achieved by understanding how “individual human subjects present the world to themselves and how they act on the basis of that presentation” (p. 135). This attitude must be self-reflective, first (Giorgi, 2015). It is the researcher’s responsibility to disclose the process of data analysis to demonstrate researcher objectivity and come up with description of the phenomena being researched, not a personal opinion (Creswell et al., 2007).

Sampling strategy. There are limitations of the exemplar sampling strategies used in this study to identify the study sample. One of the limitations of exemplar sampling is that it does not have a well-defined, standardized design. There are three different approaches that can be used to identify the sample—the expert approach, the outcome approach, and the definitional approach (Bronk, 2012). These three approaches have elements of human bias. The expert approach relies on experts in specific communities to identify the sample; the outcome approach relies on awards or accolades accumulated by potential study participants; and the definitional approach is based on the researcher’s interpretation and analysis of literature, along with how that researcher operationalizes terms (Bronk, 2012). However, the data and findings that come from exemplar research fill a gap in what is known about CSF in relationship to Christian schools. Another design limitation in exemplar methods is the sample size. The size of the sample limits the generalizability of the sample; however, this current study does not aim to make generalizations; it aims to understand a specific phenomenon as experienced by a specific group of people.

Sample size. According to Bronk (2012), the individuals in the study should exhibit exemplarity, therefore, the sample data may not be large enough for quantitative analysis but still be suitable for qualitative analysis. A study that used nomination criteria to select spiritual

exemplars had a final sample size of 30 diverse youth (King et al., 2014). King et al.'s (2014) sample selection used expert nominators to help select the sample. The demographic limitations of the subjects in this current study further narrowed the sample size. To increase the likelihood of gathering enough nominations for this study, the principal investigator had to lower the threshold of the epistemological element in the CSE construct. Since the CSF element is the more important element under investigation, the principal investigator felt this choice was warranted.

Setting and population. The research setting and population posed limitations for this study. The setting for this study was not typical; however, from its birth, the Christian faith has contended with opposing opinions about Christian identity (Bennema, 2015). The setting for this study made up for its atypical nature by representing a context whereby Christian exemplarity could be operationalized. The principal investigator chose this setting to address church-culture differences that may occur if nominees were selected outside of the culture where the nomination criteria were created. The sample population was a growing multicultural church of over 5,000 in Honolulu, Hawaii. The aim of this study was to identify CSE and explore their perspectives of their CS experiences. It was not to garner a diverse, multicultural sample although that was possible. Also, the Millennial generation is a departure from generations prior concerning spiritual and religious trends. The findings of this study are not generalizable to the generational cohorts before or after this population. These factors, setting and population, limited the generalizability of the study.

Participant expert. The participant in exemplar research is considered a construct expert. However, while the participant is an expert in the developmental process, he or she may not be experts at explaining his or her interpretations of the experiences (King et al., 2013). This

required the researcher to refer to existing literature during analysis to get a full understanding of the construct. Also, there were many years between the participants at the time of the interview and the events they related in this study. The narratives from interviews were viewed as such, as narratives—“they are not (and cannot be) copies of reality” (Magnussen & Merecek, 2015, p. 103). They are representations. Further, the narratives were selective because they were storied with plot that made sense to the individual (Magnussen & Merecek, 2015). Due to this, the principal investigator probed, using follow-up questions, for details and ideas that were left out of the initial responses.

Credibility

The trustworthiness of this study was established in the validity and reliability of the study. External validity is concerned with the generalizability of the study results (Merriam, 2001). In this study, the aim was not to generalize findings to a representative population. It was rather intended to generalize the findings to the theoretical framework. Internal validity or construct validity focuses on how well research findings mirror reality (Merriam, 2001). One way this was addressed was using multiple layers of data analysis, using the process delineated by Moustakas (1994)—epoché, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis. To support this process, the principal investigator used analytic memos and coding. Validity in exemplar research was generally addressed by consulting experts and literature (King et al., 2013). In this study, the participants were the experts. Additionally, expert advisors were involved in the operationalizing the construct under investigation.

Reliability

Reliability has to do with “the extent to which research findings can be replicated” (Merriam, 2001, p. 205). To strengthen the replication capacity for this study, the principal

investigator created protocols for creating the nomination criteria, nominating the individuals for the study, and for interviewing the individuals. The nomination criteria were particularly important because the reliability of a study heavily hinged on how well the construct under investigation was operationalized (Damon & Colby, 2013). Addressing bias was part of the reliability test in a study (Cooper, 2016; Merriam, 2001; Yin, 2003). The principal investigator limited personal bias in the operationalization of the construct by using the expert approach to create the nomination criteria for the sample. The expert approach involved consulting with community experts to create the nomination criteria through a process of three iterations of modifications to the initial nomination criteria. Additionally, the principal investigator disclosed her personal orientation to the research setting and population.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were informed about the “nature of the interview and the purpose of the study and about his or her rights as a research participant” (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015, p. 44). The participants signed consent forms and were aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, to refuse to enter the study, to refuse to answer any questions, to remain confidential, and for his or her contributions to the study to remain confidential (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). During transcription, the principal investigator guarded the participant and all other individuals mentioned in the study by using pseudonyms and by withholding unnecessary details about the participant’s appearance (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). Further, Magnusson and Marecek (2015) recommended that the principal investigator does not store the transcripts in an online cloud. The principal investigator stored all interview transcripts, with all identifiers removed, on a computer that was protected by a password. Once the process of

phenomenological reduction was complete, the electronic transcripts were deleted, and the printed transcripts, with all identifiers removed, were stored in a locked file cabinet.

Additionally, special attention was given to the risk of deductive disclosure. In this study, participants were asked to share key events or experiences that they felt were important to their spiritual formation. Some of the events the participants described were specific enough for a reader to deduce the identity of the participant. To reduce the risk of deductive disclosure, the principal investigator guarded against over specificity in the textural and composite descriptions in the analysis phase of the study. The purpose of the descriptions was to capture the essences of the experiences, so over specificity that could lead to deductive disclosure was not necessary in the writeup. All the research processes and protocols were reviewed by the Institutional Review Board, and there were no changes to the process and protocols during the study.

The principal investigator has no financial interest related to this research, and the research findings were not likely to cause her financial gain. Also, the principal investigator has disclosed her biases that may have emerged in the study. The principal investigator has also explained how she addressed those biases in this study. However, she acknowledged that her cultural sensitivity to Christian communities and Christian education benefits the research because the construct under investigation is context laden.

Chapter 3 Summary

This chapter explained the rationale behind the chosen design and methodologies for this study. The principal investigator explained the research setting and population and my personal orientation to the study considering this element of the study. The sampling method and protocols were explained, and the rationale for the culturally sensitive expert advisors was presented. Semistructured interviews were the primary method for gathering data, and four

phases of analysis were epoché, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis (Moustakas, 1994). To support this process, the principal investigator used analytic memos and coding. Limitations of the design are mostly related to the sample size expert role of the participant. These limitations were addressed in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction to Chapter 4

This study sought to explore how, after graduation, CSEs view their Christian high school lived experiences and how the graduates perceive those experiences to have an influence on them beyond graduation. Prior studies explored the different traits of students who attended Christian high schools; however, what was missing from those studies was a discussion of the lived experiences of the Christian school graduates and a discussion of how they saw the influence of their Christian school on shaping their spiritual lives in and beyond high school. These discussions are important to the overall picture of Christian schools and spiritual formation literature because it helps researchers better understand the intersection of the Christian high school experience and CSF, especially within a church decline narrative that is the context of the transitional years of Millennials from high school to young adulthood (Barry et al., 2015; Chan et al., 2015; Twenge et al., 2016, 2015; Uecker et al., 2016).

This study used phenomenology to explore the lived experiences of Millennial Christian school graduates. Phenomenology focuses on how a person perceives and understands an experience, and it allows the researcher to view common points in a shared experience (Giorgi, 2015; Merriam, 2001). The participants in this study gave accounts of their Christian high school experience and their life after high school through in-depth, semistructured interviews. The principal investigator analyzed these experiences of the individuals and found the common points in their shared experiences to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Christian Spiritual Exemplars (CSEs), who have graduated from Christian high schools, perceive their lived experiences of Christian Spiritual Formation (CSF) in the Christian high school?

2. How do these experiences shape the spiritual lives of the CSEs beyond high school?

Chapter 4 is a presentation of the data, the analysis, and the results of the study. This chapter also gave a description of the sample and the methodology used in this study. The presentation of the study results is addressed one research question at a time. Finally, the chapter ends with a chapter summary.

Description of Sample

The target population for this study was exemplary Christian Millennials who graduated from Christian high schools. This study focused on one specific generational cohort, Millennials born between the years 1977 and 1995. The specific generational cutoff points used in this study were based on Fromm and Garton's (2013) delineation of the Millennial generation born between the years 1977 and 1995. The principal investigator chose this cohort because of the unique spiritual climate in which this generation grew up and transitioned into adulthood—during the church decline narrative that occurred in conjunction with emergence of Millennials into adulthood. Christian education continued in this environment with an evangelistic mission of the spiritual formation of its students (D'Souza, 2000; Lockerbie, 2005; Wright, 2003).

The participants were nominated by expert advisors from one Christian community. The expert advisors generated criteria that were used to nominate CSEs for the study. The nomination criteria had its nexus in a literature-based definition of CSEs, and the advisors added to and modified the list as they saw appropriate. The expert advisors were part of one large Christian church organization in Hawaii. The expert advisors were from one church instead of a variety of churches to acknowledge what King et al. (2013) found—that the context in which nomination criteria is generated is as important as the criteria. Different church cultures may have operationalized spiritual exemplarity differently and may have hindered the process of reaching a

concrete and narrow definition of the construct explored in this study (Bronk et al., 2013). In this study, a concrete and narrow definition of the construct was important to identify a specific sample, even if the results of this study would have a limited generalizability.

Both populations, the expert advisors and the Christian school graduates, varied in gender and race. The gender profile of the expert advisors was split between six women and four men. Of the 10 expert advisors in this study, none self-identified as White or Black; one self-identified Asian; and five self-identified as two or more races; the other four did not answer. One of the 10 expert advisors identified as Hispanic or Latino.

The gender profile for the Christian school graduates were divided equally with four women and four men. Of the eight Christian school graduates, none self-identified as White or Black. Four participants identified as Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. Two participants identified as two-or-more races; and two identified as other—one Puerto Rican and the other Filipino.

Participant Descriptions

In this section is a short description of each study participant. The researcher assured confidentiality for each study participant (see Appendix D), and each participant signed a consent form before the interview. The names of the participants' schools are also given a pseudonym to protect the participant from being linked to the data in this study.

1. Participant 1, Braden graduated from his Christian high school in 2009. He attended a Christian school for all his formal schooling, from elementary through college. After graduation, he attended a Christian college on the continental United States. He is currently involved in ministry to youth and young adults through his local church. He is also employed as a minister at his church.

2. Participant 2, Elise graduated from her Christian high school in 2007 after transferring in from a public school. After graduation, she went into the work force before returning to school at a Christian university on the continental United States. She is currently involved in working with underprivileged youth in the local communities.
3. Participant 3, Blake graduated with honors from his Christian high school in 2005 after transferring in from a public school. After graduation, Blake attended a local public college. Blake did not complete his college degree. He currently works as a motivational speaker to high school students across the island. Blake is also involved in ministry to the youth and young adults at his local church and through a community outreach program. Blake also helps to network schools with community programs in the Christian community and in the public sector.
4. Participant 4, Sandy graduated from her Christian high school in 1999. After high school, she continued her education at a public university on the continental United States. She is currently enrolled at a local university, pursuing an advanced degree while she serves her community through her local church. Sandy spends some of her volunteer time with mentoring young adults and young families.
5. Participant 5, Mario graduated from his Christian school in 2004 after transferring from a public school. Mario entered the workforce outside of his faith community and is involved in community outreaches through his church and an organization that reaches out low-income communities and schools with high enrollment of students who come from those communities. Mario is passionate about mentoring young men from low-income communities.

6. Participant 6, Mandy graduated from her Christian school in 2005. She immediately entered the workforce outside of her faith community after graduating high school while maintaining her community outreach involvement. She is currently pursuing her undergraduate degree and is serving her community through her local church and a nonprofit organization that serves low-income communities.
7. Participant 7, Luke graduated with honors from his Christian high school in 2007. After graduation, he enrolled at the local, public university and worked at a public school. He currently works at his local church, and serves children in the community through the different programs offered by his church.
8. Participant 8, Leslie, graduated with honors from her Christian high school in 1996. She attended a local public university for a year after graduating high school before working full time for her local church where she is a small group leader and mentor to other women in the community.

Three of the eight participants were employed by a Christian church at the time of their interviews. All other participants held employment outside of their church community at the time of their interviews. The principal investigator did not explore the employment histories of the participants. The principal investigator did not explore the economic relationship of the participants and their church communities. However, one of the nomination criteria for the study participants was that they tithe to their church, regularly (see Appendix H). An individual tithes when he or she gives their church a tenth portion of their income.

Research Methodology and Analysis

The objective of this study was to understand how CSEs viewed their high school lived experiences and how they perceived those experiences to have influenced their lives beyond

graduation. To get this understanding, the principal investigator used a qualitative phenomenological approach along with exemplar sampling. Phenomenology helps to uncover the shared structure of an experience from multiple accounts of different individuals (Merriam, 2001; Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas' data analysis processes were used to create a textural and a structural description of the phenomena along with a composite textural-structural description of the essences of the experience.

