

SPIRITUAL NURTURE IN DEVELOPING THE FAITH OF CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL  
STUDENTS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Proposal Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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## ABSTRACT

Many Christian schools provide solid academic environments for adolescents. The programming promises to deliver an education to nurture the human soul. This qualitative, transcendental, phenomenological study was for the purpose of discovering how spiritual nurture in Christian high schools aided and encouraged faith development. Christian high school is the lived experience of adolescents going to school with spiritual nurture at the heart of their programming. The participants were 15 adolescents who attended a Christian high school that implemented spiritual nurture by use of prayer, worship, biblically-integrated curriculum, Bible study, teacher-student relationships, holistic correction, and peer relationships. The epoche was the isolation of my own thoughts about spiritual nurture in Christian high schools; my own thoughts did not become a formal part of this study. In phenomenological style I organized significant statements and then clustered those statements into themes: competent professionals, student mentors, like family, building blocks of faith, confirmation of faith, steeping in Stage Three, and walking towards Stage Four. I found synthesis between textual and structural variations (Moustakas, 1994). Findings not anticipated were how readily participants were to talk about personal problems, and also the comparison they have automatically with their public school peers. What the participants experienced regarding SN in their CHS was carefully heard through interviews and journals and strengthened through observations.

*Key Terms:* ACSI (Association of Christian School International), FDT (Faith Development Theory), SN (spiritual nurture), CHS (Christian high school), CE (Christian Education), CSE (Christian School Education)

### **Dedication Page**

I would like to thank my husband Colin Mitchell for his consistent support throughout this whole academic process. I am grateful to my mom and dad who were the first champions of Christian School Education in my life. Thanks to some of the Christian educators who nurtured me best: Deana Emmerson, Pam Alward, Dr. Sheryl Vasso, and Dr. Karl Csaszar.

My heart is filled with gratitude to the parents who I have witnessed first hand to sacrifice for Christian education. Those parents have expressed dedication to Christian education in many tangible ways. Also, to the many students who have been part of my classroom and/or school for the extent of my career. My students have filled my life with their wonderful testimonies and have allowed me to be part of their faith- building journey.

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**List of Abbreviations**

ACSI (Association of Christian School International)

CE (Christian Education)

CHS (Christian high school)

CSE (Christian School Education)

FDT (Faith Development Theory)

SN (spiritual nurture)

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Overview

Christian school board members, administrators, teachers, and parents typically make the assumption that spiritual nurture is part of the Christian school environment. This chapter will provide the framework for my study where I examine spiritual nurture (SN) within a Christian high school through the theoretical lens of Fowler's (1981) faith development theory (FDT). My study's phenomenon is focused on the SN of adolescents who attend a Christian high school and whether the school's internal system provides this component. I look specifically at the phenomenon within the context of a Christian high school in the Maritimes. This chapter will reveal a study based around the central question: how does SN impact the development of faith of adolescents who attend a CHS? This chapter will then reveal the sub questions of the study. The philosophical direction for the study is stated in this chapter. The findings in this research will have impact and significance for Christian parents, Christian teenagers, CS board members, CS administrators, and CS teachers.

Enrolling a child in Christian high school (CHS) is a spiritual nurture (SN) phenomenon through the praxis of prayer, worship, biblical integration, Bible study, memorization, teacher-student relationships, holistic correction, and peer relationships. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (III John 1:3, New King James Version). Christian parents desire that their children choose Christian faith (Bushnell, 1861; Hamrick, 2005; Schultz, 1998). The mandate of a CHS is to come alongside of families to make faith part of the curriculum (Van Brummelen, 2002). Dynamics of adolescent faith were laid out in Fowler's (1981) faith development theory. In Fowler's (1981) theory there are several stages; stage three, synthetic-conventional faith, is described the adolescent as on a journey to combining his or her past with

their recently seen future. At this stage adolescents begin to see outside of themselves. They gather values for the journey of life that they are about to embark upon independently. This phenomenological study was concerned with the phenomenon of SN in a CHS and how this education promotes faith identity.

Mark 8:36 asks, “What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” (NIV). Spiritual nurture happens when encouragement, training, and education in spiritual things occur at home (Bushnell, 1861) and is reinforced in the heart (Willard, 2002) and should be at the center of all education of youth (Schultz, 1998). Spiritual nurturing is an important part of the Christian school (CS) environment (Rhea, 2011). Rumer (1966) suggested from his research that Christian education (CE) could not be separated from SN. Spiritual nurture can be seen as the process of supporting, encouraging, training, developing, and educating towards things of a spiritual nature (Bushnell, 1861; Fowler & Dell, 2006; Willard, 2002). Fowler (1981) asked a list of contemplative questions that help define faith:

What are you being spent for? What causes, dreams, and goals are you pouring your life out for? What powers do you fear? To whom or who are you committed to in life? In death? With what group do you share your most sacred, private hopes? What are your most sacred hopes? Goals? Purposes? (p. 2)

These are the questions students in a CHS environment were asked to consider (Van Brummelen & Koole, 2012). Spiritual nurture continues at the secondary level in CHS (Bertram-Troost, de Roost & Miedema, 2007; Camp, 2009; Schultz, 1998; Van Brummelen & Koole, 2012) at a time when students, 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades, were looking to form their identity separate from their parents (Davis, 1986; Erikson, 1963, 1968, 1978; Fortosis & Garland, 1990; Kessler, 2002; Lerner, Roeser & Phelps, 2008; Smith & Denton & 2005).

A CHS environment strives to develop a nurturing spirituality as part of the curriculum (Benton, 2008; Cunningham & Fortosis, 1987; Gaebelein, 1968; Hamrick, 2005; Lockerbie, 1994; Van Brummelen, 2002). Adolescence is a time some families make the decision to look to public schools for their children for more athletic opportunities, more choices for academic electives, and more opportunities to receive local scholarships (Hamrick, 2005). Fowler's FDT (1981) provides a framework to look at this highly specialized time in life called adolescence and how it relates to faith identity formation (Erikson, 1963, 1968, 1978; Fowler, 2004; Fowler & Dell, 2006; Miller, 2011; Parker, 2009).

### **Background**

The Cardus Education Survey (Pennings, Sikkink, Van Pelt, Van Brummelen, & Von Heyking, 2012) was designed in Canada to identify the outcomes of private education versus public education. "Diversity in educational delivery has been a hallmark of Canadian education since Confederation" (Pennings et al, 2012, p. 5). The Cardus Report (Pennings et al., 2012) compiled research about non-government schools in Canada. It is pointed out that in the world market, government schools performed well and non-government school graduates had higher scores in: volunteerism, families, generosity, purpose in employment, engaged in politics, and were more focused on neighbors (Pennings et al., 2012).

### **The History of the Christian Education Movement**

The Association of Christian School International (ACSI) has been organized for over 35 years, and it originated in the United States. ACSI was established later in Canada. In Canada there are two divisions of ACSI: eastern and western. Association of Christian Schools International train youth in God's truth. Due to the hiring practices of born-again believers, these schools have a unique ability spiritually to nurture while they educate adolescents (Association

of Christian Schools International, 2012). Spiritual nurture takes place in the classroom relationship between the teacher and the students. There is a SN component that happens both intentionally and spontaneously within many Christian secondary schools (Bertram-Troust & DeRoose, 2007; Leslie, 2005). Parents invest in these private Christian schools primarily as a means to have their children taught from a Judeo-Christian point of view. There was a considerable amount of research available expanding on why parents choose Christian schools (Cunningham & Fortosis, 1987; Gaebelien, 1968; Hamrick, 2005; Schultz, 1998; Van Brummelen, 2002). Parents sometimes perceive the programming to be limited in Christian schools at the secondary level and tuition rates were prohibitive. Sports, choices for electives, clubs, networking, and government-funded tuition can become the catalysts for choosing public school. Perhaps parents were not evaluating the spiritual component that is part of the educational process and also how crucial adolescence was to the formation of faith identity (Benton, 2008). The formation that happens during the school day at a CS could possibly be deeper and more thoughtful than the spiritual training that happens in the life of the church and even the home (Bertram-Troust & DeRoose, 2007; Hamrick, 2005; Leslie, 2005).

### **Spiritual Nurture**

Spiritual nurture related to the encouragement and training of the whole human being. “But bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4b, King James Version). This passage conveys that SN is a partnership between God and mankind. Bushnell (1861) wrote extensively about the nurture of the child (Gangel & Benson, 1983). Although Bushnell’s work is dated, his work on SN was exceptional and sets him apart as the father of CE.

There is then some kind of nurture, which is of the Lord, deriving a quality and a power from Him, and communicating the same. Being instituted by Him, it will of necessity

have a method and a character peculiar to itself, or rather to Him. It will be the Lord's way of education, having aims appropriate to Him, and if realized in its full intent, terminating in results impossible to be reached by any kind of human methods.

(Bushnell, 1861, p. 10)

The evangelical Christian grounds his theology of humanity from the book of Genesis. "Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7, New International Version). In the book *Positive Youth Development and Spirituality* (Lerner et al., 2008), connections were made between the spiritual development and adolescent development. "Religious beliefs, values, and morals enable youth to make sense of the world and understand their place in it" (Lerner et al., 2008, p. 57).

### **Adolescent Development**

Adolescence is described as a unique time in life (Erikson, 1968; Smith & Snell, 2009). According to Kessler (2000), adolescence is a time where youth are eager to learn about spiritual life; these are impressionable years. The classroom needs to be set up with room for the soul. In Willard (2002) discussed the points of the human being that need transformation: the mind, the will, the body, social dimension, and the soul. These points of transformation align with the core values set out by ACSI and what they commend in the member schools; they prepare the student in a holistic way in the life of the classroom (Association of Christian Schools International, 2012). Nurture took place as the whole person is invited into the curriculum. Also when interacting with the carefully selected curriculum, encouragement is given to follow spiritual things and biblical teaching. Students need opportunities to express where they were in regards to faith (Hamrick, 2005; Schultz, 1998; Willard, 2002).



## **Faith**

Confidence is part of the faith development of the adolescent (Abel, 2011). Confidence is gained in many areas during adolescence (Erikson, 1963, 1968, 1978). Faith is no exception; it could be thought of being gained while a teen discovers his or her identity and equilibrium (Erikson, 1963, 1968, 1978; Fortosis & Garland, 1990). The strongest link to confidence in faith comes from the family environment (Abel, 2011; Bushnell, 1861). Abel (2011) went on to explore the impact that steady-abiding faith of adults has on a young person. Many are drawn to faith through hard circumstances, but youth are attracted to people who live out faith consistently in their lives (Abel, 2011; Lanker, 2010; Moore, 2011; Smith & Denton, 2005; Willard, 2002; Winn, 2010). The CS provides these individuals in the life of the adolescent through relationships with teachers; there are also others who are already working with them in different capacities in the life of the church (Graham, 2009).

Fowler (1981) delved deeply into the theological work of Tillich (2011) to define faith. Tillich (2011) wrote that faith is the thing about which we are most ultimately concerned. Tillich (2011), like Fowler (1981), saw faith as a framework, and the given religion or denomination inserts the doctrine or teaching. Lives are built on the teachings of which humanity is ultimately concerned, and faith encompasses the whole personality and bridges the gap between the rational and non-rational parts of us (Tillich, 2011). “Faith is the tension between the cognitive function of man’s personal life, on the one hand, and emotion and will, on the other hand” (Tillich, 2011, p. 6). Hebrews 11:1 reminded us faith is the hope of things unseen. A biblically based belief system becomes essential to the Christian parent and the mandate of the CHS. Schultz (1998)

wrote that from the earliest point of development a Christian parent should be guiding their children to the truths of God's Word.

### **Faith Development Theory & Identity**

Fowler's (1981) faith stages are based on chronological age as well as faith readiness to move on to the next level. At the end of each stage of faith, the individual must let go of what was and get ready to embrace the new developments. Fowler's (1981) stages begin in childhood with infancy and finish with undifferentiated faith. Stage one is intuitive-projective faith, stage two is mythical-literal faith, stage three is synthetic-conventional faith, stage four is individuative-reflective faith, stage five is conjunctive faith, and stage six is universalizing faith (Fowler, 1981). The first two stages deal with the child as they move through childhood.

Adolescence is a time in life when stories are an important part of building faith; this concept has driven the development of CE curriculum in the life of the CS and CE in a broader sense in the church. Fowler (1981) stated, "In stage two the child is beginning to see life from another's perspective and this helps them to understand that God has a perspective" (p. 139).

The CHS works primarily with faith stage three. This is a unique stage that students move through and then possibly on to deeper levels of faith in stages four, five, and six. Fowler's (1981) stage three exposes the adolescent's need for a God who accepts them and helps them form personal identity. Fowler's (1981) research uncovered that many adults were still working from this framework of faith. An individual at Fowler's (1981) stage three level of faith begins to develop ideas and values of their own; however, they are based primarily on the authorities in their lives.

## **Situation to Self**

### **Personal and Professional Experience**

Christian schooling, and specifically ACSI schools, is a part of my personal and professional experience. I attended a Christian day school from kindergarten through grade twelve. My undergraduate experience was at a college that was a member of ACSI; I studied to be a CS educator. The first three years I taught were in the secondary department of a Christian school. This was not my degree specialty, but it was a good place for me to gain valuable experience. I relived much of my own Christian school education (CSE) experience through those first three teaching years. I found myself recalling academic things I had learned as a student, and I recalled how teachers and peers had helped form my character. Because of my own experience, I had a strong desire for the students to make faith connections along with their academic studies when I became a teacher in a Christian school. I became the school's principal in 2001. My desire to see those spiritual connections grow during the high school years has only increased after accepting a job in administration. I have a desire to research the themes of the phenomenon of spiritual nurture that takes place with adolescents in the Christian high school.

### **Philosophical Assumptions**

Phenomenology works out of a philosophical framework; it is not an empirical philosophy (Giorgi, 2009). It is more comprehensive than an empirical study. In phenomenology anything that can be experienced can be studied. It is difficult to articulate the philosophy behind phenomenology. Giorgi (2009) stated, "Philosophical phenomenology makes explicit that it considers everything to be studied from the viewpoint of consciousness or subjectivity" (p. 68). Philosophically speaking, phenomenology looks at possibilities as helping to determine meaning, and the data does not have to be physical to be considered in the study. Every statement given

for the research is considered having equal value (Moustakas, 1994). My study was a reflection of philosophical assumptions customary to qualitative research design. Cunningham and Fortosis (1987) defined philosophy as a “love of wisdom” (p. 14). Every person operates out of a philosophy whether or not he or she realizes it. “For the Christian these views are influenced by one’s own views of life, God, Christ, Holy Spirit, man, education, knowledge, truth, the Bible, and parental responsibilities” (Cunningham & Fortosis, 1987, p.16). In the following sections, I will convey my positions on ontology, epistemology, axiology, methodology, and the rhetoric of the study.

**Ontological.** The reality from the point of view of the participants will be from a working Judeo-Christian worldview. My personal perspective on reality was unquestionably from a Judeo-Christian worldview. The participants on this journey were sorting out their position on reality as they continue receiving education from their CHS. This meant many different things. Some schools provide more SN than do others. The detailed observations from the school environment helped to determine what the reality is in the setting.

**Epistemology.** Observations and interviews were used to get as close to the participant’s truth as possible and to determine the truth about the participants being studied (Creswell, 2007). It was essential that the study represented the closest version of the truth as possible, as the more truth that could be exposed, the more effective the study.

Christian schools have been my primary basis of education since I was five years old. I know from personal experience how a spiritual nurturing environment can mold and shape faith. I also have witnessed the effects of SN in a CHS from my own experience as a teacher and administrator. My personal philosophy runs entirely congruent with Schultz (1998), who

believed Christian parents have a responsibility to educate their children in a Christian environment.

**Methodological.** The research took place at a CHS. Observations, online journals, and interviews with the participants were used to uncover themes of SN in the CHS. As themes emerged, they were cross-referenced. I continued to work with new themes as they appeared. The snowballing effect brought an exhaustive depth to the research.

**Rhetorical.** “The logic that the qualitative researcher follows is inductive, from the ground up, rather than handed down entirely from a theory or from perspectives of the inquirer” (Creswell, 2007, p. 19). This was a transcendental phenomenological study, which sought to discover the essence around a phenomenon. The research was presented in first person format. Qualitative research is personal, and in parts it reads like a narrative (Creswell, 2007). Abbreviations were outlined at the first of the study, but glossaries of terms were added. Creswell (2007) pointed out that qualitative research relies on defining terms as the study unfolds.

**Axiological.** Based on my own experience I place high value on CSE. Value was determined in the SN process and its impact on faith of students at the CHS. Morality and value is caught up in the person of Jesus Christ. Parents were instructed to train up a child in the way they should go and to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. I strongly believe that the CHS is part of the solution for Christian parents to accomplish the spiritual training and nurture of their children as outlined in Deuteronomy chapter six.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when

you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up (Deuteronomy 6:4-7, New International Version).

Ephesians chapter six has similar guidance for parents in a New Testament context. Parents were commanded in this letter to build the family by not provoking their children to wrath; children were commanded to honour their parents. Bushnell (1861) highlighted Ephesians 6:4b in his work on Christian nurture, “But nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord” (American Standard Version). Deuteronomy chapter six and Ephesians chapter six teach the values that Christian parents hold to and the desirable values to be upheld in a CHS.

**Constructivism.** My study was rooted in constructivism. Essentially, I tried to make sense of an experience with the participants to add to knowledge of the phenomenon of SN in CHSs. The participants helped us to see the phenomenon from several points of view. Due to the absolute nature of the God, the participants understood that there was absolute truth. However, when the human component was involved each perspective helped to shape a side of that truth. “The goal of research, then, is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation” (Creswell, 2007, p. 20).

In the funnel approach constructivism started broad and then narrowed down to the finer details of the study (Creswell, 2007). This was reflected in the questions that were designed in the study. The questions started out in broad strokes and then were narrowed down. It is important from a constructivist point of view, which was to understand who the participants were and how they live. As the researcher, it is essential that I understood my position in the research (Creswell, 2007).

### **Problem Statement**

In spite of the obvious benefits of the SN available in CHS for Christian families, little qualitative research has been done to capture the phenomenon of how the praxis of SN in a CHS builds faith. Spiritual nurture, spiritual formation, and discipleship were all terms that were popular around the evangelical community (Fleming & Cannister, 2010). Christian education is both intentional and non-intentional when relating to nurture. Biblical spirituality is integrated when approaching all parts of school life in the CHS. Therefore it may be a natural choice for Christian parents (Lanker, 2010). As parents desire to see their children grow in their Christian faith, spiritual nurturing throughout the school day could be perceived as a very important thing for their young children and their adolescents. "...Christian learning ought to be approached not as the insertion of Christian ideas into the default...but rather as the intentional fostering of communities of counter-practice rooted in the history of Christian practices" (Smith, 2011, p. 60). Given the high expectations ACSI schools place on themselves (ACSI, 2012) and the high expectations of parents, it would be assumed by teachers, administrators, and parents that SN is well supported in the literature with qualitative and quantitative studies. Qualitative research is limited especially for schools in ACSI membership. The essence of SN in ACSI high schools was research that has not been captured. Christian education seeks to develop Christ followers and nurture of the soul is a necessary part of the mission (Van Brummelen & Koole, 2012).

The focus of this research used Fowler's (1981) FDT to look clearly at the phenomenon of SN. This study focused on SN between ninth and 12th grade in ACSI Christian schools in Eastern Canada. It is my contention that Christian high schools help to provide clarity in faith development. As stated earlier, adolescence is when a young person is forming his or her identity. Erikson's (1963, 1968, 1978) psychosocial stages were utilized to observe the intricate

process that occurs when identity was formed. Fowler (1981) provided the primary theoretical source that guided my study. His stages of faith helped to provide the link between the research and the collected data. Adolescent faith formation is a very delicate process. Adolescents find themselves at Fowler's (1981) synthetic-conventional stage. This is a conformist stage, where he or she looks to strong role models in their lives to pattern their life and faith after. Without the strong demonstrations of faith by older adults, adolescents are left to conform to something else to find identity. Attention was paid specifically to this part of Fowler's (1981) theory. This study indicated that the phenomenon of SN in a CHS setting strengthened the ability for an adolescent to form a faith of his or her own.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the spiritual nurture that was an integral part of the Christian high school experience. The study evaluated a sample of 15 CHS students of ACSI Eastern Canada. Spiritual nurture incorporated teaching, motivating, and inspiring students towards faith in Christ (Bushnell, 1861; Schultz, 1998; Willard, 2002). A study explored the phenomenon of students coming to know Christ in a deeper way through the praxis of prayer, chapel, biblically integrated curriculum, Bible study, teacher-student relationships, holistic correction, and peer relationships in their CHS. "Faith is awakened and nurtured by elements from the tradition. As these elements come to be expressive of the faith of new adherents, the tradition is extended and modified, thus gaining fresh vitality" (Fowler, 1981, p. 10). The purpose of this study was to see Fowler's (1981) research at work in the life of the CHS.

The research conducted connected teachers and administrators to the SN goals of ACSI. Spiritual nurture is an assumed component of CSE; however, the phenomenon has not been



clearly explored. Adolescence is a significant time in life where one's identity begins to take form (Erikson, 1963, 1968, 1975). The way the CHS is conducted can impact the faith identity of the student as the school uses elements of the Christian tradition.

### **Significance of the Study**

Christian school education has been part of my life since I was four years old; as a result I am passionate about helping people find the benefit to this specialized type of schooling. This study will make a contribution to the world of CSE. Specifically, it will help administrators to communicate a phenomenon that should be happening in their schools based on ACSI's expectations (Association of Christian Schools International, 2012) or it will explain a phenomenon that is already taking place. Qualitative research can help bring validity to the goals of an organization. ACSI schools by nature want to impact youth in ways of discipleship and if the phenomenon can be captured it may be able to be replicated. A qualitative study will capture the voice of the participants and speak at a heart level about what was happening in our Eastern Canadian Christian schools.

This study connected to the theoretical framework of Fowler's FDT (Fowler, 1981). Fowler's work on faith development in adolescence was the primary lens through which this study was formed. Erikson's (1963, 1968, 1978) work on identity formation provided some secondary significance to the study in relation to determining how adolescents bring identity together with finding faith for themselves. The CHS could potentially be one of the environments that brought spiritual development into perspective and focus. Spiritual nurture interactions with the teacher-student relationship are vital to the nurturing experience. Kroger (2000) found Erikson's work (1978) about finding identity and discussion on this in a new millennium could potentially inform the theoretical portion of the study. Fowler's (1981) stages

of faith development are a lens to see how the CHS environment could be a place to build faith and strengthen it and help it to mature.