One of the methodological issues found in previous research hinged on operationalizing terms and measuring spirituality through varied and sometimes overlapping views of the construct (Barry et al., 2015; Francis et al., 2005; Twenge et al., 2015). One of the ways to avoid the challenge of operationalizing terms is to use exemplar sampling strategies—that is consulting with cultural experts and literature (King et al., 2017). Additionally, a method for nomination criteria to be culturally sensitive is to consult with local experts within the culture (King et al., 2013). This means that the nominees were limited to one church culture's delineation of spiritual exemplarity. Exemplar sampling is sampling strategy that the principal investigator used to identify the participants for the study—those who are highly developed in a particular construct, CSF. It was important to get data beyond what was gathered from prior research. To do this, the principal investigator needed the perspectives of those along the highly developed spectrum of CSF to garner information that went beyond the descriptions or experiences of the typical, general Christian school graduate population.

The data collection process began with inviting leaders from a nondenominational church to generate a list of criteria for exemplarity. The initial goal was to have the participation of 12 expert advisors. The 12 expert advisors were referred to the study by the senior pastor of a local church in Hawaii. Each expert advisor received an invitation letter to participate in the study. Of

the 12 invited to participate, 10 signed consent forms and participated in the process of generating a set of nomination criteria (see Appendix H). They expressed their willingness to participate in the study by responding to an email and through signing a consent form at an initial face-to-face meeting (see Appendix B). Additionally, at the first meeting, the expert advisors were notified to expect an email with a survey to gather their basic demographic data including their names, race, and ethnicity.

These expert advisors were asked to nominate at least one CSE for the study. They submitted their nominations through a Qualtrics survey link. The survey asked for the email address of the nominee, phone number, and social media aliases. The principal investigator contacted the nominees with an emailed invitation letter which explained their nomination into the study (see Appendix A). The nominees who expressed interest in the study were then emailed a consent form along with a demographic survey. The principal investigator contacted the nominees to schedule an interview that best suited their schedule if they filled out a consent form and if the principal investigator ascertained that they were an appropriate fit for the study. Before the scheduled interview, the study participant was asked to fill out a timeline of five to 10 high school related events or characteristics they felt had a significant impact on their growth as Christians. These events were discussed during the interviews, and an interview protocol complete with additional prompts was used to guide and supplement the interview (see Appendix G).

Summary of the Findings

A summary of findings includes a textural description, a structural description, and a composition textural-structural description of faith formation in the Christian high school, the essence of the experience. The textural description is a write up of what was experienced. The

structural description is how the phenomenon was experienced. The essence is the textural and structural description as a “unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100).

Textural description. Christian spiritual formation in the Christian high school was experienced as a mosaic of events, opportunities, and perspectives. Christian exemplars in this study entered into their Christian high schools with certain expectations. If the experience fell below their expectations, the study participants took ownership for their growth and learning by accessing the resources available to them. If the experience met their expectations, they acclimated to their environment, and gained influence amongst their peers.

Each study participant experienced an awareness that they were different from their peers. Even while in a Christian school, they recognized that they behaved differently and viewed their school experiences as opportunities or obligations to positively influence others. The self-awareness evolved into influence and leadership amongst their peers.

Study participants were able to tap into the resources provided by their schools and in their faith community to reinforce their convictions; albeit sometimes the study participants were not initially aware of the support that the resources would be, long term. Of the resources provided to the participants during their Christian high school experiences, there were a few that were significant in helping the participants experience God—attending chapel, worshiping God, praying, reading the Bible, and teachers who acted as mentors and modeled Christian virtues to the students. The participants did not report a specific regimen that enabled their moments of experiencing God. The experiences were spontaneous and individual to each person.

The study participants also reported involvement in extracurricular faith communities. The extracurricular faith communities provided mentorships that remained intact after the study

participants graduated from high school. The relationships greater faith communities supported the spiritual growth of the participants when the daily reinforcement of faith development in the classroom was no longer available.

Structural description. Christian spiritual development involved a variegated set of experiences for the CSE. The individual was aware of his or her expectations upon entering their Christian high school and could respond to whether his or her expectations were or were not met. The personal responsibility of the CSE incited awareness of his or her environment along with the resources in the environment. As the CSE engaged with his or resources—either programs or people, the CSE developed along his or her spiritual formation journey. At some point along the trajectory, the CSE had experiences with God that gave him or her a desire to keep moving along their path, even beyond high school. As the CSE moved beyond high school, he or she referred to his or her high school experiences as a standard for other experiences, a standard which drew the CSE back to his or her faith community. As the exemplar continued to glean from his or her resources, he or she developed a symbiotic relationship with his or her community of which the exemplar became an integral part in a giving-receiving relationship with the faith community.

The essence of Christian Spiritual Formation in the Christian high school. The Christian spiritual formation process for the CSE is one that does not end. It was experienced through a variety of events and opportunities that are made available in the Christian high school and was supported by events and opportunities which include but are not limited to attending chapel, worshiping God, praying, reading the Bible, and having teachers and mentors who modeled Christian faith virtues. Additionally, faith communities outside of school supported the faith formation process of the CSE. The experiences that the exemplar had in his or her high school are individual but share the commonality of providing context for the individual to

experience God. The individual was keenly aware of his or her role in high school, and used his or her influence, intentionally. As the student matriculated beyond high school, his or her high school experiences remained a benchmark to which he or she measured other spiritual formation experiences. The faith community connections of the exemplar supported the continued formation that was experienced by the individual while in high school.

Presentation of the Data and Results

The following process was used for the analysis of the interview data. Each interview was transcribed within 24 hours after the interview, and the recordings were destroyed after verifying, through a second reading, that the transcription was successful. The principal researcher also used member checking to verify the content of the transcribed data by emailing the participants copies of the transcripts to verify if the content was transcribed accurately. During member checking, Participant 8, Leslie, clarified statements where she felt she was not clear.

Moustakas' (2014) data analysis processes coupled with Saldaña's (2011, 2013) data analysis procedures framed the analysis for this study. Saldaña (2011, 2013) considers transcription as part of the data analysis process of phenomenological reduction. After transcription, the data went through a process of bracketing and horizonaling until all the relevant and key statements were set apart from the general data and overlapping statements were consolidated or deleted. The bracketing process is part of phenomenological reduction, where only the statements relevant to the research topic and questions are set apart for analysis (Moustakas, 1994). These statements became the horizons or invariant constituents for the study and were coded with in vivo and process coding. The primary investigator bracketed 362 statements that were relevant to the study (Table 2).

Table 2

Study Horizons

Participants	Horizons
Braden	62
Elise	43
Blake	65
Sandy	20
Mario	35
Mandy	39
Luke	57
Leslie	41

After horizonaling and bracketing, the researcher used two coding methods—process and in vivo coding. In vivo and process coding are first cycle coding methods that helped to draw out the themes across the data. The researcher used process coding to catch the action elements in the participants’ experiences and in vivo coding was used to capture the nonaction elements through the language of the participants (Saldaña, 2011). In vivo coding uses words directly from the participants. Any word or phrase that seemed poignant was used as an in vivo code. The in vivo codes served as checks to verify if the principal investigator captured the meanings in the overall themes (Saldaña, 2013).

The data were also coded with process codes. Process codes captured the action present in the data and helped the primary investigator see how different events “emerge, change, occur in particular sequences, or become strategically implemented through time” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 96). The first cycle of coding yielded 149 codes of which 61 were individual in vivo codes and a

total of 716 coded segments. The primary investigator used focused coding, a second cycle coding method, to categorize the data and move the codes into themes.

The principal investigator read through the coded excerpts and placed the categories and subcategories into a hierarchical diagram to get “a handle on them” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 216; Figure 2). The principal investigator combed through the horizons and constructed new codes based on the “comparability and transferability” of the process codes and in vivo codes. The themes emerged from the smaller groupings into the overall themes. The themes overlap and are not mutually exclusive. Once the themes were identified, the primary investigator checked across all eight participant transcripts to see if the experience was shared across all participants’ transcripts (Table 3).



Figure 2. Themes and subthemes for the experience of CSF in the Christian high school.

Table 3

Codes in Document

Themes	Participants							
	Braden	Elise	Blake	Sandy	Mario	Mandy	Luke	Leslie
Standing up for convictions	38	9	15	3	17	18	14	7
Having perspective	17	3	28	1	5	11	8	1
Being mentored	8	12	30	1	4	18	21	5
Taking ownership	18	6	6	0	3	1	8	4
Having a lifestyle of faith	7	8	5	1	13	12	6	7
Being part of a greater faith community	1	4	1	4	6	4	6	7
Engaging in the culture	2	17	6	10	5	16	8	2
Having influence	12	11	13	0	6	3	3	1
Using high school as a benchmark	12	2	2	3	1	1	2	12
Being self aware	13	13	28	2	8	5	9	6
Experiencing God	15	11	5	9	6	8	3	3

Participant Four, Sandy, did not have any segments coded for the themes “Taking Ownership” or “Having Influence”; however, the wealth of the data came primarily from six of the eight interviews, as displayed in Table 2. The primary investigator did not consider frequency of codes across the data as indicators for themes as Saldaña (2013) cautions: “Mere numeric frequency of a code or category from data analysis and memos is not necessarily a reliable and valid indicator or a central/core category” (p. 227).

Memo writing was also used throughout the data analysis process. According to Saldaña (2011, 2013), memo writing and coding are complementary processes as they help the researcher make connections between the data. For the researcher, memo writing enhanced the reflective process—imaginative variation, that Moustakas (1994) deemed necessary in data analysis. The researcher used memo writing while transcribing and reading through the data. Memo writing helped the principal investigator identify the themes and subthemes that emerged from data (see Figure 2).

The participant narratives provided the principal investigator with the horizons used for the analysis of participants’ experiences with CSF in their Christian high school and beyond. The horizons in the data were organized into 11 themes, each a composite of subthemes that were used to uncover the “nature and meaning” of the participants’ experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Each theme is discussed as a composite of the subthemes from which each theme emerged.

Question 1. How do Christian Spiritual Exemplars (CSEs), who have graduated from Christian high schools, perceive their lived experiences of Christian Spiritual Formation (CSF) in the Christian high school?

Key theme: *Standing up for convictions.* The study participants described experiences of when they had opportunities to stand up for their Christian faith convictions while in their

Christian high schools. This theme was coded with less frequency in the transcripts from the female participants than the male participants. The primary investigator did not focus on code frequency when constructing the code categories as cautioned by Saldaña because she did not employ magnitude coding (2013). Rather the principal investigator chose to focus on the quality or depth of discussion of the statements (Saldaña, 2013).

However, the difference of skew between the female and male participants in this theme prompted the primary investigator to explore the skew. Upon rereading the coded texts, the primary investigator noted that the female participants spoke less frequently about situations in high school where they experienced and responded to pressure. The male participants spoke with more frequency in the subtheme “dealing with pressure.” It was unclear to the primary investigator if the difference of skew in the subtheme was a result of the participants’ awareness of moments of pressure or a result of the female participants not considering those moments to be significant.

The moments to stand up of their convictions came in spontaneous moments when what they believed was directly or indirectly challenged by the school or their peers. Leslie described one such moment in her biology class: “I know I did some dumb stuff in school, like in my biology class, sit on the counter and tell my teacher and everybody in class, I didn’t come from monkeys. They were just talking about evolution.”

Blake shared an incident when he confronted his peers about something peripheral to doctrine—their disrespectful behavior and what he believed would be the eventual result of that behavior: “There were several times when people would walk out of Mr. Luis’s class, and I would catch them during lunch, and tell them, ‘you guys may have a car, and you may have this, but one day you’ll have nothing.’” Braden described what it was like to stand up for his

convictions with his peers. “When I would defend what the Word said, it didn’t feel like I won the argument, or I didn’t connect with my friends because those who I was arguing with or defending my faith to were already Christians,” yet Braden would still share his convictions because he believed the result was “it left a seed in their heart.”

Similarly, Luke described what it was like to live out his convictions amongst his peers:

I remember at one point, um, I had this reputation of like goody-two-shoes, or I don't know what you call it, but basically it was that. So, that drove me crazy cause I felt like it was, uh, I don't know, you know, like you're isolated. You're behaving so good to where like the teachers are like, “that’s awesome.” Your parents are like, “that’s great,” but as far as like your peers, it’s like not that great, you know? So, it didn’t make me popular, but I think looking back on it now, I’m grateful it happened.

Study participants described moments like these where they experienced opportunities to stand up for their convictions. Those times were significant for the participants even in a Christian school environment because as Luke explained, “even though you went to a Christian school, in a Christian private school, there were people not living a Christian life.” Mario shared Luke’s sentiments: “in my mind, I was thinking that I was going to go to this Christian school and all my problems will be solved, but I realized that in a private Christian school, sometimes the struggle is even more.”

The study participants had the opportunity to stand up for their convictions. This was important for the participants as they recognized the default was what Elise called “adapting to the negativity.” Participants used these opportunities to sometimes literally set themselves apart from those who did not share their convictions.

Key theme: *Having perspective.* Participants spoke of moments of having perspective. This theme highlights the participants' experiences in their Christian school in light of their experiences outside of Christian school or with people outside of their Christian school. Mario shared that his experiences prior to being in his Christian school was that at his public school, "Everybody was for their own, for themselves;" this gave him an appreciation for his Christian school experience calling it a "life changer."

The appreciation for the Christian school experience was also expressed by Mandy whose home life was very different from what was typical at her Christian school: "For me, growing up you're seen and not heard" which was different from her experience at school where she was encouraged to "take on roles" that she did not think she was capable of. Luke shared how he learned that what was normal to him in his Christian high school experience was not normal to others:

So I dated. My parents were OK with us having girlfriends and stuff, so I remember in high school where I dated a girl who went to a public school. And, um, like the stories I would share about my friends and stories that she would share about her friends were like polar opposite. So, like if I shared, "oh, there was a fight at school today," like for me that's a huge deal, but for her, she'd be like, "oh, there was like 10 at my school today." So it was like, what the heck? Uh, I know in my school, like people smoked weed, or swore, or drank, or whatever. That that was like, "oh, that was hardcore." But I guess what was considered hardcore where I went to school was like normal for other schools.

Elise's school would sometimes bring guest speakers and pastors in to speak to the students. Elise described that her perspective shifted when she listened to a guest speaker: "[The speaker] was younger than me. She's still younger than me. So when she came, I remember that

kind of opened a lot of students' eyes. Like, you know, this young girl is able to preach such a powerful message.” Seeing and hearing the speaker who was so young and influential inspired Elise to pursue her faith more seriously.

Both Mandy and Sandy shared that tragedies helped them to see that value of their faith pursuit. Mandy shared that a death in her family compelled her to reach out to her teachers for prayer. She was inspired by their sensitivity to the “Holy Ghost” and their willingness to pray for her. For Mandy, that gave her an appreciation for her faith and the faith of those around her.

Experiences like these gave the participants perspective on how to navigate their Christian high school experiences and faith formation. They had an appreciation for the environment and the people in their schools. This impacted how they responded to the growth opportunities they were given in their schools.

Key theme: Being mentored. The participants described being mentored in their Christian school experience. This theme is centered around the mentorship relationships the participants had in their Christian schools. This shared experience was key in the faith development of the study participants. Braden shared with conviction that “Everybody needs a mentor in their life, spiritually. Everybody needs a leader. Everybody does. That’s what I firmly believe.” This came from his experience with a mentor at his school:

So when I was in high school, maybe like my last, one of my second junior year or senior year, I had somebody reach out to me. I started going to a discipleship group, and I connected myself with the leader of the group. He was like a spiritual mentor. Um, so I was going to that group and then I was growing, but then I kind of had stopped growing. Then I started going to someone else’s discipleship group. The leader was a pastor. That relationship for me with this leader really helped shape and form my life, seriously. But it

was more towards the ending of high school. So the fruit of that relationship was still, um, it was still young.

Leslie had a similar connection with her ninth grade teacher. Her experience with her teachers highlights the shared experience with mentors amongst the participants. Leslie described it this way:

My ninth grade teacher, she totally was one of the biggest motivators to be a light where I was because she was a Christian. She was a strong Christian. You know, in school you basically have to just lay all the options out before the kids, and they have to choose their own. But she knew that I was a Christian. She encouraged me to not try to hide it, in a sense. So we had like different projects, you know, like goal projects or things like that. And you had to set goals for whatever you had to do. My goal was reading the Bible every day or different things like that, and she encouraged me to do those kinds of things, you know, and not be ashamed of my beliefs.

This same teacher was one of Leslie's favorite teachers because she encouraged Leslie to stand up for what she believed in. Leslie was further inspired by this same teacher to pursue her field of study in college.

Uncle Ryan was Blake's mentor. Blake referred to Uncle Ryan, a staff member at his Christian high school, as a father figure. Their relationship was such that if Blake was having difficulties in school, or if he was displaying behavioral problems, the staff would call Ryan to talk to speak to Blake. Blake shared:

I'm very selective who speaks into my life because there are people who either they want to prove a point using you, or they want to take something away from you, and then at the same time there's just people like Uncle Ryan that just want the best for you.

Mandy also looked to a teacher as an example of one whose example she followed. She “looked up to” a teacher who “was always kind and never let his standards fall.” Other times, the participants looked to other students as examples for their faith formation. Luke looked to a student who was older than him:

She was a year above me. So, I grew up with Karen, uh, like we went to church together and, you know, went hiking together and all that stuff with friends and whatnot. So, I knew her in one aspect. And then I remember my junior year, our teacher asked Karen to come speak to our Bible class. And I remember she shared how important her walk with God was there to the point where like, she cut friendships off. She would eat lunch in the shower. That was her quiet place to be away from like everybody. Cause even though you went to a Christian school, you know, in a Christian private school, there was like people who are not living that Christian life. So, there was like a lot of swearing, a lot of things that shouldn't have been happening. But for Kristen, she was sharing that like, because her walk with walk with God was that important, she wanted to take it that serious. So, for me, hearing that my junior year, that really stuck with me my senior year. And um, yeah, now Kristin is a pastor in California. Um, but yeah, that definitely I think influenced me a lot.

Experiences like these are the core of this theme. Mentorship directly and indirectly was an experience that was shared amongst all the participants. Sometimes the mentorship relationship was an official arrangement like Braden's, and other times people mentored the participants, indirectly through their actions.

Key theme: Taking ownership. This theme emerged from the invariant constituents that spoke of the participants' experiences with taking responsibility for themselves in their faith

growth and in their personal growth. It also includes the horizons that spoke of the participants' pursuit of help when they needed it. For example, Luke shared that when one of his teachers was not well-versed in the subject he was teaching; Luke taught the subject to himself in order to pass. It is moments like these that characterize this theme.

Mario had to take ownership of his associations. Mario shared how he had to make personal choices about who affected his atmosphere to stay on the right track:

For me personally, I had my own struggles, but I knew how to make a decision, with the right atmosphere to hang around. I didn't feel any peer pressure. It was more like my decision to, okay, now that I'm in this school, what am I going to do? Either I can complain, and I can nitpick all these negative things that I see, or I can choose to take advantage of my opportunity. That's what I did.

Mario did not place the responsibility of his success on a teacher, staff member, or his peers. Rather he took ownership of his ability to thrive in his school.

The understanding that other people were investing into their education also compelled the participants to take ownership of their growth. Blake shared that his goal was to make those who invested in him proud. Luke's parents took the perspective that since they were paying for their son's education, he should do well in school, so Luke made the most of the opportunities he received at the school. Elise's experiences was similar to Luke's. Elise explained,

I'd see my parents struggling financially, so I wasn't going to waste their time. I'd see the sacrifices that they put in for me to be at that school, to put my older siblings through that school and me as well. I was pretty much involved in a lot of it. My mom, we would talk about stuff. I knew the hardships and the struggles, so even more so, I wanted to make sure that I wasn't wasting time, money, effort, any of that.

Also prominent in this theme was the participants' penchant to take ownership of their shortcomings. Braden cited his own lack of application of what he learned for why he faced some struggles in his faith. He shared

I did feel as though I didn't apply enough of that in my life. So, I knew a lot of information, but a lot of that information, you could say I didn't believe it cause I wasn't doing it. It wasn't doing a lot of it if that makes sense. A lot of what I knew, I wasn't doing.

Not faulting other people for moments of stagnation or growth was shared amongst the participants. When the participants noticed they needed help in an area, they practiced autonomy and sought out help or a solution. This theme focused on the responsibility of the participant.

Key theme: *Having a lifestyle of faith.* This theme is composed of moments where the participants engaged in faith disciplines and practices that they understood in retrospect to have helped them develop their faith. These practices and disciplines include things like prioritizing prayer, applying their faith, and serving God. Braden captured the nexus of this theme in his statement about how he viewed school while he was attending his Christian high school:

I'm not just here at a school. I really am here at a Christian school not only to learn, but ultimately, we're here to serve God be Christian. So, that definitely was the priority. And you could tell in our Christian upbringing in high school it was that Christianity was the priority. Learning was also a priority, but it was secondary of the ultimate value of everything we were doing, that is the word of life.

Leslie took opportunities to share her faith with her peers who did not have a relationship with God the way she did. Blake, Mandy, Mario, and Leslie lived out their faith in their service to the school. Mario spoke of his involvement in the work study program. He understands that he

was technically working for compensation given to him in the form of tuition waivers and discounts; however, he commented that “it really taught me about giving back and using that as an opportunity to serve.” This was not an isolated experience for Mario.

Luke talked about a time when he had to live out his faith in humbling himself to his teacher:

It was like, uh, English test or something and, we were passing around a cheat sheet. It had like literally every answer on top of it, but it was like printed out, really small all on one sheet that fit into your hand, after that person gave it to me, I gave it to somebody else. So, like everybody was acing this test. Then two people got caught with it. I remember the teacher made a deal with them and was like, “Okay, if you can tell me who else cheated? I’ll let you retake the test. I’ll give them zeros.” So, they dropped my name. And I remember the teacher put it on the online gradebook, and I got a zero, and my mom texted me like, “What the heck? You got a zero?” So, because I got a zero, [my mom] texts me, and I told her what happened, and she was like, I want you to go to that teacher and apologize. So, I went to her and apologized, and I remember her telling me, “You know, out of everybody, I think for you, I was shocked.” I think for me that cut because that was like, you know, like if you portray an image, and then not live up to it, you know, like a double life, whatever.”

That experience was two-fold for Luke. It gave him the opportunity to live out his faith in humbling himself to a teacher, and it motivated him to be consistent in living with integrity.

In this theme, the participants shared how they made Bible reading, devotional times, prayer times, and serving as part of their daily routine. This theme also included instances where

the participants had to make practical application of what they learned in their times of learning about their faith. This theme focused on the lived experience of faith.

Key theme: Being part of a greater faith community. This theme was constituted of moments and insights shared by the participants about their involvement in the greater school community. This included, but was not limited to, instances where participants attended schools that were affiliated with a church. The study participants were involved in those church communities in the church communities. This also included instances where participants described relationships with people within their perceived community of faith outside of school, this included family relationships.

Leslie's experience with her school's support of her extracurricular faith-based activities exemplifies the impact of being part of a greater faith community. Leslie was less involved with her school's faith-based programming and more involved in the outreach activities made available at her church. When she had opportunities to participate in mission trips to other nations with her youth group, her school's administrators exempted her from participating in required activities. During those activities with her youth group, she built relationships with people at her church. Leslie reflected on her thoughts about the importance of faith outside of school for her children: "We want them to go someplace that will reinforce the values and not bring questioning to him," yet she emphasizes that it "It's not the school's job to teach the truth."

Family was also mentioned in this theme. Leslie credited much of her faith development to her mother. Sandy described her belief in God as matter-of-fact for much of her life because she was raised that way. She shared, "I mean I grew up in a Christian home and we went to church my whole life pretty much. So, I knew what it meant to be a Christian." Luke shared a similar experience.

Luke felt the impact of being part of his school's greater faith community because it added a layer of accountability to his growth process. He shared that because his parents and teachers attended the same church, he did not get away with questionable behavior:

Because our teachers went to church with our parents, it wasn't like normal conversations of like, "Hey, how's the weather?" It was always like, "How's my kid doing in your class? Oh, they're doing what? Oh, I'll get on that." Or because our parents had relationships with our teachers, I guess that made that connection of if there's a problem with grades or whatever, there was always that open line of communication.

For Luke, at that time, he did appreciate that benefit of being part of the school's greater faith community, but in hindsight, he is thankful for it. Mario shared experiences similar to Luke but with adults who led a ministry group he was a part of. He recounted it this way:

I think it was really good to have a support group outside of the school. To this day they're still part of my life. Just on days I would complain, get frustrated, and there wasn't a lot of days like that, just like a few. Once in a while I'd get frustrated with this life, but to have someone to continue to remind me of who I am and where I am, and the importance of finishing strong really helped me out. Knowing that not only do I have support in school, but I also had support after school.

The study participants shared the experience of being part of a faith community beyond their schools. These faith communities and schools acted as partners in providing scaffolding for the values and virtues the participants learned in school. The faith community outside of school was present in faith development in the study participants.

Key theme: Engaging in the culture. Participants in this study discussed their involvement in culture of their schools. It is similar to "Having a Lifestyle of Faith" and "Being

Part of a Greater Faith Community” but with the key difference being the setting—specifically the school. The participants’ schools had specific programs like chapel that helped to create a unique Christian culture which varied slightly from participant to participant; however, the deliberate engagement in the culture was shared across all participants.

All participants reported having engaged in discussions about their faith with their peers and teachers. These discussions were the conduit for the communication of the culture. What people would say and how they would communicate what they said was notable for the participants as they engaged in faith-based discourse. Blake shared this insight:

I mean it was a typical school as far as the classroom setting. But, it was different because the culture was different. You know, it’s a Christian school, but you’re not allowed to swear. But, just the language, the verbiage—I mean I used to always tell people, “Oh homeboy, is sick.” But, they’d say, “Oh no, he is receiving his healing.” I used to, they tell people, “Oh you get headache? Take Tylenol.” But, we would instead say, “In the name of Jesus.”

This concept of what Mario called “speaking life” and what Mandy referred to as having people “speaking into my life” created an atmosphere that gave the participants access into the culture where they could actively engage with their peers.

Another area where participants engaged with the culture of their schools was in the area of forgiveness or in extending grace to others. This element empowered the study participants to get beyond failures and help others get beyond failures in their pursuit of God. Braden shared his insight on his experiences with forgiveness when making bad choices in school:

That was where I grew a lot in high school because I made a lot of bad decisions. Um, pre like eighth grade too, right before high school I made a lot of, well not a lot, some

decisions that were just really bad and really not good and very un-Christian, pretty sinful. But in those times, I came out of making a bad decision. I got consequences for some of those bad decisions that were not biblical. You know, I shouldn't have done them. Some were against the law. After those things, what helped me, what helped my faith kind of get sharpened was how I came out of those things. I was normally loved by my peers, my friends. I was loved by my parents. I was forgiven, which helped. I learned a lot from those experiences because of what I knew in the word, God loves me. So, after I had this horrible decision, I know God loves me, so I'm just going to repent, and you know that God's going to forgive me. So, that really helped me like tremendously, knowing that God loves me and forgives me. That was something that really challenged my faith, sharpened my faith when I made bad decisions. When I came out of it, I went back to what the word said, went back to what I was taught essentially.