This study contributes to ACSI schools in Eastern Canada, across all ACSI divisions, Protestant Evangelical Schools, Mainline Protestants Schools, and Catholic Schools. There may also be some references made that help other kinds of mentoring ministries to youth. One study looked at the spiritual formation factors in the sanctification process of teens. Many researchers did not look to CSE as one of the vehicles of spiritual nurturing practices. This research shed new light on this topic and perhaps helps many areas in the life of the church (Fleming & Cannister, 2010). The study will be helpful to other types of religious schools (i.e. Catholic schools, etc.). The Catholic research by Cho (2011) was very helpful in doing research for this study. Cho's study was a quantitative study looking at the impact of Catholic teachers on commitment within the life of the high school. Hopefully, my research impacts a broader community beyond ACSI schools.

### **Research Questions**

Van Manen (1990) wrote that phenomenology is to address the question of what something is really like. Van Manen (1990) asked the question, "What is the nature of this lived experience?" (p. 42). My questions began to form as I researched Fowler's (1981) FDT and the distinctive of the CHS (Gaebelein, 1968; Graham, 2009; Schultz, 1998). The central question for this study was: How does SN impact the development of faith of adolescents who attend a CHS? This question gets to the heart of the study and researches one of the main goals of ASCI schools (Association of Christian Schools International, 2012), i.e. creating disciples. We understood from Fowler (1981) that faith is awakened and nurtured by elements from a faith tradition. Christian high schools practice elements of Christian faith each day; therefore, it results in faith

development (Abel, 2011; Benton, 2008; Bramer, 2010; Cunningham & Fortosis, 1990; Fowler & Dell, 2006; Gaebelein, 1968; Graham, 2009; Hamrick, 2005; Rumer, 1966; Schultz, 1998; Streib, 2005; Van Brummelen & Koole, 2012; Van Brummelen, 2002).

As I studied the literature surrounding the topic of SN in CHS as faith development from a constructivist approach, a list of sub questions were developed: (a) What themes arise in relationships with teachers to help adolescents build faith in a CHS that help with faith development theory? (b) What themes arise in the relationships between peers that help with faith development theory? (c) What statements about the school environment help to understand the impact of spiritual nurture on faith and faith development theory? (d) What are the students' thoughts and feelings about building faith while attending a CHS? (e) How does this impact faith development theory? The CHS is a place where students receive SN (Hamrick, 2005; Schultz, 1998; Van Brummelen, 2002). The praxis of SN in a CHS offered elements of Christian faith as a daily part of the school environment. Fowler's (1981) FDT suggested the practice of elements of a faith system help to build truth (epistemology) and character (axiology) in the life of the student. These questions helped develop the central phenomenon of how the CHS helped to build faith.

### **Research Plan**

Through this research, I sought to understand the SN that occurred or does not occur in the context of the CHS. A transcendental phenomenological research was used to collect data from students involved in the spiritual nurturing process. Because this was a qualitative study, as the researcher, I am a "human instrument" (Creswell, 2007, p. 38) in the process. I needed to make sure that the voices of the students were heard. I chose transcendental phenomenology because I believed it was important to bracket out my own voice using epoche. Those who read

the study really got a sense of the phenomenon outside of what I think about it. As Creswell (2007) stated, “The participants in the study need to be carefully chosen, to be individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon in question, so that the researcher in the end can forge an understanding” (p. 62). There were 15 students chosen as participants. I collected the data through interviews, observations, and journals.

I collected the data from the participants to gain an understanding about the structure of the essence and the textural components of the essence. I used the framework recommended by Moustakas (1994) for data analysis. “Structural essence of the imaginative variation with the textural essences of the transcendental phenomenological reduction to see the textural-structural synthesis of the essence of the phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 36). The data was collected to understand the essence of SN and faith development in CHS students. I used Moustakas’ (1994) phenomenological, transcendental procedures for analyzing the data. I reflected on input from Giorgi (1995) and Van Manen (1990).

### **Delimitations**

There were delimitations to this study. Christian schools often run a range of ages from K-12. However, my study was looking only to those students who were enrolled from grades nine through 12. Erikson (1963, 1968, 1978) described this stage as the time in life when one grapples with forming identity. This was an important time to understand the transition from childlike faith to adult faith. The question was: What elements of the faith are present with students growing in faith? (Bushnell, 1861; Fowler, 1981; Fowler & Dell, 2006; Willard, 2002).

### **Limitations**

With only one school involved in the interviews, the phenomenon was limited to that school. Students who are enrolled in a CHS are there for different reasons and come from

different family backgrounds. Many students that are being nurtured at a CHS are also being nurtured spiritually at home and at a local church. However, some students do not come from a Christian home or a church background. There could be a variation between the types of student homes.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview

The literature review was an essential part of my study. Articles were selected to confirm the reality of the phenomenon of SN of CHS. The literature informed the study's importance and exposed the gap that existed for this type of qualitative, phenomenological study. An in-depth look at the theoretical framework that drove the study was through Fowler's (1981) FDT and Tillich (2011), who informed Fowler's (1981) direction on faith. The work of Bushnell (1861), Willard (2002), and Schultz (1998) generated the main literature that informed my definition of SN. I also explored many other authors on the same topic. This chapter unpacked the distinctives of CE and adolescence through key authorities, Van Brummelen (2009), Hamrick (2005), and Erikson (1963, 1968, 1975). I evaluated information that examined the praxis of SN: worship (Brennen, 2011), prayer (Ackerman, 2007; Halverson, 1989; Mayotte, 2010), Bible memorization & study (Hamrick, 2005), peer relationships (Campolongo, 2009), teacher relationships (Dozier, 2012), and holistic correction (Van Brummelen, 2009). This chapter helped me to understand and began to capture the research surrounding a possible phenomenon of SN in CHS.

Van Manen (1990) taught that phenomenology is the progress of humanizing human life and human institutions. The literature review of this study served to better understand the lived experience of a spiritually nurturing climate. The following literature review was a reflective study of faith development and how SN is connected to those moving forward in their faith journey. The research was aimed at understanding SN in the context of a Judeo Christian worldview. The reviewed literature reflected on the institution of the CHS as understood by ACSI guidelines. In this review, I sought to understand the gaps in the research. I concluded that

there was little qualitative research to capture the phenomenon of the spiritual nurture of the CHS student. The following was thoughtful research of my theoretical framework, spiritual nurture, and Christian school education in the secondary department.

Drexler (2007) stated, “Christian schools should be known as communities of grace—places where visitors clearly see God at work in the way relationships are conducted” (p. 5). Parents and students should notice the difference in a CHS; the atmosphere should speak to something more spiritual. Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV) imparted wisdom about the fruit that is part of having the Spirit of God live in you and those fruits are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, and goodness. One assumes these attributes would create a great culture in which to learn.

Drexler (2007) described the concept of school communities in a book of collected essays, *Schools as Communities*. In his essay, he spoke to the difference between nomads and pilgrims. Pilgrims were people who set out on a personal and purposeful journey to eternal things. Twenty-first century North American society pulls our youth into a nomadic, individualistic way of thinking during their late teens and early young adulthood. Drexler (2007) wrote passionately about our students being “pilgrims” (Heckman, 2007, p. 9). Christian high schools were in the business of producing spiritual pilgrims for the journey (Gaebelein, 1968; Graham, 2009; Hamrick, 2005; Schultz, 1998). They produce pilgrims by including SN as part of the school environment.

Acts of SN happen each day in a CHS and the goal was to produce pilgrims who were intentionally nurtured daily in the school community (Harrison, 1999). The literature review currently undertaken was analyzed with the following in mind: FDT, SN of the student, spiritual development of the nurturer, and the distinctive of a CHS context. The following was a review of

the theoretical literature that helps form the framework for this phenomenological study of students, teachers, and curricula interacting in a CHS setting. The following was also a review of the literature that currently surrounds the topics of faith, faith development theory, spiritual nurture, Christian high school, and adolescence. What was communicated through the literature review process was the placement of my study and how it fills a gap in the literature.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Fowler's Faith Development Theory**

This phenomenological study of SN in Christian high schools was rooted in the theoretical literature of Fowler's FDT (Fowler, 1981), especially as it related to stage three—synthetic-conventional faith. The link between Fowler's (1981) stage three deals with faith development in adolescents, and CHSs are full of students who are developing at the stage three level. The mission of CHSs is to develop spiritual life along side of academic life. Fowler (1981) was the theorist behind FDT. Fowler started with faith and the human experience, or how faith forms an identity of its own within an individual. My study described the phenomenon of faith identity of CHS students. "It [faith] shapes the ways we invest our deepest loves and our most costly loyalties" (Fowler, 1981, p. 5). In the beginning of his book, *Stages of Faith*, Fowler looked to theologian Tillich (2009) to help with a definition for faith. I examined Tillich's (2009) work to further ground my study in relation to Fowler's (1981) FDT.

Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned. The content matters infinitely for the life of the believer, but it does not matter for the formal definition of faith. This is the first step to make in order to understand the dynamics of faith (Tillich, 2009).

Tillich (2009) circled around and solidly lands on the idea of ultimate concern. Tillich (2009) theologized that humans are drawn to faith because they were aware there is something



infinite to belong to, and it creates what he called a restlessness. “With faith there is an awareness of holiness, an awareness of a divine presence” (Tillich, 2009, p. 14). The faith connections bridge an understanding of how adolescents begin to walk in faith and help to know what adolescents in a CHS are grappling with regarding the adult faith they are beginning to build on their journey of spiritual maturation.

Fowler (1981) referred to faith as involving a vision, an alignment of the will, and a resting of the heart. This is the mantra of the CSE movement. The desired outcome is that students are nurtured to faith and with faith in Christ through biblically-integrated teacher philosophy and curriculum (Dexter, 2007; Gaebelein, 2005; Graham, 2009; Schultz, 1998). Fowler (1981) made an important observation about how nurturing to the transcendent impacted a person:

But conscious or unconscious, they affect the setting of our goals, the relationships we make and maintain and the ways we respond to emergencies and crisis. They have an impact upon the ways we make plans and on our efforts to live our lives with integrity. These are the triadic dynamics of faith. (p. 97)

### **Erikson’s Developmental Psychology**

My study of SN in CHSs involved looking specifically at how the adolescent developed in faith especially in the previously mentioned context. It was important in relation to my study to understand all of Fowler’s faith stages, but especially the stage moving into adolescence and the stage moving towards young adult/adulthood. Fowler (1981) relied heavily on the research of Erikson, Piaget, and Kohlberg, paying special attention to Erikson’s (1978) psychosocial stages.

Erikson’s (1978) stages are trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame, initiative versus guilt, industry versus inferiority, identity versus identity confusion, intimacy versus

isolation, generativity versus stagnation, and integrity versus despair. Erikson's (1978) stages all correlate with a basic age range. Fowler's (1981) stages of faith compare to a great degree. The developmental stage, identity versus identity confusion, and the faith stage, synthetic-conventional faith relate to how adolescents grow up and find themselves, as well as the faith system which surrounded them.

Erikson's stages of human development provide a lens through which to visualize spiritual development, particularly as it might be experienced by conservative evangelical Christians who emphasizes being "born again", and to identify some of the actions and thinking they might be individuals stuck in their spiritual growth. The defining characteristics of each stage can help spiritual leaders assess the various stages and a person's progress through them, as well as suggest ways with the issues at each stage. (Bissinette & Parker, 2007, p.5)

Like Fowler (1981), Bissonnette and Parker (2007) saw the benefit of using Erikson's stages provided explanation on development as it related to faith. Parker (2006) spoke to the fact that Fowler's (1981) FDT inspired many studies and had a significant influence on religious education. Fowler's (1981) work on the stages of faith and the research that circled out of the original work is helpful to understand the process of what was to be accomplished in a CHS.

Fowler's study (1981; Fowler & Dell, 2006) on faith development aligned with chronological age in many cases. However, it was interesting to note that Fowler's (1981) research revealed that some adults stay in early faith stages with children and adolescents. Also some children and adolescents accelerate in faith stages because of circumstances that surround their development (Fowler & Dell, 2006). One should ask, "What are possible circumstances?"

A few possibilities included: nurturing Christian families, prayer, Bible study, worship experiences, and testimonies of faith.

Persons may reach chronological and biological adulthood while remaining best described by a structural stage of faith that would most commonly be associated with early or middle childhood, or adolescence. By the same token, contexts of spiritual nurture and practice coupled with a person's spiritual aptitude and discipline, may lead some children to a deeper and more rapid development in faith. (Fowler & Dell, 2006, p. 36)

This concept is important in regards to studying the phenomenon of SN in CHSs. Does this environment accelerate the faith development of the students who are involved? Or does it aid families in helping their student(s) keep pace with the faith stages as laid out in Fowler's (1981) FDT? The answers to these questions were important for parents concerned about faith as they evaluate secondary level in a CS as an option for their adolescent.

Critics of Fowler's (1981) FDT believed he was misdirected to rely so heavily on the cognitive development of the child/adolescent/adult instead of delving into the Apostle Paul's work in the New Testament that spoke to the inward man (Ford-Grabowsky, 1987). Ford-Grabowsky's (1987) research suggested that Fowler focused on the temporal and not as much on the eternal. Ford-Grabowsky (1987) questioned the FDT system, which was based on Christian dogma, but spoke little to the role of sin and evil and their interruptions to the building of faith. McDargh (2001) balanced this criticism by providing a clear picture of Fowler as researching the psychology of religious faith:

Fowler's (1981) FDT for over 20 years has provided a theoretical foundation for a wide range of research projects in the psychology of religious development as

well as generated lively critical scholarly response from other psychologists of religion. (McDargh, 2001, p. 186)

Although Fowler (1981; Fowler & Dell, 2006) recommended that the scaffolding of faith did not exist so that individuals were inspired to the next level, the Bible does not endorse that concept. The author of Hebrews suggested to a group of believers that they were not moving along in faith. “Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness” (Hebrews 5:13, New International Version). Matthew Henry (2014) stated it this way; “It is a sin and shame for persons that are men for their age and standing in the church to be children and babes in understanding” (p. IV, 2014.). The Holy Scriptures state that the CHS must take seriously the task of presenting opportunities for the students to move along in their faith.

Stages four, five, and six differ in ranges of spiritual maturity throughout adulthood. The individual in stage four must be ready to make breaks physically and emotionally from former authority figures in their lives (Fowler, 1981; Fowler & Dell, 2006). Erikson (1963, 1968, 1978) called this time of young adulthood a test of being vulnerable enough to stand on one’s own two feet. This was the butterfly breaking out of the cocoon and ready to take on a new identity. Stage five was often symbolic of midlife and a time when a person reflects on helping the next generation come to faith (Fowler, 1981; Fowler & Dell, 2006). Stage five, conjunctive faith, became a time of understanding a deeper version of truth (Fowler, 1981; Fowler & Dell, 2006). Fowler (1981) in his book on FDT wrote that very few have ever made it to the last stage. This stage of faith was an individual who was leaning on God for themselves and all humanity.

Fowler (1981) wrote that, “We become part of what we love and trust” (p. 18). Fowler and Dell (2006) described the time of adolescence as a time when the whole framework for faith

begins to gain clarity. “Theology and human development walk hand in hand” (Fowler, 1981, p. 38). Fowler (1981) concluded that faith was relational. Fowler (1981) used the work of Piaget, Kohlberg, and Erikson to describe the process by which we come to build faith into the framework of our lives. Erikson extensively researched the “identity crisis” of the adolescent (Miller, 2011). His own life had crisis of identity as an immigrant, and he later made correlations to the adolescent having to emerge with a new identity during the teenage years.

The SN that happens in adolescence is at a key time of development; therefore, the CHS is a safe place to search for faith identity (Fowler, 1995; Fowler & Dell, 2005; Miller, 2011; Schultz, 1998). Parents might be interested to understand the phenomenon of SN in Christian secondary school to make an informed decision for the spiritual life of their child as it relates to schooling. The whole family is impacted by the nurturing of the adolescent, especially if the family espouses that their child will take on the Biblical worldview that they desired when they enrolled them in a private, ACSI school setting (Gaebelein, 1968; Schultz, 1998; Van Meter, 2009).

Fowler’s (1981) book on the stages of faith has now had over 40 printings (Fowler, 2004). Fowler’s (2004) FDT related individuals to the life source. Fowler (2004) reflected on the impact thirty years had on FDT. Faith development theory provides a scaffold for faith development (Fowler, 2004). It goes beyond the intellectual and moves into the territory of emotion. An individual should understand and evaluate authority. Faith development theory should help them to extract meaning from the world. It should touch things deeply spiritual and holy. As St. Augustine wrote centuries before Fowler, “So I must also go beyond this natural faculty of mine, as I rise by stages towards the God who made me” (Augustine, 1961, p. 214). Years after Fowler’s (1981) original work and in his quest to define spiritual formation, Willard

(2002), said, “Spiritual formation in Christ is an orderly process” (p. 4). Those who were involved in religious education should work hard to make space for children in their lives, attend to their needs, and introduce them to the stories of faith and help them to experience the love of God. “Whatever the source, the conveying of images in narrative, in art, in symbol and ritual, can awaken and nurture what we may call the spiritual imagination” (Fowler, 2004, p. 415).

Fowler (2004), made note that the real parts of faith like the Scriptures, liturgies, ethical teachings and visions of the holy do help form faith (p. 417). Faith development theory helps religious educators to understand where to set pace in goals and how to frame curriculum. “It should never be the primary goal of religious education simply to precipitate and encourage stage advancement” (Fowler, 2004, p. 417). It was essential as Fowler’s (1981) stages are evaluated that it is understood that they are available to help understand where an individual is in his or her development. Fowler (1981) did not intend for his stages to be used to manipulate the progression of faith in any student.

In his book, *Weaving the New Creation*, Fowler (1991) wrote about his stages of faith bringing parallel to Kuhn’s paradigm shift theory. A paradigm is a model or an example. To shift paradigms, an individual needs to recognize the state of affairs. Often a paradigm shift takes place in a time of crisis. What is needed in the individual’s life in the next step will not fit with the current paradigm. The shift comes when tearing down the old and building something new. There is a transition period when the individual has part of the old and part of the new. For the paradigm to completely change, it must be more than thoughts in the heart and mind. It is steps of action and a change in priorities. The concept of the paradigm parallels with what happens with Fowler’s (1981) FDT.

“We all begin the pilgrimage of faith as infants” (Fowler, 1981, p. 119). The first stage of Fowler’s (1981) FDT intuitive-projective phase observes the child from about two to about seven. In this stage, the child starts to understand the patterns of faith within their own setting. They are unable to see the perspective of others in this stage; children of this age are riveted by stories and testimonies of faith and these become their first building blocks of faith.

Fowler’s (1981) stage two is mythic-literal faith. This stage, pre adolescence, is based on reciprocal fairness, and the world becomes a bit less ideal. “Developmentally the child is at a place where they can understand that others have a perspective; therefore they are able to understand that God has his own perspective” (Fowler, 1981, p. 139). Youth at this stage are working in a concrete frame of mind and are still looking at the world in shades of black and white. The child begins to take on the faith they are observing around them through people and stories (Fowler, 1981). The child is impacted by the symbols of faith that surround them. Pediatric nurse Newman (2011) did research on Fowler’s FDT in relation to patient care of young patients. She reflected on the key to understanding a child holistically was to understand child development from all perspectives including faith (Neuman, 2011). It is also very helpful for teachers from a CHS to view their students in a holistic way (Graham, 2009).

In Fowler’s (1981) FDT, the adolescent is in what he described as a synthetic-conventional faith stage. This stage is where he or she forms a faith framework from the influences around them. Fowler (1981) described how the stories of faith and human development come together to help us to understand FDT. Piaget (Fowler, 1981) also described how cognitive development was so important in the life of the adolescent.

Fowler’s (1981) FDT stage three is where he theorized about adolescents and how they form opinions about faith from the people in authority who inform their faith framework. A

teenager begins to collect ideas about faith. At the end of stage three, the adolescent begins to transition into a series of questions of how the faith they have collected relates to who they are as a young adult. Fowler's stage three is an important point to elaborate on in regards to CHS. Fowler (1981) said, "Communities of faith are communities of shared interpretations" (p. 98).

### **Equilibrium and Disequilibrium**

The rise of sexuality, among other changes, creates an affective disequilibrium at this stage of development (Fowler, 1981). Disequilibrium is a state of imbalance. Equilibrium, on the other hand, is a state of balance. Piaget's formal operational stage tracks the human species from age 11 through to adulthood (Fortosis & Garland, 1990). During this time, the adolescent forms ideas, begins to understand thinking, and processes huge amounts of information. When ideas adolescents have are challenged, this creates a state of disequilibrium; when adolescents figure this out, they regain balance. The cycle happens many times over the span of adolescent development. Fortosis and Garland (1990) wrote an article about disequilibrium and Christian nurture. It is important to note their findings with Fowler's (1981) FDT. They opined:

The adolescent having just entered the formal operations stage is creating a reality against which he or she will later test every incoming piece of information or data. How one handles the new information in light of one's created reality or how one changes one's reality to handle new information, is crucial to the whole process of equilibrium. (Fortosis & Garland, 1990, p. 633)

This adolescent processing was key when looking at faith. Fortosis and Garland's (1990) article went on to explain the necessity of Christian educators to create disequilibrium in areas of faith so that the young person can grapple and find out what they believe.



Fowler (1981) also suggested that faith was an important part of developing character or personality. It is vital to understand FDT when working with students at a CHS. It is the student inside of their world figuring out what they believe. They are coming into their own identity. This is a time to bridge the past where they are at present with their faith, and at the end of this stage, they are able to see their future. The beliefs of authority figures are still very important at the synthetic-conventional stage (Fowler, 1981).

Stage four is individual-reflective faith (Fowler, 1981). This stage is where the adolescent or young adult charts a new course of faith. Fowler (1981) laid out some key circumstances that help to make this transition happen. The first thing is creating distance between oneself and the value system in which adolescents were raised. The second thing is the emergence of the executive ego (Fowler, 1981). Fowler wrote how important these two things are if a person is to move past the synthetic-conventional and into a deeper faith experience. Fowler (1981) raised the concept in his research that some never reach past the synthetic-conventional stage of faith. However, for the purpose of my study on CHS and SN, it is important to understand how to guide older adolescents towards deeper stages of faith.