Mandy talked about an experience in chapel where she, along with her peers, engaged in extending forgiveness to others:

Pastor Destiny brought up all the staff to the front of the stage and um, she kind of, it was like talking about forgiveness but also like honoring authority. So, she brought up all the teachers to the front of the stage and said, "You know, if you have anything against these, any anybody in the front, I want you to go up to them and hug them and let go and forgive." And I remember there was just like a kind of like a healing service between students and teachers. Teachers that maybe students thought were like, um, I don't know, strict or whatever. Like it just changed the atmosphere the next time in class. Those two moments just kind of like opened my eyes. I think it was growing me as a person and also my love walk with people. It helped me to forgive.

Forgiveness and grace were lived virtues that were core values in the culture of the participants' schools. These values gave the participants access to participate in the culture of the school, adapting and connecting to the culture of the school.

Every study participant engaged in the culture of their school. This theme highlighted the significance of each participant having access to the culture. The theme also highlighted the participants' ability to adapt the culture in their language and actions in order to benefit from what was available to them.

Key theme: Having influence. Participants in this study described some point in their Christian high school experience, that they understood their influence. The study participants moved beyond understanding they had influence and used their influence to affect other students. This theme centers around the participants being leaders—leading themselves and others.

Luke felt marginal when he first went to his Christian high school. He explained that his school “majored on sports,” and since he was not athletic, though he tried out for the athletic teams. With the help of his mentors in school, he discovered his gifts and talents. His experience with art gave him confidence to pave his own way in school instead of trying to follow the steps of this older, athletic brother. By the time Luke was a junior in high school, he took on a leadership role, being an example to others:

I think I was more mindful as to who I hung out with. I was more mindful as to the way I carried myself, because the following year I was a senior, so I know that a lot of underclassmen, I guess looked up to the senior class, and because my brother was younger than me, I ended up hanging out with a lot of his friends, too. I think at that age, you know, that whole desire to fit in and be cool or whatever is very prevalent. So for me, I guess I was more aware of the influence, I was on them. So, I made sure I wouldn't

swear. If they did, I would correct them or just even like I don't know, I guess be like a big brother kind of thing.

Other study participants had similar experiences. Blake was also influential in his school; however, he did not grow into his influence as Luke did. Blake was brought into the school because he was perceived by administration to be a leader. Blake was volunteering at his church when the principal of the school saw Blake:

I'll tell you what happened is one of the guys came with a boombox on the shoulder. We were serving at the Ocean Garage. It's like yesterday. And, he was playing a certain secular music. Me being afraid of the person in charge, I said, "Hey, you can't play that music over here. Turn it off." I turned his radio off; I put it to the side. From what the head of school saw, from far, he saw a little boy just tell an older guy what to do. That's leadership. So being that the school never had a scholarship program, they had to show that it could turn a person's life around, and Mr. Tamura wanted Blake to be an example. They asked me if I wanted to go to a private school.

Blake shared that his school's head administrator singled him out as a prospect for the school because of what he perceived as the ability to lead. By the time Blake graduated from his Christian high school, he received an award that was given to him and one other student for being a representation of the values and mission the school. It was the first award of its kind to ever be given in his school.

Before enrolling in her Christian high school, Mandy anticipated that the environment would have a positive impact on her. While she was positively impacted by some facets of her school, Mandy understood soon after enrolling in her Christian school that she would have influence on her peers:

I remember somebody had told me like, “You know, you may think like you’re coming in here, and you’re going to learn. Yes, you’re going to learn a lot, but people are gonna learn a lot from you.” And so just realizing that I had a part to play in like helping my classmates or my peers to like have that respect or just be open and like participate in a lot of things to kind of just be role model, you know, to show what God would expect from us and just be the light even in a Christian school.

Mandy took those words to heart and participated in school activities with the understanding that she was being watched by her peers. Even as a new student in her school, she was a leader. It required of her humility and willingness to be an example, and she received positive feedback from her peers. Mandy described it this way:

I don’t know, just they really taught me to be humble, and then be willing to go to the next level and just be a leader. I kind of felt like, oh, it’s not my place cause I’m new here, you know? But, just with different people like talking to me and like saying, “You’ve helped me be stronger in my walk with God.” I realized later that I was put there for a reason to just, I don’t know, to help lead my peers in their walk with God. It was very interesting, my first couple of weeks of being in a Christian school.

The study participants knew they had influence and chose to use their influence. They were aware of having an audience, and they knew they could affect other’s behaviors with theirs. This theme focused on the study participants having the awareness of their leadership potential. The next theme is similar to this theme with a small but significant difference.

Key theme: Being self-aware. This theme centered around the study participants’ understanding that they were different from their peers. In the previous theme focused on the

leadership of the participants. This theme focused on the moments the participants understood that they were different.

Elise explained that she always wanted to be a good kid, even before she enrolled in her Christian school. When she started attending her Christian high school, she realized that she was different from her peers. They did not share the same desire she had to be a “really good kid.” She gave her perspective:

Personally, I’ve always been like this. I wanted to be a really good kid. I wanted to be a church kid . . . I thought it was kind of funny that some students came to our school from public schools as well, but their mindsets were a little different from mine. I think for them it was kind of like they were forced [to attend the school]; their parents got them in.

But for me, it was like I was privileged to.

Similarly, Blake also understood that he was not a typical student. Blake shared, “I was doing what a minimal percentage of people were doing, meaning a lot of people came to school and did the typical, playing sports” referring to his volunteering schedule in school after all his athletic obligations.

Mandy described a moment when she realized that what made her different was the opportunities she had available to her. Before this moment of realization, she felt she took for granted what she had at her school. Mandy was impacted when she saw that other students her age yearned for what she had:

I just remember like it was a gym full of high school students and like just remembering their cries after . . . I think the pastor or somebody had given an altar call, um, and asked if anyone wanted that relationship with Jesus Christ. And, hearing the cries in the gym of all these students my age who were hungry or who desired God. . . . That just like made

me so much more grateful for like being able to go to a Christian school, um, and seeing these kids outside, that were hungry and that, you know, like, just being able to be there to witness it and also just to be in that space . . . I probably cried too that day, but that being the opportunity to be there, to be a part of that outreach, in any outreach, has helped me become stronger in my faith, knowing that other people are so hungry for what I have. That experience impacted Mandy. She knew she had influence prior to this experience, but after this experience Mandy had an appreciation for what she had that set her apart from her peers, and she recognized the difference. She explained that kids in her school were “so comfortable with what they already had.” Yet, when Mandy went to that outreach and many others, she developed an appreciation for her school that her peers did not have.

Luke learned early in his high school career that he was different from his peers. This was credited to the accountability system he had because his family attended the church that was affiliated with the school. His parents and teachers would have conversations about Luke’s progress in school, and this kept Luke from veering far from the expectations set by his parents, teachers, and overall faith community. However, Luke became more aware of how separate he was from his peers when he tried to blend in. Luke reflected on that moment:

I had friends in high school that, um, although I wouldn’t do the things that they would do, I still associated with them. So as far as like, uh, cutting class or ditching school or whatever, like I would do that. But as far as like talking back to teachers and whatnot, like for me, I kind of had like boundaries, like, oh, I would never do that, you know. And, I remember one time my best friend got into a full on like heated argument with one of the teachers. And, I guess my teacher felt like I was guilty by association. So, I like I didn’t stop him. I just kind of like laughed, and I guess that encouraged it. So, afterwards

they pulled me to the side, and I remember them telling me, “You know, I know your parents wouldn’t be okay with you hanging out with that person.” And, um, they gave me like the Jedi mind trick, “Show me who your friends are, and I’ll show you who you are.” So that was like a big, uh, eye-opener for me.

Seeing that people had different expectations of him helped Luke be aware that he was different from his peers.

The study participants had the common experience of being self-aware. While they were amongst their peers and shared the same environment, they had moments where they understood that they were different. For some participants, not only did they know they were different, they understood that they were expected to be different. Like Blake, some study participants responded to the expectations by striving to make people proud. Different participants responded to those expectations differently.

Key theme: Experiencing God. This is the last theme that emerged from the data in relation to Question 1. Study participants all described moments of experiencing God. This is different from “Having a Lifestyle of Faith” that included living out the virtues they learned. It is different from “Engaging in the Culture” because it is related to school programs or intentional, organization-incited experiences. These are personal experiences. This theme centers on moments when the participants were consciously aware of God being present or what Sandy referred to as “the Spirit speaking to me” or “where God would become very real to me” and what Mario called “being in that presence.”

All the participants had these experiences; however, not all the participants were able to articulate in concrete terms what the experience was. Mandy described it as “I encountered God’s love.” Braden reflected on a context where he experienced God:

Honestly, in class we would take breaks from things. Like when we would get overwhelmed, let's say a teacher would get overwhelmed, and she just gave us a huge project to do for science or whatever and we're all alone. They just stopped and they would just pray. And then like sometimes, we would just worship, and we would do that. Mario shared that the atmosphere in chapel and worship would be the place where he would experience God:

Just all around, just creating that atmosphere where you can worship God in school. . . .

Just the atmosphere, Chapel, and we had Chapel on Wednesdays. I looked forward to it.

It was always the opportunity to be in the presence of God when you would have like praise and worship.

Mandy shared that in one of her chapel experiences, she responded to an altar call where she went up to the front of the auditorium and she had the experience of "being loved-on by God." Like other study participants, Mandy had a difficult time putting the experience into words: "It was like, I don't know. I can't explain. I just remember that moment. It was so freeing . . . I remember everybody went back [to class] and was just kind of quiet and till bathing in that love of God." Mandy also had personal experiences with God during her homeroom, Bible class where she would go to her "secret place" with God.

All study participants participated in their school's chapel services. Additionally, all participants participated in their required Bible reading and Bible and religion classes. However, at some point while participating in a school organized activity, they each experienced God. That experience is central to this theme.

Question 2. How do these experiences shape the spiritual lives of CSEs beyond high school?

The CSEs identified a variety of experiences that they felt directly impacted their spiritual formation in high school and beyond. The two themes that emerged from horizons related to this question were “Using High School as a Benchmark” and “Being Part of a Greater Faith Community.” The latter theme was identified in both questions one and two.

Key theme: Using high school as a benchmark. Although all the study participants had different paths from one another, something common was that they all reported using their high school experience as a point of reference for experiences after high school. After the participants spoke about their high school experiences, they were prompted to speak about their lives after high school. The study participants mentioned their high school experience having a role in their perspectives in their personal, academic, and professional lives beyond high school.

Leslie is a mother of a toddler. At the time of the interview Leslie and her husband were looking for schools for their son. In their search for their son’s school, she explained that her high school experience impacted how they began the search for his school: “I cried when my aunty gave me a backpack from my alma mater for him. I was like, ‘Oh my gosh!’ And every time, you know, we drive by the school and say, ‘That’s where you’re going to go.’” Leslie wants her son to have the same values instilled in him that were instilled in her. Additionally, she wants the school to reinforce what she and her husband believe: “I cannot allow the school he attends to just fill him with knowledge ‘unchecked’ by my beliefs, morals, and standards.”

Leslie also uses her high school experience as a benchmark because she believes what she did in high school helps her now in her professional life:

I think that formal education and academics that I got and that drive that I had helps me now because if I didn't have the drive that I had when I was in school, then I wouldn't be driven to figure things out now.

Leslie attended college after high school, but she left school to pursue a career with her church. She initially planned on attending a college in California; however, she enrolled in a local university where she did not experience the sense of calling and purpose that she felt necessary. Her teachers did not understand nor support some of the decisions she made with dropping out of classes, but Leslie was familiar with spiritual “shifts” even when her college instructors were not. Leslie understood that her purpose was becoming clear when her figurative “antennae shifted” and prompted her to drop some of her classes.

Leslie noted that much of what she learned spiritually and academically in high school helps her do her job. She shared in the interview that she has the practical writing skills to do her job, but she also understands how to ask God for help. Her college experience did not involve faculty or mentor who encouraged her to be sensitive to spiritual leadings. Her college experience was solely cerebral.

Braden enrolled in a Christian university after high school. During that time in his Christian university, Braden looked to his high school experience to process different challenges to his faith and overall spiritual growth:

I was thankful for having a Christian upbringing and learning everything that I did about the Bible, but also about having a real relationship with God because when I got into the real world, when push came to shove, if I didn’t know the things that I did, I would have let go of my Christianity much sooner. . . . So, the Christian upbringing had a direct impact on me getting through that, that time in college, which for me was a life or death situation. I actually ended up having suicidal thoughts. I was like, I just, I was so lost. I was so like I don’t know what to do anymore. So I would have never got through that time if it wasn’t for the deeply rooted convictions that were instilled. I wouldn’t be here

today. So that, that was one of the big things that happened and it was like a time of testing, so to speak, and it was directly correlated to everything that I learned.

Braden continued to reflect on the environment in his college in light of his high school: “So, in high school, I feel like I had a Christian education. I feel like I got a Christian education whereas in college, I felt like the Christian education was good, but I felt like there were things missing, so to speak.” Braden’s faith experiences in college experience were inferior to his experiences in high school. He described a notable difference:

We believed in the Holy Spirit and the power of God and letting the Holy Spirit use you.

In my high school, it was more about actually living a life for God instead of just talking about all the things you know. High school seemed more authentic to me.