Fowler (1981) theorized that the later stages of faith involve a deepening that many people do not achieve. A point of reflection is that that CHS could be a time to set the patterns in motion that would prepare the students to reach for higher levels of faith due to the SN they receive. Stage five, conjunctive faith, takes place around mid-life. At this stage of faith, the individual realizes that life, with its circumstances, is serious. A person recognizes at this stage that decisions that are made are not irrevocable (Fowler, 1981). There are commitments made at this stage of life that must be kept. Conjunctive faith is about spending the second half of one's

life to help others find their way in the world of faith. This is a level of faith where a person can begin to understand the difference they can make in the world.

“It is to be part of the suffering rule of God, to oppose those structures of life that block and deny the future of persons and being in God” (Fowler, 1981, p. 210). Stage six, universal faith, is extremely rare. Fowler (1981) used examples of universal faith in people like Mother Theresa. It is a very mature level of faith that looks to help and heal the misfortune of others. An individual that is at this point in faith is absolute in their vision and what they must do to carry it out. This person sees everything in the world as sacred. They lean into the purposes of God for the world (Fowler, 1981).

At each stage transition, there is loss and gain. As Fortosis and Garland (1990) described needing disequilibrium to grow faith, it makes sense that at each stage something was left behind and that something else is gleaned. Leaving an emotionally and physically safe place to swim in the sea of uncertainty is never easy. Fowler (1981) described how in stage three, the person can still be naive about religious symbols. There was less reliance on symbols in stage four; it was more that the meanings behind those symbols can be translated into a definition that builds the foundation of an individual's faith (Fowler, 1981). The most ideal time for this transition to happen, according to Fowler (1981), is in a person's early twenties; this is not the case for everyone. “For some adults, however, the transition to stage four, if it comes at all, occurs in the thirties and forties” (Fowler, 1981, p. 181). Fowler mentioned that sometimes a personal crisis like divorce or death can bring on stage four. The later time frame was less ideal. Individuals are more adaptable to change in their twenties. A foundation for how individuals will live their lives is laid during this time period.

There is critical review of Fowler's (1981) work from the conservative evangelical community. Fowler's (1981) FDT is about creating a structure around faith versus focusing on content. The Protestant evangelical culture has been about the doctrinal content (Davis, 1986). Many evangelicals see content and structure as being inseparable (Davis, 1985; Fowler & Dell, 2006). However, Fowler contributed positively to the world of CE. Fowler (1981) determined that faith comes out of a worldview (Schaeffer, 1973). This is an extremely important point when teaching academic subjects from a Judeo-Christian viewpoint. According to Fowler (1981), everyone has faith in something. However, Fowler (1981) received criticism from the conservative Protestant culture as he described himself as a liberal Protestant.

Fowler argues that faith is a universal human phenomenon because all people believe in something....the focus of his research is to separate content of faith (what people believe) from the structure of faith (why they believe it), and then examine the deep structures of how people believe rather than what people believe....James Fowler describes himself as a classical liberal Protestant. (Downs, 1995, p. 2-3)

With the help of Fowler's (1981) structure, a teacher is able to assess for spiritual growth and maturity.

The questions for this study were centered in the context of Fowler's (1981) FDT. Streib (2005) researched effectively using Fowler's (1981) FDT. While interviewing the students of Christian high schools, I included the dimensions of life history and narrative dynamics. Streib (2005) recommended doing a "life tapestry" with interviewees to get a sense of where they were coming from developmentally in life and in their faith. I believe this may be essential with the interviews with the students of Christian high schools to determine other factors of their faith

development. Examples might be if they are from a Christian home, how long they have been a part of their Christian school, and if they attend worship and other church activities.

### **Developmental Psychology**

A secondary theorist to the study is Erikson and his psychosocial stages (Miller, 2011). Fowler (1981) leaned heavily on Kohlberg, Piaget, and Erikson for his theoretical framework. Erikson was the predominant theorist of the three for Fowler (1981). “Research is likely to show that a person of twenty-two, whose moral and faith structuring is best described by Stage 2, will indeed encounter the physical, social, and emotional issues of the crisis of intimacy” (Fowler, 1981, p. 107). Fowler (1981) drew many parallels between Erikson’s psychosocial stages and his own stages of faith.

Erikson’s psychosocial stages are well recognized in educational circles as a means to understand the development of youth. Adolescents are at a unique time of development. Erikson (1978) called it identity versus role confusion. This is a time in life when adolescents are looking for their identity outside of their parents. “In this country (America), the word ‘adolescence’ has come to mean, at worst, a no man’s land between childhood and maturity...” (Erikson, 1968, p. 5011).

Fowler (1981) confirmed that Erikson was the primary developmental psychologist upon which FDT was based. Beyond psychosocial development, Erikson wrote quite extensively about religion in his written work examining both Luther and Gandhi (Steele, 1995, p. 3). These were important works that examined the role of religion in the life cycle (Steele, 1995). Humans will naturally progress through loops in life that bring them to points of crisis to work through. “The study of identity crisis and resolution, through the reshaping of images of faith by young

Luther, opened ways to understanding the interplay of faith and culture as well as many other rich issues” (Fowler, 1981, p. 109).

Erikson took an interactionism approach to understanding the whole person. He believed in the body, the sense of self, and the dynamics of the culture all coming together to form the person (Steele, 1995). Fowler (1981) recognized the deep impact Erikson had on his work. He alerted the reader that Erikson was a strong base for his FDT.

By identity I mean an accrued awareness of oneself that maintains continuity with one’s past meanings to others and to oneself and that integrates the images of oneself given by significant to others with one’s own inner feelings of who one is and of what one can do, all in such a way as to enable one to anticipate the future without undue anxiety about losing oneself. (Fowler, 1981, p. 77)

## **Identity**

The idea of identity is where the phenomenon of faith formation schools becomes important to the Christian parent. Erikson (1968) saw adolescence as a time when youth are discovering their loyalties. Erikson’s own youth served a purpose on how he was impacted by life cycles; adolescents come together to figure out who is on their side and help each other find themselves (Erikson, 1968). The crisis of identity that is felt during the teen years can turn into a beautiful expression of self-discovery. Adolescence is a popular time for a young person to express faith in Christ (Steele, 1995). Sometimes falling in love is an act of trying to find one’s identity during these years. The opposite of identity in Erikson’s (1963) theory is confusion; confusion occurs before the adolescent gains clear understanding of his or her personal identity (Steele, 1995).

These formative years lend themselves to the adult development of intimacy. The CHS helps to coach adolescent loyalties to faith and be led to identity. Once identity is established, they can contribute to others (Steele, 1995). Christian high school educators desire for youth to form identity knowing Christ and then go out in the world to serve Him and love others. “Erikson’s own definition of love is amazingly reminiscent of the biblical concept of agape love. He stresses the self-giving nature of love and the importance of commitment” (Steele, 1995, p. 22-23). Fowler (1981, 2004) and Erikson (1973, 1963, 1968) both laid strategies that help clarify the CHS process.

### **Related Literature**

Demonstrations of SN occur in many places in our culture. I have evaluated published studies that concern themselves with SN in medical professions, secular institutions, and faiths of all types. Fowler’s (1981) work monitored the stages by which human beings progress through faith. Fowler’s (2004) work indicated that SN helps an individual progress to faith and then go deeper. The definition for spirituality in my study comes from a Judeo-Christian worldview, and the definition of nurture is to train, educate, and encourage. Training, encouraging, and education towards a faith in a Judeo-Christian worldview is the goal of a CHS.

“Pedagogy is the activity of teaching, parenting, educating, or generally living with children, that requires constant practical acting in concrete situations and relations” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 2). Christian high school concentrates on a pedagogy of faith. Teaching and educating adolescents in Christian faith is the mandate. Smith (2009) concluded that an education—whether acknowledged or not—is a formation of the desires and imagination that creates a certain kind of person which is part of a certain kind of people. He also theorized that education helps to create the whole human identity.

For the purpose of my study, I will lean heavily on the interpretation of SN from Bushnell (1861). Even though Bushnell's (1861) work is dated, his work was revolutionary in his time about the view of nurturing children to faith in the home, the church, and the school. I examined the spiritual formation work of Willard (2002). What was accomplished spiritually in the CHS relies heavily on the agreement between home, church, and school (Schultz, 1998).

### **Spiritual Nurture**

Knowing Christ is the whole purpose of nurturing faith for the Christian. Encouragement, training, and education in spiritual things begin at home (Bushnell, 1861); it is reinforced in the heart (Willard, 2002) and should be at the center of all education of youth (Schultz, 1998).

It was reported that a fellow minister once remarked to Horace Bushnell, 'When Christ sees you nearing the gate, Dr. Bushnell, I am sure He will say, There comes a man I know'. Quickly, but humbly, the great Christian replied, 'And I shall be able to say I know Him.' (Jones, 2006, p. 149)

The family was God's first institution (Schultz, 1998). When Bushnell (1861) reflected on how children would grow up Christian, the ideal setting was the Christian home.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (Deuteronomy 6:4-7, New International Version)

God's instructions in Deuteronomy are to the families of Israel; there is an expectation of passing on faith from one generation to another.

Therefore God hath set Israel in families, that the argument to duty may come upon the

gentle side of your nature, and fall, as a baptism, on the head of your natural affections. Your character is to be a parent character, unfolding lovingly the spirits of your children, As birds are gathered in the nest, they are to be sheltered and fed, and got ready for the flight. Every hour is to be an hour of duty, every look and smile, every reproof and care, an effusion of Christian love. For it is the very beauty of the work you have to do that you are to cherish and encourage good, and live a better life into the spirits of your children. (Bushnell, 1861, p. 174)

Bushnell (1861) wrote extensively on the importance of spiritually nurturing children in the home and in the life of the church. The above quote explains the responsibility of the spiritual caretaker of the children in the family. Despite the year it was written, it continues to ring true because it was based on God's inspired Scripture.

Spiritual nurture is found in many ways in the life of a CHS and in the life of the North American evangelical churches (Benton, 2008). When it is discussed from the literature, I am looking at some of the vehicles of SN; examples may be discipleship hospitality, gratefulness, grace, mission, mentoring, dignity, respect, love, encouragement, clear presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and instruction in how God wants us to live by Biblical principles (Harrison, 1999). These character traits and practices should be evident on the CHS campus.

**Friendship.** For example, friendship is considered to be an important model of faith demonstrated from one human to another (Conner, 2010). Conner described that friendship actually reflects the character of God in individuals' lives. Friendship brings love, acceptance, and encouragement. True friendship and kindness embodies the love of Christ and displays the piety of Christlikeness (Bushnell, 1861). Bibby (2009), a Canadian sociologist, conducted



extensive research on youth within Canada, and he concluded Canadian teens value friendship with peers higher than any other relationship in their lives.

Christian education needs to be intentional in its approach so as to bring the child into a way of life not just a stream of facts and ideas (Smith, 2009). Christian educators do not want to be guilty of running a Christian education establishment whose practices run contrary to the information being taught. It is more than just “right information,” it is educating the whole person to be in line with the Christian faith. Education is the idea of forming the entire person. “Education is not primary a heady project concerned with providing information; rather, education is most fundamentally a matter of formation, a task of shaping and creating a certain kind of people” (Smith, 2009, p. 26).