Similarly, Elise enrolled in a Christian University after she graduated from high school, and she used the Christian education at her high school as a standard to measure her college. Elise called her college experience an extension of the experience she had in high school, calling it the “5.0” version of her high school, “the good, the bad, and the ugly.” Her high school experience was more of a benchmark for her professional life.

Elise was given opportunities in her high school that set a standard for the way she interacts with her coworkers. In high school she took on the perspective that “Relationship is more important than actual school or a job” and the work she does professionally as an office manager is measured against the experiences she had in her work study roles in high school. She recounted, “There’s so much I can say about that. I mean today, I’m an office manager. So, a lot of what I’ve learned is what I am applying now.”

Sandy attended a non-Christian college after high school. Sandy's experiences in college were a stark comparison to what she experienced in high school, calling herself "sheltered" in high school. She reflected:

I didn't see a lot of other lifestyles, and then going to college, people were definitely very open. Like if they don't believe that, they don't believe in God are atheists or they believe in spiritual, you know, they just would be very open about what they believed, um, which I guess I hadn't really had a lot of experience with.

Sandy explained that her faith was tested at that time and caused her to do "a little bit of searching" because she still believed in God in college, but "it wasn't as important" as compared to when she was in high school. It was common in her college experience for Sandy to be around people lived lifestyles that were different from what she was exposed to in high school. Her peers were open about doubts or questions they had about spirituality in ways that prompted Sandy to also explore and test her beliefs. Yet, Sandy noted that "Having that faith throughout high school definitely set me up to have a strong faith for the rest of my life." Similarly, Luke noticed that high school was sheltered time for him.

Luke realized when he was in college, there was no one to keep him "in check" like in high school. College for him did not involve the parent supports and teacher supports that he was accustomed to, so college was involved a lot of "figuring it out" himself. Luke reflected on a time in college when he learned that he realized the number of students in his graduating class was significantly different from his peers who had graduating classes of over 700 people. Luke understood that the friendships and comradery Luke developed in his Christian school was unlikely in his college experience.

Luke noted that his high school experience was a point of comparison for his career after graduation. Luke took a position at a public school where he was on the other side of the student-teacher dynamic:

I was on the other side of the whole student teacher thing. So, I remember I had parents that would question the teacher on like, “Well, why aren’t you doing a good job?” Like it was never the kids’ failures. But for me in my Christian high school, it was never the teacher’s fault, it was always our fault.

Luke had to adjust his perspective because in his high school experience, the student was expected to take responsibility for their learning.

Mandy remembers her high school experience as one full of opportunities. Some of the opportunities were given to her, but she was also encouraged to create her own opportunities by trusting God and using her faith to have experiences she wanted. She was encouraged by her teachers and other adults in her school to not settle for the minimum. When Mandy graduated from high school and entered the workforce, she sought out a program to help her find employment, and she was told that she could only qualify for entry-level positions at fast-food restaurants. She knew that God’s best for her was not in any of the jobs the program was suggesting, so she went against the expectation of workforce program and used her faith. She describes it this way:

And so I went out and I started looking for my own opportunities and started working at a health center. I just remember giving a call to this program that I was going to. I was like, you know, I think I’m good. I’m not going to need your services anymore. But you know, I just took on that role. I started working, and it wasn't until maybe five years ago that I actually went back to school. I’m still working on my degree.

Mandy recognized that her faith and expectations were not held by everyone outside of her high school and faith community. Instead of adapting a different mindset, Mandy referred to her high school experiences to guide her career path beyond high school.

Blake affirmed the impact his Christian school had on his life. He explained that much of his success beyond high school is directly correlated to his high school experience: “I make an effort in my own personal life to show that Blake is the greatest example of what a Christian school student looked like. . . . My life is a testament that something good did come out of the school.”

Central to this theme is that the study participants had experiences in their Christian high school that they used as a point of comparison or point of reference beyond high school. Their experiences in high school made the study participants aware of their expectations. Their experiences in high school also gave them a measure for their environments.

Key theme: Being part of a greater faith community. This theme was also present in the first question; however, many of the study participant experiences around this theme extended into their experiences beyond high school. Often this theme was mentioned in relation to various relationships that started while the study participants were in school. Some of these relationships remained intact beyond high school and played in role in the participants’ continued engagement in their church communities.

Braden began relationships with mentors while he was in high school. Those mentors were significant in helping Braden to navigate different challenges to his faith. Two of those mentors were Pastors who were not teachers in his school. Braden’s experience is an example of this theme:

It was like probably a six-month process of me going through this questioning time, and I ended up talking to my pastors, and they both helped me to really kind of navigate through it. But one pastor asked me a question. He said, “Braden, at the end of the day”—cause I was trying to reason it with myself—“he said at the end of the day, what do you believe is the truth?” So, I told him, I said, “I believe that Jesus is real. I believe in God.” He said, “Then that's what you need to stand on.”

Braden’s access to his mentors beyond high school scaffolded his faith formation through college. These mentors were part of Braden’s greater faith community. When Braden returned home from college, because of his connections, he was able to continue participating in his faith community.

All the other participants had relationships with individuals in their faith communities that they began and maintained beyond school. Mario recalled that “It was really good to have a support group outside of school. . . . To this day, they are still part of my life.” Similarly, Leslie shared that she was able to develop relationships in her youth ministry while she was in high school:

I got more involved in the youth ministry. I got to develop a better relationship with my now husband, and now we’re married. . . . So I think what helped me was to get involved . . . in some kind of ministry. . . . But to get involved in church. That’s what connected me.

Mandy’s experience was similar. She explained that while in high school, she got involved in a Bible study outside of school. She began to volunteer with her Bible study, and she is still well connected with those people from the Bible study. She continues to volunteer in the community with that same group where she also serves as a mentor.

This theme centered on the continuity of relationships between the study participants and their faith communities after the study participants graduated from high school. Each of the participants had connections with their faith communities often involving their churches. The study participants' connections in their greater faith communities beyond high school always had a positive impact on the participants' faith formation.

Chapter 4 Summary

Chapter 4 was a discussion of findings from eight semistructured interviews with CSEs. This chapter began with an overview of the scope and purpose of this study—to explore the perspectives of CSEs of their Christian high school experience and how they perceive that lived experience to have affected their lives beyond high school. This chapter presented a description of the sample, a description of the participants, and an overview of the research methodology used in this study. This chapter also provided a presentation of the data analysis that yielded 11 themes. Finally, the chapter presented the textual description, the structural description, and the essence of the Christian spiritual formation experience in the summary of the findings. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the results in relation to literature, present the conclusions, and give recommendations for further study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction to Chapter 5

The purpose of this study was to understand how CSEs who graduated from Christian high schools perceive their lived experiences of CSF in the Christian high school. This study also sought to understand how the lived experiences shaped the lives of the CSEs beyond high school. Understanding the experiences of CSEs in high school gives insight to what is involved in the spiritual formation process. Understanding those experiences also provides insight to the experiences and process that were meaningful to those who are highly developed in their Christian faith formation, even in a generational cohort that had historically seen a decline in religious practice (Barry et al., 2015; Chan et al., 2015; Twenge et al., 2015, 2016; Uecker et al., 2016). This specific intersection of Christian spiritual formation and the Christian high school has been under explored. However, understanding this intersection is important for stakeholders who would like to support CSF in Christian high schools or in other faith-based organizations.

The perspectives communicated in interviews with study participants gave insight to the experiences that supported CSF during high school and beyond. The semistructured interviews were structured to help the principal investigator understand the process of CSF that each study participant experienced. The participants communicated their thoughts and feelings surrounding those experiences. Phenomenology was the appropriate approach to explore the research questions in this study:

1. How do Christian Spiritual Exemplars (CSEs), who have graduated from Christian high schools, perceive their lived experiences of Christian Spiritual Formation (CSF) in the Christian high school?
2. How do these experiences shape the spiritual lives of the CSEs beyond high school?

The focus of this chapter is to give a summary of results, a discussion of results, a discussion of results in relation to literature, the study limitations, implications of the results for practice, and recommendations for further research.

Summary of Results

The results of this phenomenological study revealed that the CSEs' saw their experience of CSF in the Christian high school as multifaceted; it also revealed that the CSEs did not experience CSF isolated from the community outside the Christian high school. Study participants also perceived their experiences of CSF in their high schools to have given them a foundation for continued CSF beyond high school. Moustaka's (1994) phenomenological research method processes were used to explicate the essence of the experience of CSF. Phenomenological research is a design that captures the essence of a shared experience. Phenomenology provided a way to get an in-depth perspective of an individual lived experience and find common points amongst shared lived experiences amongst multiple individuals (Merriam, 2001). The lived experiences of eight CSE were captured through semistructured interviews, categorized into 28 different themes, and then further refined into 11 themes.

From the coded data emerged themes that revealed a nonlinear trajectory of CSF for each of the CSEs. Ten themes emerged in relation to Question 1. Two themes emerged in relation to Question 2. The themes for Question 1 were

1. Standing up for convictions,
2. Having perspective,
3. Being mentored,
4. Taking ownership,
5. Having a lifestyle of faith,

6. Being part of a greater faith community,
7. Engaging in the culture,
8. Having influence,
9. Being self-aware, and
10. Experiencing God.

The themes for Question 2 were

1. Using high school as a benchmark and
2. Being part of a greater faith community.

The themes overlap and are not mutually exclusive, and one theme was found in relation to both questions. The discussion of these results are in the next section.

Discussion of Results

The intent behind this study was to understand how CSEs who graduated from Christian high schools view their lived experiences in their Christian high schools and beyond. Study participants discussed events in and characteristics of their high school experiences that they felt were significant to their CSF. Prior to the interview, the principal investigator asked the study participants to create a timeline of important events and experiences from high school.

Throughout the interview, the principal investigator asked the study participants to expound on the different events and experiences on the timeline. All the study participants were readily able to think of events and characteristics of their experiences in high school that were significant to their CSF. All study participants mentioned characteristics of their schools that indirectly and directly supported their CSF, and all participants described extra-curricular supports that helped them in their CSF. This section provides an in-depth analysis of the results in response to the research questions.

How do Christian Spiritual Exemplars (CSEs), who have graduated from Christian high schools, perceive their lived experiences of Christian Spiritual Formation (CSF) in the Christian high school? The study participants were nominated to this study by merit of their exemplarity as Christians. The principal researcher sought to understand how the CSEs perceived their high school CSF experiences. Study participants described their experience of CSF as multifaceted and nonlinear, and there were many common points in the shared experience of CSF. Some experiences directly reinforced their spiritual formation, and some indirectly impacted their spiritual formation.

Study participants recognized upon reflection that their teachers had a significant impact on their faith formation. It was the teachers lived faith that impacted the students. Seminal writers on Christian education agree that the educator is indispensable in the mission of Christian education (Groome, 1980; Lockerbie, 2005; Wright, 2000). According to Meuting (2017), Christian teachers must be able to give witness to the reality of Jesus in His kingdom and live out Christian convictions. The study participants had such teachers and were inspired by the spiritual disciplines of their teachers. Study participants spoke about their relationships with their teachers with enthusiasm and little prompting.

A strength of Christian teachers is that they are supposed to bring the ability to critically assess curriculum and be skilled in their subject matter so as to guide their students through critical thinking and learning (Bailey, 2012; Lockerbie, 2005; Mueting, 2017). However, mention of teachers being skilled at their subject was mentioned only once in the data. Actually, two study participants were sorely disappointed in the academic aspect of their education and felt ill prepared for college; one failed his first year of college, and another had to get remedial help

to continue in his first year. At least one participant mentioned that he had teachers who were unqualified to teach their subjects.

There was little mention of integration of Christian faith in the curriculum at the high schools of the study participants. Where an integrated curriculum was mentioned, it was passively stated and with reference to how the teachers prayed before class or the general atmosphere of the classroom because of worship or how a teacher would interact with the students; it was not mentioned as an integrated curriculum as one that blends the forming of the mind, body, and spirit in a biblical context (Lockerbie, 2005). Ultimately, the teachers served as mentors in the lives of the study participants.

Direct reinforcement of CSF. The significance of mentorship was evident in the themes, “Being Mentored,” “Engaging in the Culture,” and “Being Part of a Greater Faith Community.” Mentorship as experienced in the lives of the study participants was akin to discipleship in that mentors modeled spiritual disciplines and encouraged the practices of spiritual disciplines like prayer, worship, and reading the Bible (Willard, 2006). The study participants experienced through mentorship corrective demonstration and formation to the character of Jesus and demonstration of acted-out ethics (Bonhoeffer, 1955). Some mentors were people in the school. Other mentors were those who were part of the study participant’s faith community.

Mentorship is an indispensable facet of faith formation, and the study participants all cited mentorship as part of their faith formation journeys. Study participants recalled teachers praying and worshipping in classes. Study participants also mentioned pastors and other faith community leaders bringing support to the study participants when they had to make choices, some as important as life or death decisions. Throughout the interviews, mentors were mentioned as being involved in helping the study participant make choices.

Context is also important in faith formation. The Christian school provided a context where students had the opportunity to engage in the Word of God, without which spiritual formation could not occur (Bonhoeffer, 1995; Capon, 2002). Study participants noted that in their Christian school, they were afforded the option to choose their faith whereas in other schools they experienced, Christianity along with its system of values and beliefs was not available. The study participants recognized they had the option to choose a Christian system of beliefs and values. Study participants who attended public schools prior to attending their Christian high schools noted that a Christian system of beliefs and values were not presented as an option. The Christian high school engaged the volitional part of the student by presenting the option of faith formation and a biblical worldview (Manning, 2014). Study participants learned about the Bible in their classes, and they engaged in structured Bible reading. As Jesus is referred to as the Word of God, interacting with the Word of God was imperative for the study participants to develop in their CSF processes (John 1:1).