**Home.** Bushnell (1861) wrote in his book, *Christian Nurture*, that there is a kind of nurture that comes from the Lord. The assumption is that the authority figure becomes the vehicle of that nurture. In Bushnell’s (1861) work, the authority figure(s) he wrote about are primarily the parents in the home of the child. Bushnell’s (1861) work was very controversial in 19<sup>th</sup> century New England when Calvinism dominated Protestantism (Bushnell, 1861; Gangel & Benson, 1983; Stull, 2005). At the time, Bushnell’s (1861) work was a reaction to the common thoughts about children of the day.

In Calvinistic theology, there is a heavy inference on depravity and a common belief that children cannot enter true conversion until they are adults (Bushnell, 1861; Stull, 2005). Bushnell (1861) resisted the notion that children should be raised in an environment where they are constantly told they were bad and sinful. “The aim, effort, and expectation should be, not, as is commonly assumed, that the child is to grow up in sin, to be converted after he comes to a

mature age” (Bushnell, 1861, p. 9). Bushnell (1861) thought children should love what is good from their earliest years.

Bushnell (1861), a Congregational minister (Gangel & Benson, 1983), urged families to look deeper into a theology of infant baptism and organic faith. He believed that through the act of infant baptism, children were brought into the household of faith until mature Christian nurture led them to a saving knowledge of Christ (Gangel & Benson, 1983). He wanted families of his congregation to understand that the faith in the household could nurture the child to a place of understanding and accepting Christian faith (Bushnell, 1861). Bushnell (1861) agreed that depravity was born in the heart of each child and that they admittedly will struggle in a battle of good versus evil (Bushnell, 1861). However, Bushnell believed the true Christian faith of the parents would nurture the children to be heirs together in Christ.

“Bushnell was opposed to the individualism of the prevailing theology, and argued for the corporate side to human experience, recognizing the organic life of the family, the church, and even the society at large” (Stull, 2005, p. 51). He believed the parent would live the faith out in the home and the child would be nurtured to faith because of the sincere faith of the family. Bushnell (1861) believed that the deeper the genuine faith in the family, the greater the probability that a child would capture the faith of the parent(s). The act of the gospel being lived out in the home would be the convincing factor of faith for the child versus being told they suffer from a depravity they cannot possibly shed until their adult years. Bushnell believed the Christian home should teach children about faith—not sin (Gangel & Benson, 1983). In a CS setting, teachers must demonstrate a genuine faith for their students. “Before they (students) begin to love God, they must see their mentors loving Him” (Hamrick, 2005, p. 32).

**Church.** The work of Bushnell (1861) was extremely far-reaching and important in the life of the church. He was considered the father of CE. “Horace Bushnell was and is considered one of the dominant forces in the development of CE as a separate disciple” (Gangel & Benson, 1983, p. 283). Bushnell’s (1861) work in the field of CE does not translate directly to CHS in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, a great deal from what he wrote could be inferred to relate to CHS. What he understood about the public schooling of his time might effectively influence the CSE movement of today.

It should not be underestimated how much Bushnell’s writings were a reaction to what he experienced in his 19<sup>th</sup> century life in New England. History generalizes America at this time to be one of the most Christian nations in the world (Stull, 2005). “This culture was characterized by a blend of evangelical Christianity, the Enlightenment, science, nature and reason, republican principles, and morality” (Stull, 2005, p. 22). Bushnell (1861) had a sense of how the public school system could nurture Protestantism into the culture at large. He believed that the public education system should be open to Catholics and Protestants, and everyone could be nurtured to one Christianity (Stull, 2005). Bushnell believed the common school of his time should have clear teaching of the Scriptures (Stull, 2005).

Obviously, in 21<sup>st</sup> century public schools this type of SN is not attainable. Spiritual nurture the way that Bushnell (1861) described would be ideal for public schools, but could only be realized in the 21<sup>st</sup> century CHS (Stull, 2005). He believed the flexible nature of the child should not be hardened into stone (Bushnell, 1861). Bushnell believed holy virtue was the aim of every plan God adopts.

Despite the fact it is over 150 years old, I believe Bushnell’s (1861) work on SN was extremely important to my study. When studying the phenomenology of SN in CHS, many of

Bushnell's (1861) principles apply. Although theologically he was on the fence on some issues, his concept was what birthed CE in the life of the Protestant church (Gangel & Benson, 1983). The concept that God wants a crop of holiness and not a crop of sin is powerful energy to fuel the movement (Bushnell, 1861).

**Watch the heart.** Willard's (2002) work on spiritual formation speaks to many of the truths in Bushnell's work as well as to goals and aspirations of the CHS. In *Renovation of the Heart*, Willard (2002) examined the principle of watching over the heart. "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23, New King James Version). How one finds the world today is a result of what he or she has become in the depths of the spirit, the will, or the heart (Willard, 2002). The environment inside the Christian home, the Christian church, and the CS have a great deal of impact of the state of their hearts. Bushnell's (1861) work was careful to stress the importance of sincerity in the interaction between adults and children or young people. The heart can be translated as the springboard of motives from which we love and hate (Wesley, 1990). The training of this heart becomes so important, considering all decisions made by a young person will come from that heart.

Circumstances both good and bad will come throughout life. Some will face adversity and just ask "why", while others by God's grace will be able to make sense of the suffering (Willard, 2002). The key advice for what makes the difference, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33, New International Version). In his book *The Heart of the Matter*, Hamrick (2005) wrote about the God-focused Christian school. He wrote about the fact that individuals can know so much about God and the Bible and really miss knowing God in the fullest way that God intended. "It is all

too easy to teach the Bible as an academic book or as a book on behavior and miss the whole point of the Bible” (Hamrick, 2005, p. 31).

Hull (2006) delved deeply into the discipleship gap in the life of the evangelical church. He suggested that one of the reasons spiritual disciplines do not take root in the life of the Christian was because their hearts were not positioned to receive the training. Hull (2006) suggested the heart must foster attitudes of submission, humility, and vulnerability before the study and memorization of Scripture, prayer, worship, fasting, and relationships can take root. This was key to my study; students need to be courted to these attitudes of the heart to maximize the spiritual nurture of the their CHS.

Knowing Jesus is to face a revolution of the heart (Willard, 2002). Getting to know God is a relational matter. Willard (2002) wrote about the choices that have been formed away from God in a fallen world. Isaiah 55:8-9 described this, “For My thoughts are not our thoughts, nor are your ways, My ways says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (New King James Version). Because spiritual dimension is formed it can be transformed (Willard, 2002). The revolution is in the changing of heart and of character from the inside out.

“Spiritual formation, without regard to any specifically religious context or tradition is the process by which the human spirit or will is given a definition form or character. It is a process that happens to everyone” (Willard, 2002, p. 15). Willard (2002) pointed out that the process does not begin with self-esteem. Looking briefly at Bushnell’s (1861) *Christian Nurture*, one might conclude the journey starts with the self-esteem of the child (praising the child for what they have done right). However, a closer look reveals its praise for the righteousness for

Christ's sake. Spiritual nurture is all about helping someone to know God. "When we are lost to God we are lost to ourselves" (Willard, 2002, p. 94).

Images of the heart project an image of life. "Those with a well-kept heart are persons who are prepared for and capable of responding to the situations of life in ways that are good and right"(Willard, 2002, p. 37). Placing side-by-side Willard's (2002) spiritual formation work, Bushnell's (1861) Christian nurture writings, and Hamrick's (2005) research on the God-focused school, I believe they are completely aligned with the mission of ACSI. "ACSI exists to strengthen Christian schools and equip Christian educators worldwide as they prepare students academically and inspire them to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ" ("Vision and Mission", 2012). From Fowler's (1981) FDT, it is understood that it will be a process to inspire faith in the life of a young person. My study will help to clarify how this process takes shape in the CHS.

**Confidence.** A CHS is philosophically aligned for adolescents to grow confident in their faith walk with God. Abel (2011) analyzed how youth build confidence in areas of faith (Abel, 2011). Faith is a complicated and diverse thing, and although parents of faith want their children to carry on with those same beliefs, they often do not have research-based solutions to back their desire. Abel's (2011) study outlined the fact that adolescents have their own experience with God, and it is critical for them to build confidence in their faith. Fowler's (1981) stages clearly map out that young people need to build a faith identity of their own if they are going to progress through the upper levels of FDT. Abel (2011) outlined building confidence through acts of faith and that they are costly, come from dependable sources, come from individuals held in high regard, consistent, enduring, and repeated frequently. This study holds significance to Christian schools with a high school department. This is significant because confidence in one's faith in

high school leads to confidence in less protected paradigms like college, universities, or the workplace.

Van Brummelen (2009) wrote eloquently and practically about the nurture that was a part of Christian schools. “Nurturing children means bringing them up and cultivating their capacities in supportive, encouraging, and compassionate ways. Biblical nurture directs and redirects people to follow God’s path of integrity, righteousness, justice, and mercy” (Van Brummelen, 2009, p. 270). The teaching is key to preparing students to follow God with their lives; teachers and administrators have the responsibility to pace out God’s truth through curriculum and class techniques. Christian schools are responsible to help students to know who God was and His laws.

**Research demands.** Boerema (2011) wrote an article specifically to highlight the need for more research in ACSI schools. Teachers and administrators were surveyed about issues that needed further exploration to increase the strength of the organization’s schools. A number of excellent topics were raised. For example, one concern was whether or not the ACSI schools are living up to their mission (Boerema, 2011). My phenomenological study on SN in the CHS fits with the research demands of the organization as a whole. In another dissertation study on ACSI schools, the researcher looked at the most common teacher characteristics that relate to intentionality in student spiritual formation (Moore, 2011). This was a quantitative study. There appeared to be a gap in the literature I examined for my study. I cannot find a qualitative project that studies the phenomenon of spiritual nurture with high school students. My proposed research is a qualitative counterpart to these recommendations.

It is important to consider what stage the adolescent is transitioning to or from upon CHS graduation. Rhea (2011) explored the spiritual formation practices of the Christian academy as

an interesting perusal of thoughts about the young adult at the Christian university. This research does not apply directly to the CHS. However, the concepts of SN to a group a couple of years older than high school are valuable and worthy of consideration. Fowler (1981) contended that one is best ready to move past a synthetic-conventional level of faith when they are in their early twenties. These str the years when young adults are laying the structure for the life they will live. Rhea (2011) debated young adulthood as a time of continued transition from adolescence. The CHS wants to prepare students to be ready to move from Fowler's (1981) synthetic conventional faith (adolescence) to an individuative-reflective stage (young adulthood). After high school is completed, it becomes important for churches to think about how they can be reached through their complex youth culture. It is a time of fostering industriousness and self-expression as parts of identity formation beginning in adolescence (Kessler, 2000). Rhea (2011) clarified that the church must understand the culture in order to cultivate spiritual growth. This includes understanding how spiritual formation practices are part of the SN of the soul.

**Faith narratives.** In relation to Streib's (2005) study, I want to see the narratives of faith. Martin (2002) wrote of his faith nurture experience as a teen in *Faith Through our Changing Years*. He identified that as an adolescent he began to read about the heroes of the faith. In these books, he learned how to go forward in faith. His narrative helped to identify how his faith was formed. As he became an older teen he recognized that life was always lived in the presence of God. This narrative account gives insight to how Mennonite faith is nurtured to this man in his youth. Psalm 78:1-7 declared we should tell the next generation what God has done in our lives:

Give ear, O my people, *to* my law; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and



known, And our fathers have told us. We will not hide *them* from their children, Telling to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, And His strength and His wonderful works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob, And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers, That they should make them known to their children; That the generation to come might know *them*, The children *who* would be born, *That* they may arise and declare *them* to their children, That they may set their hope in God, And not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments. (New King James Version)

Showing the works that God has done defines what should be at the core of ministering to youth (Hamrick, 2005). The idea of SN through narrative continues in *Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture* by Abel-Van Doren (2007). *Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture* was part of a United Methodist Confirmation class. Abel-Van Dorean (2007) helped to open eyes to the power of story. She provided research on providing the story of the congregation, the denomination, Christian history, Jewish history, and the history of the Scriptures. Abel Van Dorean (2007) believed these stories help young people understand the context for the faith they are being taught. She reflected that youth valued sincerity. She believed that adolescents would be more open to hear God if their hearts were open to the spirit of the speaker. Van Brummelen (2009), opined: “All teachers are storytellers. Many are very good ones, either telling their stories directly or organizing their units in a storytelling way” (p. 932).

Spiritual development in church-run schools is a topic that surfaces in all parts of the world. Davis (2007), from Wales, noted that spiritual development in church schools can sometimes be unclear and, by definition, a bit vague. Education in Wales referred to spirituality from a Christian perspective. However, that has changed with an influx of immigrants coming

into the country (Davis, 2007). Many who responded to the questions felt it was still appropriate to use Christianity as the benchmark for spiritual development. Head teachers were surveyed and most had a clear sense of how spiritual formation impacted their school (Davis, 2007). Having pupils find their own faith identity was also considered valuable by the head teachers questioned. It seemed these church schools in Wales desired to see the next generation of pupils understand what it meant to focus on the meaning of life, to be creative, and to learn the religious context of the country. These are values that ACSI schools hold to within their schools stretched across the globe.

Researchers Fleming and Cannister (2010) studied teens in the New England states and what formats seemed most important to boost spiritual formation. Their study centered on asking the question of how youth leaders can best direct and spiritually nurture adolescence in Christ. What spiritual experiences promoted the most spiritual growth? “Many young adolescents were just on the edge of developing abstract reasoning skills” (Fleming & Cannister, 2010, p. 60). This study concluded that summer camps and retreats are times when teens grow the closest to God and feel the impact of soul nurturing. Spiritual disciplines and spiritual situations of all kinds were examined within the research. Although CHS was never observed as part of the study, it was concluded that those opportunities where youth get a chance to connect with adults are beneficial. Inter-generational, authentic relationships really help to boost a youth’s faith (Fleming & Cannister, 2010). I thought this was an interesting part of the SN that gets accomplished in the teachers’ and students’ relationships in the CHS (Black, 2008; Lanker, 2010, McCallough, 2008; Van Bummelen, 2009; Winn, 2011). Listening is an important component in any relationship. Part of making that connection was found in the teacher listening to the student’s questions (Abel-Vandoren, 2007).

Kiesling, Sorrell, Montgomery, and Colwell's (2006) article on identity research and the formation of one's sense of spiritual self provided insight into forming a spiritual identity. Students need a spiritual identity of their own. If they were going to go out into the world and be the person God intended, it becomes paramount.

However, the concern soon becomes whether these students can adequately engage and transform culture, practice genuine hospitality to the stranger, provide answers beyond 'just have faith' to the complex questions confronting a wounded creation and/or practice justice and civility in an increasingly pluralistic society. (Kiesling et al., 2006, p. 249-250)

Faith identity is formed in conjunction with the general development level of the student. In CSE, the goal is nurturing spirituality because it is vital to adolescent development.

**Secular spiritual nurture.** The discussion of nurturing from a Judeo-Christian context is crucial to my research. It is also interesting to note the research about spiritual nurture that comes from a secular viewpoint. Kessler (2000) wrote in the *Soul of Education*:

When a group of students can acknowledge the truth, whether it is malevolent or benign, when they can meet where their personal stories strike universal chord, they become a community that can respond constructively to any challenge—even death. This is the soul of education. (p. 258)

Kessler's book addressed the need to have SN in public schools and that educators often shy away from anything that seems remotely religious. Kessler's (2000) book was full of animated stories of different activities she walked students through to connect to that deeper part of themselves. Students participated in activities that build trust and allow them to be vulnerable with their peers. Kessler's (2000) definition of SN for education compelled students to share

what inspired and encouraged them. It came from within themselves and how they were evaluating the world around them. In many ways, it lined up with what Fowler (1981) conveyed that everyone has faith in something.

Kessler (2000) described seven gateways to spirituality in a secular setting: the yearning for deep connection, the longing for silence and solitude, the search for meaning and purpose, the hunger for joy, and delight, the creative drive, the urge for transcendence, and the need for initiation. These are all things that we experience in religious settings. In a Christian context, it is understood that the source of all of these seven gateways to deeper connection. Augustine's words have impact here, "all truth is God's truth no matter who finds it" (Gangel & Benson, 1983, p. 103). What is the value of truth? Truth enlightens thinking and being. The gospel of John states, "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32, New King James Version).

Spirituality confounds the culture. In *Positive Youth Development and Spirituality* (Lerner et al., 2008), a research-based book on adolescent development and the positive impact spirituality has on the process, the editors recognized the physiological need for spirituality. "The chapters in this book make clear that science and scientists were poised to engage the difficult conceptual and methodological issues involved in the search for new spiritual realities about positive development in adolescence" (Lerner et al., 2008, p. 19). Bushnell's (1861) 19<sup>th</sup> century vision for public education was to have sound biblical training and spiritual training as part of the fabric (Stull, 2005). Over time separation of church and state made it impossible for Christianity to be core to the education system. This would not have been in Bushnell's thinking. This quest for spirituality in education spoke to Willard's (2002) thoughts, "The quest for spiritual formation is in fact an age-old and worldwide one. It was rooted in the deep personal and even

biological need for goodness that haunts humanity” (p. 15). The CHS becomes that vehicle for SN in the education community.

**Private Christian education.** Some results of religious-based, private education in Canada were compiled in Cardus Education Survey (Pennings et al., 2012). This study took an extensive look at 1356 graduates. The questionnaire mined down areas like generosity, volunteerism, family status, and fulfillment in the workplace, political engagement, social connectedness, and commitment to church. The study was extremely valuable when considering the “results” of CSE. Qualitatively, this research revealed where Christian school graduates are tracking post-graduation compared to their government school counterparts. These graduates seemingly gained more of the spiritual confidence Abel (2011) talked about in his study. Even though private Christian school graduates know the culture was hostile towards their religious beliefs, they still believe it was important to get involved with politics and volunteer in the community. These graduates tend to get married younger, have more children, and find a “God led me here” purpose to the world of work.

“When it comes to deciding right and wrong Christian school and religious home-educated graduates rely on the God and/or the Bible to make decision” (Pennings et al., 2012, p. 49). When Fowler (1981) discussed stage three of faith, synthetic-conventional, he spoke of it as the time of the adolescent making faith concepts his or her own. Bibby (2009), through over 5,000 surveys of Canadian adults and teens uncovered the following: “In general, students in private religious schools, and Roman Catholic schools were more likely than others to believe in God or a higher power, pray privately, acknowledge spiritual needs, and attend services” (Bibby, 2009, p. 183).

Reflecting on CSE and patterns of faith, it is interesting to consider how other religions work to form faith in educational spheres. Marshallsay (2012) stated that there was always tension between Muslim education and secular education. He described the tensions in similar ways to how it would be described between Christian faith and secular education.

Muslim educators and educational policy makers may need to refer back to the peak of Muslim intellectual activities in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century when logical reasoning and scientific arguments were part of these theological debates and ideas; Practices which are consistent with modern theories of learning and which are in line with Islamic liturgy. (Marshallsay, 2012, p. 190)

Islamic education intends to shape character and inform worldview; these basic principles are part the Christian tradition of forming the adolescent to the faith.

### **Christian School Education Distinctives**

“Every teacher is in the process of building. You need to know what you can build on your foundation and what you can’t” (McCallough, 2008, p. 464). McCallough’s (2008) book unpacked the foundation of a Christian education. The foundation has everything to do with what the individuals bringing leadership to the school believe about God, His place in a person’s life, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Scriptures, the supernatural, beliefs about people, history, truth, and relationships. The answers to these building block questions are what make the CSE distinct.

Teachers in the CHS are creating tiny communities to teach students how to live as God would have us live. Ackerman (2007) wrote about how to continue to foster those students in that classroom to manage their behavior in a way that would be God-honouring. A teacher must keep revisiting their approach to teaching and learning and according to the purpose of the

school. “Interaction between theory and practice is complex” (Van Brummelen, 2008, p. 223). Christian schools claimed that they have a different approach than secular education, but the proof of that needs to be seen was in the practice. “It goes without saying that Christian School teachers need to pray for their students. But they also need to pray for their own ability to reach these students and for patience in finding solutions to reach these students” (Ackerman, 2007, p. 136).

Van Brummelen (2009) is a CS educator on the west coast of Canada. His book, *Walking With God in the Classroom*, encouraged the teacher to keep evaluating the nature and purpose of the school. Discussion in his book centered on the fact that God entrusts young people to families, the church, and then the school. As a Christian educator, Van Brummelen (2009) believed Christian education is a necessary part of Christian parenting. “We shortchange children’s nurture in the Lord if their schooling does not openly proclaim that ‘the heavens declare the glory of God’ and that ‘the precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart (Psalm 19:1,8)” (Van Brummelen, 2009, p. 278).

Christian education distinctives included a worldview that emulated Jesus Christ in both theory and practice. This is apparent in how the curriculum is approached. Van Brummelen (2009) suggested that knowledge is vainly received without the Holy Spirit’s guidance. The Bible informs the curriculum every step of the way, because all facts taught come from a perspective. Christian school curriculum should be impacted by, “Creation, the Great Commandment, and the Great Commission” (Van Brummelen, 2007, p. 2086). The core aspects of the Christian faith are to be core in a CHS.

### **Spiritual Nurturers: CHS Teachers**

“Students spend more hours in the classroom observing their teachers than do adults” (Dozier, 2012, p. 2) Dozier’s (2012) study is a fascinating look at how students perceive their teachers in a private CHS. Over two hundred students answered a questionnaire about the effectiveness of their teachers. This study was key because the interviewees are similar to the students in the setting where I will interview for my phenomenological study on SN in CHS setting. The conclusions addressed many academic and pedagogical issues in private Christian high schools. Two conclusions spoke to the relationship between the student and teacher. Christian high school students emphasized the importance of their school providing teachers who share the same faith and who care about them as individuals (Cunningham & Fortosis, 1987; Dozier, 2012).

Teachers care about their students. That means that they not only create a warm and supportive tone in their classrooms, but they also provide an environment in which students will develop their talents to make positive contribution to the classroom and to their future life contexts (Van Brummelen, 2009, p. 3759)

Research reinforced the importance of adults who live a consistent example through good times and bad times in front of adolescents (i.e. Christian teachers in a CHS) (Abel, 2011; Benton, 2008). When teachers provide the example of how to get through daily situations by relying on God, they become an informal mentor to the students (Lanker, 2010 McCallough, 2008; Van Brummelen, 2009; Winn, 2010).