Study participants also discussed experiencing the God. The encounter with God is identified as the genesis for spiritual formation (Chandler, 2015; Chandler et al., 2014; Hwang, 2016; Willard, 2006). Often the study participants had trouble articulating experiencing God; however, each time, the mention was always ardent. It is in the experience with God that the spirit is changed (Bonhoeffer, 1995). The rest of the change is a renewing of the mind that eventually matures into action (Bonhoeffer, 1955; Willard, 2006). The schools of the study participants programmed events and activities where students could have spiritual experiences that were not related to academics. This process was not explicitly stated by the study participants; however, the pattern was evident in the themes “Experiencing God,” “Having a Lifestyle of Faith,” “Having Influence,” and “Being Self-Aware.”

Indirect reinforcement of CSF. During an interview, one participant asked if it was okay to talk about the negatives, too. He wanted to be sure that he did not have to speak solely on the positive events and characteristics that he felt helped to form his faith. These experiences were not negative in a sense that they dismantled the participants' CSF processes; they actually reinforced the processes, however indirectly. Along this vein, study participants began to share insights that contributed to the themes "Standing up for Convictions," "Taking Ownership," and "Being Self Aware."

Participants were poignant on speaking about behaviors of their peers that they could not reconcile with their initial expectations of the school. They would see their peers living contrary to what the participants perceived as appropriate Christian behavior and sometimes the study participant would adapt to the negative behaviors before ultimately choosing to be set apart from their peers, developing more fully in their CSF. Nevertheless, the participants saw those moments of having to make choices for their faith as important to their CSF.

Fowler (1995) made commentary on the developmental stage of the study participants' that speaks to how the negative participant experiences impact the fabric of their belief. While in high school, the study participants are in the individuative-reflective faith stage of Fowler's (1995) Stages of Faith theory. In this developmental stage, individuals typically conform to the values and beliefs of those closest to them—that is family, friends, and authority figures (Fowler, 1995). It is during this stage where individuals begin to think about what they are thinking and how they are thinking. Individuals are moved into a stage of being critically aware of their value systems and beliefs when they live through incidences where they see contradictions between what they believe and what they experience, eventually taking ownership of what they believe or

emancipating themselves from what they believed and their assumptive worldviews. In the case with the CSEs, their faith was strengthened.

The volitional facet of the study participant was also engaged. Participants shared about incidents in the classroom where they learned about topics that were controversial to the central beliefs of their faith but used those opportunities to choose a Biblical perspective, thus galvanizing their Christian faith belief system. Additionally, the study participants had adults in their school settings who created authentic opportunities to make choices to grow in their faith as seen in the theme “Having Perspective” and “Taking Ownership,” having presented to them the option to pursue CSF. Lockerbie (2005) held that this intellectual part of a student must be challenged in order to be developed as long as the curriculum is based on a Christian worldview. Further, Wright (2000) submitted that lessons being taught moves from being cerebral to spiritual when the lessons cause the students to reflect and engage with ideas that deal with life and purpose, regardless of what subject is being taught. Study participants had opportunities to grapple with ideas about evolution and even other religions without departing from their Christian faith. The study participants were trusted to make choices, but they were also guided to make choices.

Generally speaking, the Christian high school was a context where CSF took place. Each participant could easily recall events and characteristics of their high school that they felt had an impact on their CSF. The process for each of the study participants was individual, yet shared commonalities were reflected in framework of this study. CSEs saw their experience of CSF as both direct and indirect while in their Christian high schools. CSEs saw their CSF process as embedded within a community of faith and also as a series of personal choices to take advantage of the opportunities provided for them to grow in their faith.

How do these experiences (of CSF) shape the spiritual lives of CSEs beyond high school? The study participants were nominated to the study at a minimum of 10 years after they had graduated from high school. To be nominated as a CSE, the study participants needed to meet criteria set by community experts. Community experts were given an initial set of nomination criteria based on the literature on CSF. The community experts then modified the nomination criteria over a series of three iterations before the principal investigator finalized the nomination criteria based on the modifications. Thus, the principal investigator interviewed each participant knowing that he or she had gone through the process of CSF. The principal investigator sought to understand how the CSEs saw their experiences, particularly in high school, to have shaped their lives beyond high school. The consensus amongst the study participants was that their high school experiences of CSF provided a foundation for their continued CSF. Their experiences also helped to embed the participant within a network of supports that resulted in his or her steadfastness to the Christian faith.

Foundational CSF experiences. Fowler's (1995) faith development stages holds that individuals in the high school years typically choose the values systems that have chosen them after clarifying and ratifying through their experiences. For example, study participants, Luke and Elise, took ownership of their Christian high school experiences because they were aware of the cost it was to their families to send them there. While they were in their high schools, they experienced God and out of a deliberate act of their own will chose to grow in their CSF. The study participants' experiences in their Christian high schools helped them to build a foundation for their faith to the extent that when they were outside of the safety of their high schools, they held on to the values and identities they had already formed.

Participants engaged in fundamental faith practices like reading the Bible, praying, and worshipping while in school. Study participants also saw the disciplines modeled by their teachers and mentors within and without their Christian high schools. As evident in the theme “Being Mentored,” study participants had people in their lives validate their faith by explicitly encouraging them to engage in faith disciplines. Study participants also had people validate their faith by bringing correction to the study participant if needed either by modeling or by encouraging the study participant to go in a particular direction.

The Christian school gave the study participants a safe context to practice and live their faith. When they made mistakes, there was grace and forgiveness extended to them as seen in “Engaging in the Culture” where one participant knew he would be accepted by his family and his friends even when he made mistakes. The participant did not need to consider any consequence of rejection or exclusion from the community as a result of his mistakes. So, taking responsibility by owning up to faults and shortcomings was not a hindrance in his growth. This context for faith development appeals to the affective dimension of the person, where the individual feels emotionally safe within a community of people (Manning, 2014). The context of grace, love, and forgiveness provided to the study participants, was a context for the forming of a strong faith foundation for the study participants.

As the study participants graduated high school and continued on to their colleges and careers, they were simultaneously entering into what Fowler (1995) calls the individuative-reflective faith stage, where individuals typically become critically aware of their values. There is no specific event that incites this critical awareness although the awareness manifests in this stage. In the individuative-reflective faith stage, individuals are faced with the “relativity of their perspectives and those of others to their life experiences” when they leave their assumptive

value contexts (Fowler, 1995, p. 179). The study participants CSF processes were challenged when they were “disembedded” from the Christian high school and placed in contexts where the values and belief systems were more diversified. For example, two of the eight participants continued their education in Christian colleges while the others entered the workforce or attended schools outside of the Christian community. However, instead of abandoning the values and beliefs they acquired in high school, the study participants held on to them because they had what they believed to be a strong foundation for their CSF. Their habits of faith sustained them through moments of questioning. The strong foundation for the CSE was met with equally strong scaffolds.

Support networks. The CSF experiences shaped the lives of the CSE by providing not only a strong foundation but also by providing steadfast supports to the CSE. The social network of an individual is important during the high school years, but it is equally as important for those transitioning into young adulthood (Fowler, 1995). In the young adult years, individuals ask critical questions about identity but no longer provide themselves with the generic response that comes with looking at those in his or her circles of influence. Rather, the individual looks at the generic responses against concrete experiences and notices the discrepancies. The individual finds identity through critical reflection and the ability to make concrete the ideas they may have been abstract. If the study participants’ have access to resources, including people, they can continually be guided to critically reflect on their identity through a Christian faith framework.

Study participants were all engaged in a greater faith community while they were in high school. So, when they left high school, the study participants had continued access to resources to support their CSF. For one study participant, it was imperative for him to maintain connections with his pastors at his home church as he almost walked away from his faith and

would have if it were not for the supports that were intact. Other study participants maintained the friendships they created while in high school while they went away for school. Other study participants were compelled to become even more involved in their faith communities through their churches or faith-based organizations after graduating high school, so the experience of leaving the contexts of their assumptive values did not materialize. None of the study participants emancipated themselves from their faith communities and as a result were eligible to be nominated to the study as exemplars based on the criteria set by the expert advisors.

The CSF experience in the Christian high school helped to shape the spiritual life of the CSEs beyond high school by providing the CSEs with a foundation of spiritual disciplines and beliefs. The CSE could always refer back to that foundation when he or she needed a point of reference for a life situation that challenged their CSF process beyond high school. However, the Christian high school experience alone was not enough to help CSF beyond high school. The Christian high school experiences of CSF were supported by the continued involvement of the CSE in his or her faith communities. The Christian high school provided the foundation, but the greater faith communities provided the scaffolds that resulted in Christian faith exemplarity for the study participants.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to Literature

The focus of this study was to understand how CSE viewed their CSF while they were in high school and how their CSF in high school shaped their lives beyond high school. The demographic focus of this study was Millennial CSEs who graduated from Christian high schools. The reason for this focus was because there was a wealth of literature on the attrition of religious practice and Christian spirituality amongst emerging adults, at the time of this study, Millennials (Barry et al., 2015; Chan et al., 2015; Twenge et al., 2016; Uecker et al., 2016). In

the midst of the church decline narrative, the study participants retained their Christian faith and were considered exemplary in their faith by community experts, making them compelling subjects for the study. Subjects were chosen for this study based on their continued involvement in their faith communities (see Appendix H). Research pointed to reasons why the continuity of faith formation amongst CSE might have been so—social capital found in faith communities, families, and schools. This study adds to this discourse concerning the role of the Christian school in the CSF process.

The results of this study provided insight into how the Christian high school functions as part of a community that nurtures faith formation for its students. Prior research has found that the Christian finds his or her fullest expression of faith when he or she functions within the parameters of Christian virtues, particularly love (Aziz, 2017; Derrico et al., 2015). In such context, the individual is free to develop his or her Christian character (Chandler, 2015; Chandler et al., 2014). In this study, the participants described moments where they gleaned from the opportunities given them to practice their faith, particularly concerning extending grace to other and receiving grace for their shortcomings. Receiving grace for mistakes removed the fear and apprehension of remaining in the community.

The study results corroborate with prior research concerning mentors and faith formation. In faith communities, where there are mentors present, the individual is afforded the ability to learn from mentors the language vocabulary to express their values and beliefs (Carlson, 2016; King et al., 2014). Study participants recognized the difference in the way their teachers spoke about and perceived situations. One study participant thought the language and word choices of his teachers and peers to be peculiar although the participant eventually adopted that way of speaking for himself. When teachers model spiritual disciplines, it has a positive impact on

helping students progress along in their spiritual journey (Moore, 2014). Additionally, studies found that purposeful interactions with others who live their faith was key in the lives of individuals who were considered spiritual exemplars in particular faith (King et al., 2014, 2017). Each of the participants in this study had mentors in their CSF that helped them to navigate and understand what it looked like to be a Christian.

Family as a context for spiritual formation was another theme in prior research. Researchers found that family life played a significant factor in the sustained spiritual life (Sikkink, 2018). If the family had a strong spiritual life, so did the student (Barkin et al., 2015). The results of this study showed that the study participants were in families that shared their Christian faith and supported the faith formation of the study participant. This study provided more insight into how families support the CSF of students in Christian high school. This study found that two of the ways families can support CSF for students is by providing a means for accountability for the students by partnering with teachers in the character formation of the students and by giving the students opportunities to thrive in contexts like the Christian school where the values at home and at church are modeled by teachers and mentors.

In addition to family as a context for spiritual formation, prior research also found that the process of family formation was key in young adults continued religious affiliation (Denton & Uecker, 2018; Uecker et al., 2016). The findings of this study could not corroborate with prior research on family formation in relation to the Christian school experience. The reason for this is because the primary investigator did not provide a line of questioning that was directed at uncovering phenomena other than the CSF in the high school experience that caused exemplarity amongst the participants. The interview data showed that only one study participant had a child, and there was a mixture of both single and married participants. While data on the greater

Christian community was prevalent, there was no mention by the study participants of family formation being resultant of the Christian school experience, although one participant made mention of her toddler son multiple times.

Christian schools have a spiritually formative context (Francis, 2005; Horan, 2017; Prichard, 2016; Schwarz & Sikkink, 2016). Study participants effortlessly drew differences from their nonChristian school experiences and their Christian school experiences, citing the atmosphere, the practices, and the overall culture, including the language. Prior research found that students who attended Christian schools had a different values profile than those who did not (Francis, 2005). However, those studies did not provide insight into how the differences in the values profile was achieved because it was difficult to isolate the variables that would have impacted the student (Francis et al., 2014). This study gives additional insight into how the spiritually formative context of the Christian high school is viewed by the student and what they saw as important in their CSF journey. For example, there was little mention of the study participants being affected by an integrated curriculum; however, there was more reflection on the atmosphere, teachers, and opportunities.

The participants in this study gave insight into the role of the Christian high school in their CSF process. The role of the study participants as CSEs positioned them as experts in Christian spiritual formation in their faith communities. Their emphasis on relationships, atmospheres, and opportunities to practice their faith and experience their faith speaks to the importance of these elements in CSF. The results of this phenomenological study are not meant to be generalized to the public; however, the study provides insight into where schools and organizations might be strengthened if they would like their investment into their students to last beyond high school into adulthood.

Limitations of the Study

This phenomenological study had multiple limitations. Study limitations came from the sampling method, the research population, and the data collection method. A purposive snowball sample was used to identify two separate samples for the study. The research population was limited to one church community. The data collection method was based solely on interviews.

There were two separate samples used for this study—both were snowball samples. One sample was the expert advisors, and the other was the study participants. The expert advisors were all part of one church community. The limitation this posed for the study is that the sample was limited to the social networks of the expert advisors. There may have been other individuals who met the sample criteria for the study; however, because they were outside of the expert advisors' social network, they were not considered for the study. Also, using a purposive snowball sample assumed the trustworthiness of the initial informant. The principal investigator had to assume that the expert advisors nominated participants to the study based on the nomination criteria generated through the iterative process.

The principal investigator chose to focus on the expert advice from one church community to focus the nomination criteria to be as concrete and descriptive of the target nominees as possible, as suggested by prior research (Bronk et al., 2013). The drawback of this method is that the nomination criteria was so specific to one church culture that only those who were in some way affiliated with the multi-campus church were nominated to the study with the exception of one nominee with whom the principal investigator could not establish contact. The principal investigator recognized that with trying to avoid generic criteria that might have resulted in nominations of the typical instead of the exemplary, she had a much smaller sample of participants nominated to the study than she anticipated. However, the principal investigator is

aware that sampling for exemplarity would generally result in a smaller sample than one that focused on the typical individual. Also, the goal of this study was not to generalize the results to a broad population but rather to get insight on the process of one specific population. Still, a sample of more diversified expert advisors from a whole denomination rather than one church organization might have yielded a larger sample of CSEs.

Another limitation of the study was the semistructured interview format of data collection. The semistructred interview format of the study limited the amount of data collected for the study. The study participants were all productive individuals who were involved in community nonprofit programs in addition to their careers. As a result, it was difficult to schedule interviews with the study participants. Every scheduled interview was rescheduled at least once, and two interviews were shorter than the scheduled time because the participants had other obligations.

Additionally, though the participant may have been an expert in the construct under investigation, he or she may not have been experts in communicating his or her perspectives through interviews. More than one participant interjected during the interview to ask if he or she needed to elaborate or if he or she was clear or making sense. During member checking, one participant emailed the principal investigator with more information to clarify some of the statements she made during the interview. The data could have been richer in description if the study participants filled out a survey at their convenience along with the semi structured interview. This way, if the principal investigator did not get to address an experience, she would have captured some insight in the experience through the survey.

Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

Christian schools by tradition are focused on educating the whole child (Lockerbie, 2005; Manning, 2014). There are spiritual implications in every educable part of the child; in other words, the spiritual formation of the child is not isolated by academic subjects or courses (Manning, 2014). The concept of educating the whole child is foundational to the concept of the integrated curriculum—one that is infused with a biblical worldview. A biblical worldview is one that approaches all subjects through the values and beliefs found in scripture (Lockerbie, 1986). The CSF process of the study participants, from their perspectives, involved very little, if any, reference to the strength of the curriculum. A biblically infused curriculum is meant to be the common thread through the academic element of the school, bringing continuity and reinforcement of a Christian worldview (Lockerbie, 2005). However, of the 11 themes that emerged in the study, none explicitly involved the school's curriculum.

This study shows that the Christian high school does not foster CSF independent of a network of resources in a greater faith community. Researchers and seminal authors on faith formation theorized that the community is a necessary context for an individual to develop in his or her faith formation (Aziz, 2017; Fowler, 1995; Fowler & Dell, 2006). In fact, once an individual is removed from a context that mirrors the beliefs and values of the individual, the individual undergoes challenges to his or her faith (Fowler, 1995). The beliefs and values that were shared between the individual and his or her community begins to wane for the individual.

The faith based social networks of all the participants in this study remained intact when they left high school to continue into college and their careers. As a result, the study participant had supports available to them if they needed counsel during times of critical reflection about their assumptive values. Christian high schools can benefit their students by networking with

relevant community organizations and resources that share their similar values. Likewise, Christian high school students can benefit from making meaningful connections with faith-based organizations while in high school.

There are programs in Hawaii that aim to connect Catholic school graduates to the greater faith community; however, the efforts and supports for the programs are largely initiated by the diocese (Roman Catholic Church in the State of Hawaii, n.d.). The principal investigator identified one of these programs for students who are seniors in high school. The program has been in place for over five years and continues to be implemented in Catholic high schools in Hawaii. In the program for high school seniors, students have the opportunity to meet with the bishop as a graduating class. This meeting takes place over breakfast, and the students have a time of asking questions and getting answers before filling out a contact card indicating what college they will attend. The office then follows up with the student if there is a fellowship group available for the student at the college campus. There is little contact with the graduates beyond that. Students who do not provide valid contact information are not reached again. Based on the findings of this study and prior research, a single opportunity to interact with a faith figure is not an effective means to support CSF in the lives of high school graduates. Programs like these can be scaffolded with support from the Christian schools throughout high school grade levels by increasing the frequency the students interact with the bishop. Schools can also integrate encounters like these into the daily routines of the students by increasing the presence and availability of faith figures like bishops and pastors on campus. Relationships would have more opportunity to be established before the students graduate from high school.

Administrators might support CSF in high school students by enforcing restrictive hiring of teachers who live Christian virtues and who have the capacity to act as mentors to their

students. Teachers can support CSF of their high school students by living Christian virtues and by acting as mentors to their students within the parameters of the schools' policies (Horan, 2017). Teacher evaluations may include student feedback on how teachers demonstrate Christian virtues. The feedback can be used as a tool for professional development or as an indicator for the need for professional development in the area of Christian faith development. Additionally, administrators could provide professional development opportunities for teachers to learn how to be mentors to their students.

The findings of this study could not support the theory on the importance of a Christian school curriculum. A curriculum infused with a biblical worldview is considered to be one of the hallmarks of Christians schooling (Groome, 1980, 1998; Manning, 2014). The integrated curriculum is supposed to be thread that holds together all the dynamic parts of the Christian school. The effective Christian education is one that avoids indoctrination and addresses all educable parts of a person, including the cognitive, but not limited to the cognitive (Manning, 2014). However, from the perspectives of the study participants, the curriculum did not facilitate their CSF. The school programming that had an impact on the CSF of the study participants was not perceived by the participants as part of the curriculum. Rather, there was a culture of faith expressed in the teachers and the greater faith community that facilitated opportunities for the study participants to have experiences that helped them build their faith. More research is needed on how culture and curriculum are related in the context of Christian high schools. Additional research in this area would help add to theory on Christian education.

Faith formation theory explains that while it is typical for children under the age of 12 to process experiences as literal, linear, and in terms of reciprocity as knowledge is often presented in a formal classroom setting, individuals in high school typically see experiences with

“reflection on meanings” (Fowler, 1995, p. 150). Individuals in high school have the ability to recognize discrepancies between what they are taught and what they experience, and therefore, a “disillusionment” with classroom teaching begins. While none of the themes involved curriculum, of the 11 themes that emerged from the study, five involved a mentor. In the study participants’ experiences, the atmosphere and the educators provided the seamless continuity of Christian values, practices, and perspectives. This confirms the assertion that the Christian educator is an indispensable element of Christian education in an academic setting (Bailey, 2012; Horan, 2017; Lockerbie, 2005; Mueting, 2017). Both spiritual formation theory and faith formation theory emphasize the importance of mentorship. Faith formation theory explains that high-school-aged individuals are highly sensitive to the interpersonal (Fowler, 1995). Spiritual formation theory explains that discipleship is a necessary part of growth as seeing principles in action are just as important as hearing about principles (Hwang, 2016; Willard, 2006, 2010).

Recommendations for Further Research

For this study, the principal investigator targeted those who are part of the Millennial generation because of the church decline narrative associated with Millennials as they emerged into adulthood. At the time of this study, Millennials were in the stage of faith typical to emerging adults. The intersection of the faith decline narrative of emerging adults in light of Fowler’s (1995) faith stages theory was appealing to the principal investigator. The intersection was appealing because individuals who remained steadfast in beliefs values systems while others were leaving theirs may have had experiences in their formation processes that were unique and significant. The primary investigator wanted to know what those experiences were.

According to Fowler (1995), it is typical of individuals in young adulthood to become critically aware of his or her assumptive values and beliefs while also taking an active role in

forming his or her beliefs and values. Fowler (1995) does not associate his faith formation theory with a specific generation. It is recommended for further study that the target population be extended to generations before and after Millennials. This will give additional insight to Christian school constructs that are conducive to spiritual formation and are not generation specific.

The principal investigator noted that the study participants were a both single and married individuals. Of the eight study participants, only one participant mentioned that she had a child. Family formation is a context that is conducive to spiritual formation (Denton & Uecker, 2018; Uecker et al., 2016). The principal investigator recommends further study into the relationship between family formation and CSF in the lives of CSEs after graduating from a Christian high school. The line of questioning could be directed at uncovering the family formation phenomena. Such questions were not included in this study.

Coding frequency differences presented another area for future research. Coding frequency in the theme “Standing up for Convictions” skewed more toward the male participants. The skew was a result of the male participants speaking with more frequency in the subtheme “dealing with pressure.” The principal investigator chose coding methods that did not emphasize frequency over depth in creating code categories. However, the principal investigator recommends further study into the reasons male participants spoke more frequently concerning dealing with pressure than the women participants.

Another recommendation for further study is a comparative qualitative analysis of the perspectives of spiritual exemplars who graduated from Christian schools and spiritual exemplars who graduated from public schools. In this study, emergent themes including “Being Mentored” and “Being Part of a Greater Faith Community” could be experienced in non-

Christian school settings. Prior research and seminal authors on spiritual formation and faith formation identify mentorship and community as key elements to spiritual formation—apart from the Christian school experience (Carlson, 2016; Fowler, 1995; King et al., 2017). A comparative qualitative analysis would identify if different conditions—public school or private school—could produce the same outcome; it could also provide insight to what conditions need to present to produce the same outcome.

The principal investigator also recommends for further study the economic ties between the study participants and their faith communities. The elements of coercion and compulsion were noted by the principal investigator. To address coercion, the principal investigator ensured the confidentiality of all the participants by using pseudonyms of any person mentioned in this study and by taking great care in limiting the possibility of deductive disclosure. Any details that may have identified the study participants were not included in this document. However, more research is needed on the economic ties between individuals and their faith communities to explore the element of compulsion in the lives of faith exemplars. The criteria for nomination to the study limited study participants to those who had economic ties to their churches through the religious practice of tithing. However, the principal investigator also noted that three of the eight study participants were also employed within the faith community where they were educated and have established social connections. The principal investigator recommends further study on economic ties between individuals and faith communities and the relationship of those ties on the individual's faith formation.

Lockerbie (2005) argued that the real measure of effective Christian spiritual formation is in the spiritual strength of the alumni “ten or twenty or forty years later” (p. 116). A recommendation for further study is a longitudinal phenomenological study of spiritual

exemplars. Researchers may revisit how individuals who were nominated as exemplars perceive their Christian school experiences to have continued to shape their lives beyond high school. Researchers can explore the extent to which study participants believe their Christian high school experiences to have an impact on their continued faith formation. The researcher may present the participant's previously gathered data and furnish the data to the participant prior to the interview. During the interview, the researcher could ask questions that help the participant reflect on how his or her spiritual formation process has progressed since the previous interview. The researcher could also ask questions to discover how the participant perceives his or her Christian high school experience to have waned in relevance in their lives. In this study, study participants did not ask the principal investigator to disclose the nomination criteria used to qualify the participants to the study. The nomination criteria can be given to the study participants, and they can use that information to reflect on their growth and progress throughout the longitudinal study.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study of exemplary Hawaii, Christian school graduates was to understand how CSEs viewed their lived experiences of CSF in their high schools, after they had already graduated. The conceptual framework for this study—faith formation theory, spiritual formation theory, and Christian school theory helped to explore the intersection of CSF and the Christian high school. Study participants reflected on events in their high schools and characteristics of their high schools that they felt were significant to their Christian growth. These reflections were discussed in semi structured interviews that were analyzed to answer the research questions. The results of this study showed that CSEs saw their experiences of CSF in their Christian high schools as multifaceted and as complementary to CSF

experiences outside of their Christian high schools. The participants' experiences provided a foundation for their continued CSF process, and with the support of a Christian community beyond high school, the participants remained steadfast in their Christian faith in the midst of a Christian faith decline narrative.

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Appendix A: Interview Invitation Letter

Name of Recipient,

My name is Lacey Vasquez, I am a doctoral student at Concordia University–Portland. I am doing a study on spiritual formation in the lives of Christian school graduates. You were nominated for your spiritual growth as a Christian. To be selected, you had to meet 43 different criteria for exemplarity, be born between the years 1977 and 1995, have attended a Christian (or Catholic) school for at least two consecutive years, and have graduated from a Christian (or Catholic) school in Hawaii. I would like to invite you to an audio-recorded interview where I can learn more about your journey as a Christian in relation to your Christian high school experience.

To prepare for the interview, please draw a timeline and identify 5–10 high-school-related events or characteristics that you feel had a significant impact on your Christian growth. When we meet for the interview, I will ask you to tell me about these experiences. The interview will be scheduled for 30 minutes, but you may take as much time as you feel needed to expound on the interview items.

Please contact me if you would like to participate in the interview.

Sincerely,

Lacey U. Vasquez

Appendix B: Letter to Expert Advisors

Name of Recipient,

My name is Lacey Vasquez, I am a doctoral student at Concordia University–Portland. I am doing a study on spiritual formation in the lives of Christian school graduates. You were referred by [redacted] for the insight you could provide with creating a set of criteria for Millennial Christian school graduates who demonstrate spiritual exemplarity.

If you choose to participate, your participation will be two-fold. First, I will need your help creating a set of criteria for Christian exemplarity. I will provide you with a starting point which was generated from literature, and you will help to add, subtract, and modify the criteria for no more than three iterations. Second, I will need your help identifying potential study participants who meet the criteria for spiritual exemplarity and the demographic parameters of the study. The nominations will be done through a digital nomination form.

Please contact me by responding to this email if you would like to participate in this study. I will email you a consent form and we can set up a date for an initial meeting at your convenience to sign a consent form and begin the first step of generating the nomination criteria.

Sincerely,

Lacey U. Vasquez
[contact information redacted]

Appendix C: Letter for Permission to Conduct Research

January 7, 2019

Name of Gatekeeper,

I am writing to request permission to conduct research at your church. I am currently enrolled as a doctoral student at Concordia University–Portland and am writing my dissertation. The purpose of my study is to explore the role of Hawaii Christian high schools in the spiritual formation of exemplary Christians beyond high school.

This study will engage members and leaders of your congregation as subjects and experts, respectively. The church community involvement in the study is twofold. First, leaders and pastors will be consulted to help identify criteria for exemplary Christians and identify Millennials who meet that criteria and have graduated from Christian schools in Hawaii. Second, with their consent, I will conduct interviews with each nominee.

The individual results and data from this study will remain confidential.

I would greatly appreciate your approval to conduct this study. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have about this study. Please contact me at [redacted].

Very Respectfully,

Lacey U. Vasquez

Appendix D: Participant Consent Form

Concordia University–Portland

Institutional Review Board

Approved: May 2, 2019; will Expire: March 11, 2020

Research Study Title: Christian Spiritual Exemplars: A Phenomenological Study of Exemplary Christian School Graduates in Hawaii

Principal Investigator: Lacey U. Vasquez

Research Institution: Concordia University–Portland

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Jillian Skelton

Purpose and what you will be doing:

The purpose of this interview is to gather interview data to understand how Christian school graduates view their high school experiences and to understand what experiences are associated with exemplary Christian faith. We expect approximately 10 volunteers. No one will be paid to be in the study. We will begin enrollment in March 2019 and end enrollment in June 2019. To be in the study, you will meet the following requirements: (a) be born between 1977 and 1995, (b) have graduated from a private Christian or Catholic high school in Hawaii, (c) have attended that same Christian high school for at least two consecutive years, and (d) have been nominated by an expert advisor. All participants must sign a consent form to participate in this study to have the audio of the interview and other observation notes recorded by the researcher to be used in this study; all recordings will be deleted following transcription/member-checking. Doing these things, including the interview, should take less than 2 hours of your time.

Risks:

There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, we will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside a secure filing cabinet. When I or any investigators look at the data, none of the data will have your name or identifying information. I will only use a secret code to analyze the data. I will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times and then all study documents will be destroyed 3 years after I conclude this study.

Benefits:

Information you provide will help understand the role of Christian education in the spiritual formation of Christian school graduates. You could benefit from this by becoming aware of different perceptions Christian school graduates have of their schooling.

Confidentiality:

This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions.

Contact Information:

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Lacey U. Vasquez. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranche@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

Your Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

_____ Participant Name	_____ Date
_____ Participant Signature	_____ Date
_____ Investigator Name	_____ Date
_____ Investigator Signature	_____ Date



Investigator: Lacey U. Vasquez email: [redacted]
c/o: Dr. Jillian Skelton
Concordia University–Portland
2811 NE Holman Street
Portland, Oregon 97221

Appendix E: Expert Advisors Consent Form

Concordia University–Portland

Institutional Review Board

Approved: May 2, 2019; will Expire: March 11, 2020

Research Study Title: Christian Spiritual Exemplars: A Phenomenological Study of Exemplary Christian School Graduates in Hawaii

Principal Investigator: Lacey U. Vasquez

Research Institution: Concordia University–Portland

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Jillian Skelton

Purpose and what you will be doing:

The purpose of this interview is to gather interview data to understand how Christian school graduates view their high school experiences and to understand what experiences are associated with exemplary Christian faith. We expect approximately 12 volunteers. No one will be paid to be in the study. We will begin enrollment in March 2019 and end enrollment in June. To be in the study, had to be referred by one of the senior pastors of Word of Life Christian Center. All advisors must sign a consent form to participate in this study and have face-to-face meetings and electronic communication. Doing these things, including the initial meeting, will be at your convenience and should take no more than a few hours of your time.

Risks:

There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, we will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside a secure filing cabinet. When I or any investigators look at the data, none of the data will have your name or identifying information. I will only use a secret code to analyze the data. I will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times and then all study documents will be destroyed 3 years after I conclude this study.

Benefits:

Information you provide will help understand the role of Christian education is the spiritual formation of Christian school graduates. You could benefit from this through reflection on Christian spirituality and spiritual growth assessment. Participation in this study may also help you understand the role of spirituality in education.

Confidentiality:

This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions.

Contact Information:

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Lacey U. Vasquez. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

Your Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

Participant Name

Date

Participant Signature

Date

Investigator Name

Date

Investigator Signature

Date



Investigator: Lacey U. Vasquez email: [redacted]
c/o: Dr. Jillian Skelton
Concordia University–Portland
2811 NE Holman Street
Portland, Oregon 97221

Appendix F: Nomination Criteria Protocol

1. Receive full Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval.
2. Meet with each advisor one-on-one.
3. Explain the purpose of the study and the role of the nomination criteria.
4. Present the initial nomination criteria table (see Table 1) to the advisor on hardcopy format.
5. Explain that the initial criteria were derived from the literature and theory surrounding the construct.
6. Ask for any changes, additions, or subtractions to be given in that meeting (the length of the meeting determined by the advisor).
7. Write down changes and make clarifications to the nominations during the meeting.
8. Read back each modification to the advisor and allow the advisor to see the modifications on the document.
9. Explain to the advisor that I will be meeting with other advisors to go through the same process and will give him or her an additional opportunity to modify the criteria for the second and third iterations after subsequent advisors submit their feedback.
10. Permit each advisor to make additions, subtractions, and modifications up to three times in the sequence of my scheduled meetings.

Each advisor will have an opportunity to make changes up to 24 hours after being invited to make changes. Invitations for second and third iteration changes will be given after each advisor gives his or her additions, subtractions, or modifications in the subsequent iterations.

Appendix G: Interview Protocol

Date:

Location:

Start time:

End time:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

High School:

Years at Christian High School:

- Arrive at least 10 minutes before interview.
- Prepare to be in the interview for about 2 hours.
- Secure a quiet spot with two chairs facing each other with a small table in between.
- Have a bottle of water available for the interviewee.
- Check battery life on all recording devices (including the backup device).

The interview questions stem from the following researchable questions:

1. How do Christian Spiritual Exemplars (CSEs), who have graduated from Christian high schools, perceive their lived experiences of Christian Spiritual Formation (CSF) in the Christian high school?
2. How do these experiences shape the spiritual lives of CSEs beyond high school?

There are probes under each interview question. Use the probes to evoke deeper, more descriptive answers. As you use each probe, cross them off to avoid redundancy.

Opening:

INTERVIEWER (icebreaker): “Hi ____, my name is Lacey. Thank you for meeting with me today. How has your week/weekend been so far?”

(pause for response)

INTERVIEWER: “Before we start our interview, let me give you some background for this study.”

(pause)

“I am a doctoral student at Concordia University–Portland, and I am doing a study on exemplary Christians and the role of their Christian high school experience in their spiritual journey.”

(pause)

“You were anonymously nominated to be part of this study because you met the criteria for exemplarity, graduated from a Christian or Catholic school, and attended a Christian or Catholic school for at least two consecutive years.”

(pause)

Verify that the demographic information provided by the nominator is correct—school of graduation, age, and years at school.

Interview:

INTERVIEWER: "Let's begin with your timeline. Please tell me about the first event or incident on the timeline. You can begin by describing the event or incident then tell me why you included it on the timeline."

- "Can you tell me more about that?"
- "What did that mean to you?"
- "What did you think was occurring?"
- "How did you expect that to turn out?"
- "Have you ever experienced that before?"
- "Can you walk me through that process?"
- "Why do you think this is so?"

(pause)

INTERVIEWER: "Of all the items on your timeline, which do you feel is the most significant in your faith or spiritual formation?"

- "Can you tell me more about that?"
- "What did that mean to you?"
- "What did you think was occurring?"
- "How did you expect that to turn out?"
- "Have you ever experienced that before?"
- "Can you walk me through that process?"
- "Why do you think this is so?"

(pause)

INTERVIEWER: "In what ways was your school intentional about faith or spiritual formation?"

- "Can you tell me more about that?"
- "What did that mean to you?"
- "What did you think was occurring?"
- "How did you expect that to turn out?"
- "Have you ever experienced that before?"
- "Can you walk me through that process?"
- "Why do you think this is so?"

(pause)

INTERVIEWER: "In what ways was your school passive about faith or spiritual formation?"

- "Can you tell me more about that?"
- "What did that mean to you?"
- "What did you think was occurring?"
- "How did you expect that to turn out?"
- "Have you ever experienced that before?"
- "Can you walk me through that process?"
- "Why do you think this is so?"

(pause)

INTERVIEWER: "Have you always been a person of strong faith?"

- "Can you tell me more about that?"
- "What did that mean to you?"
- "What did you think was occurring?"
- "How did you expect that to turn out?"
- "Have you ever experienced that before?"
- "Can you walk me through that process?"
- "Why do you think this is so?"

(pause)

INTERVIEWER: "Were there any influential people in your school that supported your spiritual growth?"

- "Can you tell me more about that?"
- "What did that mean to you?"
- "What did you think was occurring?"
- "How did you expect that to turn out?"
- "Have you ever experienced that before?"
- "Can you walk me through that process?"
- "Why do you think this is so?"

(pause)

INTERVIEWER: "If you could give any recommendations to Christian school teachers to help their students grow spiritually strong, what would those recommendations be?"

- "Can you tell me more about that?"
- "What did that mean to you?"
- "What did you think was occurring?"
- "How did you expect that to turn out?"
- "Have you ever experienced that before?"
- "Can you walk me through that process?"
- "Why do you think this is so?"

(pause)

INTERVIEWER: "If you could give any recommendations to the head of school or principal to help students grow spiritually strong, what would those recommendations be?"

- "Can you tell me more about that?"
- "What did that mean to you?"
- "What did you think was occurring?"
- "How did you expect that to turn out?"
- "Have you ever experienced that before?"
- "Can you walk me through that process?"
- "Why do you think this is so?"

(pause)

INTERVIEWER: “What was your faith journey like when you graduated from high school?”

- “Can you tell me more about that?”
- “What did that mean to you?”
- “What did you think was occurring?”
- “How did you expect that to turn out?”
- “Have you ever experienced that before?”
- “Can you walk me through that process?”
- “Why do you think this is so?”

(pause)

INTERVIEWER: “Did your high-school experience impact your faith as you entered adulthood?”

- “Can you tell me more about that?”
- “What did that mean to you?”
- “What did you think was occurring?”
- “How did you expect that to turn out?”
- “Have you ever experienced that before?”
- “Can you walk me through that process?”
- “Why do you think this is so?”

(pause)

INTERVIEWER: “Is there anything else you would like to tell me about any of the topics we discussed today?”

(pause)

INTERVIEWER: “Thank you so much for your time today. Is it OK if I contact you if I have further questions?”

Additional Questions/Prompts for the INTERVIEWER:

- How did your high school experience affect you?
- What parts of your life do you associate with your experience as a student in a Christian high school?
- What emotions or feelings do you associate with your Christian high school experience?

Closing:

Check to make sure that all forms are filled out and all contact information is current. Save all the files and shut down all technology. Take a digital scan of all interview notes and memos, and make sure that all the notes have the interviewer information attached.

Appendix H: Final CSE Nomination Criteria

Nexus for Criteria	Criteria
Is a disciple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knows God’s vision to reach humanity • Understands how he or she fits into God’s vision for humanity • Personally accepts and engages in God’s vision • Is being equipped and trained to engage in God’s vision • Wins souls by bringing people into relationship to God • Loves God • Loves self • Loves others • Is accountable to a mentor or leader • Shares his or her faith with others • Responds with a positive attitude to guidance and correction • Disciples others or is on a pathway to disciple others • Is teachable and eager to learn • Has a vibrant relationship with God
Critical awareness of Christian beliefs and values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can share his or her personal testimony with simplicity and sincerity • Can communicate his or her faith • Knows how to lead a person into salvation • Can articulate his or her Christian faith • Can explain why he or she believes what he or she believes in a nonargumentative and nonconfrontational manner • Can explain Biblical truth regarding controversial issues • Can articulate his or her role as a disciple in the Biblical narrative of redemption • Can explain what Jesus did on the cross in relation to his or her life
Embodies the character of Christ through obedience to the Word of God	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reads and meditates on the Bible daily • Seeks God’s presence daily • Demonstrates evidence of a changed life • Lives a life of faith through acting on the Word of God • Is an example in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity • Is becoming more like Jesus • Prays daily • Intercedes regularly • Praises God, daily • Attends church weekly • Tithes regularly • Lives by conviction and not by compromise • Demonstrates ability to make hard decisions in light of the Word
Lives out Biblical Christian virtues within the Christian community and beyond	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serves in the church as needed or as requested by leadership • Is approachable by others • Has healthy, Christ-centered family relationships • Has healthy, Christ-centered friendships within the church community • Has healthy, Christ-centered friendships outside the church community • Is respected in the community • Is a person of integrity • Demonstrates ways to help, bless, serve and show kindness to others

Appendix I: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously- researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does “fraudulent” mean?

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

What is “unauthorized” assistance?

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*.

Lacey U. Vasquez

Digital Signature

Lacey U. Vasquez

Name

October 14, 2019

Date