Teachers are the most important component to SN in CHSs (Cunningham & Fortosis, 1987; Dozier, 2012; Gaebelein, 1968; Hamrick, 2005; McCallough, 2008; Schultz, 1998; Van Brummelen, 2009). Relationships are the most important part of SN. Bushnell (1861) alluded to



this in *Christian Nurture*. He cautioned that parents be careful when they interact with their children. “Everything the child sees, and hears is building an impression or shaping an attitude. This can have implications for the child’s own relationship with God” (Stull, 2005, p. 38). This is important advice for any Christian and especially teachers.

In order to nurture through encouragement, support, training, and development, a relationship must be established. Root (2012) researched the work of Lewis, respected author and Christian thinker. Root (2012) wrote that Lewis felt Trinity was proof that we need to live as humans in the context of relationship. St. Augustine concluded that God was the real source of Christian nurture and that the church as his body was to carry it out (Armstrong, 2010). Bushnell (1861) said parents were the vessels of God used for that nurture in the home. This model directs teachers in a classroom to facilitate SN.

Teachers in a CHS are often operating at a level of conjunctive faith (Fowler, 1981). Teaching in a CHS is often a decrease in pay compared to other professional teaching; what often draws teachers to use their gifts at this level is opportunity to pass on faith. “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:9, New International Version). Paul told his students that they have received the information that he taught them and they have seen it in his own conduct. Paul commanded them to put their faith into practice. “The most powerful part of this verse comes from the fact that Paul promised his students that the God of peace would be with them if they would do the things they saw in him” (Schultz, 1998, p. 55). In his book, *Kingdom Education*, Schultz (1998) wrote about the four thrusts of a great teacher: truth, proof, application, and implementation (p. 55).

“God calls Christian teachers to guide young persons into the knowledge and

discernment that lead to service for God and their fellow human beings” (Van Brummelen, 2009, p. 6862). Van Brummelen (2009) mentioned that the teacher acts as a guide and shepherd to the students in his classrooms. This shepherding is significant to the discipleship process that is part of the spiritual health of the CHS. A teacher in a CHS is responsible for the spiritual growth of the students, and it becomes an issue of stewardship.

In reviewing the phenomenon of SN in Christian high schools, the habits of the teachers have to be evaluated. Evaluation is at the heart of all progress and growth, especially in spiritual nurturing. Spiritual components were measured in one study from those who participated in small groups (Mayotte, 2010). It was revealed that prayer is an important part of a Christian schoolteacher’s day. Studies of Catholic teachers were reviewed with the literature, and they relied heavily on the use of prayer (Mayotte, 2010). Studying the Old Testament stories was reviewed, and this was discovered to be integral as part of teacher spiritual formation (Brisben & Klein, 2012). Secular or Christian universities for teacher training is part of the literature that informed this study. Thoughts and attitudes towards spiritual well being from the students in higher CE were also reviewed. These and other studies were all part of helping to shape the research around the central phenomenon of my study. Teachers need their own means of nurture to be the nurturers in the classroom. Is this challenge seriously addressed in the high school departments ACSI schools?

Hull (2006) likened those who disciple as coaches. He outlined that the coach imparts skills, imparts confidence, motivates people to do their best, models the importance of learning the basics of a skill, points people to resources, observes people in action, evaluates people’s experience, and gives them feedback (Hull, 2006). The teachers in a CHS were the coaches in regards to discipleship. However, it is important to remember it was the Lord that does the

work. “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness, made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ’” (II Corinthians 4:6, New International Version). A CHS teacher must always evaluate their dependence on the Holy Spirit to teach and reveal the truths and character of Christ to students.

Spiritual nurture in “religious” schools begins with the teachers. Bracken (2004) examined the principal’s role in coaching the teachers in this realm so that they might be committed to mentoring students spiritually. This particular study examined a case that focused on a school where the principal concentrated on helping teachers build their spiritual confidence. Bracken (2004) noted:

In relation to the teaching of a subject matter in a Catholic curriculum, a sacramental consciousness leads to a capacity to use reason, memory and imagination to see through the content to the deeper meaning in the subjects they teach, to see the mystery beyond, and to see the religious dimension of all subjects.(p. 32)

Teachers need to be prepared in order to do an adequate job of upholding the words from the gospel of Mark to educate the soul. The gospel writer stated, “What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” (Mark 8:36, New King James Version). Fowler (1981) reinforced this with the concept that Christian faith flows out of the heart of the Gospel.

### **Christian High School Students**

In *Teaching Redemptively*, Graham (2009) wrote about Christian schools as places of grace and places where students learn to walk in humility and not focus on high grades and outward success. “Omega Christian School” (Graham, 2009, p. 201) was set up as a fictitious school that keeps first things first; “Humility is fostered, encouraged, and affirmed in academic, athletic, musical and other pursuits” (Graham, 2009, p. 201). Students in this perfectly nurtured

environment look out for each other and depend on the Holy Spirit to direct them. It was an interesting illustration for a CE leader as he or she considers how the ideal school community would fit together biblically. This writing, infused with the truths of Scripture, was a wonderful demonstration of Christian high school departments as places of SN.

Students are the central factor in the CHS ministry; every student is an individual who must give an account for his or her own spiritual life. Twenty-first century, North American culture focuses on the individual. In discipleship, leaders have to look at the individual but also look to the community. “Jesus called individuals to discipleship, yet responding to that call brought the disciple into a community of faith” (Wilkins, 1992, p. 127). The discussion on discipleship formulated around whom the individual was relying on for transformation; further to that was that process of transformation. A CHS must make some philosophical decisions on how they will handle the process of discipleship within the context of education. “Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people” (Foster, 1998, p. 201). In academic settings, there is a great deal of pressure to turn out the best and brightest students academically; however, it may be the depth of training of the inner man that may produce the individuals our culture needs.

### **Adolescent Distinctives**

“Adolescence is a time of crisis” (Davis, 1986; Erikson, 1975). Erikson (1963, 1968, 1975) described their journey as one moving through an identity crisis to figure out their true identity. There are many changes mentally, physically, and emotionally, but also spiritually (Fowler, 1981). My study involved interviewing and collecting data on a phenomenon of adolescent students. Therefore, it is important to understand how important religious

socialization is at this age—it is the age when conversion is likely to take place (Smith & Denton, 2005).

There are many ideologies competing for the attention of adolescents. Detweiler (2013), wrote the book *iGods* and spoke of the difficulty of training youth in this age of digital technology. “We train our kids to look down rather than up” (Detweiler, 2013, p. 117). Detweiler expounded on the idea that digital technology gives us a false sense of control. The Internet makes adolescents feel as though they have a “godlike” support system that can give them answers to just about anything they need to know. This concept makes spiritual formation challenging for an adolescent. Detweiler’s (2013) stated concern regarding this; “Our traditional sources of authority are shifting, from people to programs, from God to Google” (p. 390). This perhaps makes a CHS experience with its spiritual nurture even more important in this millennium.

### **Spiritual Nurture Praxis**

All the things individuals do to form spirituality should be focused completely on Christ (Bushnell, 1861; Hamrick, 2005; Willard, 2002). “Among the more religiously serious American teenagers, religious practices appear to play an important role in their faith lives” (Smith & Denton, 2005). In the CHS there are tangible formalities that help nurture the students to faith in Christ. Chapel services, Bible classes, biblically-integrated curriculum, prayer, holistic correction, and peer relationships are all part of the process. Nurturing students to faith is reinforced through spiritual disciplines (Fowler & Dell, 2006). When parents enroll their child in an ACSI CHS, intentionally or unintentionally they are signing up for SN beyond their home and their church (Schultz, 1998). If students in a CHS are not focused on glorifying God with their lives, then all attempts must be evaluated. This type of school exists to provide reinforcement in

areas of Christian faith. If that is not happening, then one of the main missions of the school is being compromised (Hamrick, 2005). Students at a CHS should be somewhere on the journey of exemplifying Deuteronomy six and loving the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, and mind.

“Christianity cannot be explained or understood without reference to a distinctive cluster of practices. In order to participate in the tradition called Christianity one must necessarily participate in thee practices” (Smith & Smith, 2011, p. 15). The CHS takes these practices seriously and develops their own liturgy around instilling Christian traditions. Smith and Smith (2011) spoke eloquently to this in *Teaching and Christian Practices*; the fact Christian education is not just about transferring information but also about formation. The paragraphs to follow will explain in detail many of the habits in the Christian tradition that are put into practice during the school day and the school week.

**Worship.** Chapel services are an integral part of CHS. Every school may vary on the style of their corporate chapel worship services. Typically, it is a time when students are gathered across several grades to hear a chaplain or a speaker expound on a passage of Scripture. Brennen (2011) wrote about compulsory attendance of chapel in Lutheran schools. The argument was raised that making non-believers attend chapel services has them attending to the law versus grace (Brennen, 2011). The article concluded that non-believers could be observers in the worship experience. However, in Lutheran schools this becomes complicated since there is often a response required of the worshippers in a worship service (Brennen, 2011). Chapel services do fit the mandate of what Schultz (1998) described as the best foundation for a Christian school. Evangelism and discipleship (i.e. spiritual nurture) are the two pillars on which a Kingdom-focused CS rests according to Schultz (1998). A chapel program helps to maintain this and brings the student body together in a corporate way to accomplish SN.

Bramer (2010), of Tyndale Seminary, wrote about the spiritual formation in the life of CE. He spoke to the fact that the relationship between spiritual formation and CE is reciprocal. Those involved in spiritual formation need the training CE can offer (Bramer, 2010). According to Bramer (2010), spiritual formation has four parts, and the first one is creating the opportunity for the individual to directly to experience God. In fulfilling Schultz's (1998) idea that evangelism was part of the CHS experience, a worship service or chapel service is a way to guide the observer directly to God. This can be accomplished through scripture reading and exposition.

**Prayer.** Recently, a new teacher to the ACSI world of schools conveyed to me how much she was impacted by how the elementary students in her classroom knew how to pray. Nothing warms the heart of a Christian school principal more than hearing that the SN throughout the years was showing up in the life of the kids. Halverson (1989) wrote about the importance of prayer in the CS classroom. Halverson's (1989) book, *Teaching Prayer in the Classroom*, provided practical suggestions to teaching and mentoring students of all grade levels to pray. For the purpose of my study, I examined the practical suggestions for helping to teach prayer to adolescents:

Continue to encourage personal and private worship, expand use of formal prayers and learn about the authors, provide time and materials for regular journaling in classroom and at home, include intercessory prayer, and prayers for guidance will help youth over difficult times. (Halverson, 1989, p. 35)

Having teachers who pray was also an important part of the CHS environment. When we consider Ephesians 6:12, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of

evil in the heavenly realms” (New International Version). As professionals consider working with students in the CHS, teachers need to be equipped on a spiritual level.

It goes without saying that Christian school teachers need to pray for their students. But they also need to pray for their own ability to reach these students for patience in finding solutions to reaching these students. Trusting God will work in the situation is essential for serving difficult students.... (Ackerman, 2007, p. 143)

Mayotte (2010) discussion of the prayer of faculty in Catholic schools was an interesting look on how Christian traditions outside of the evangelical community view SN in their schools. Looking at how a Catholic faculty viewed corporate and private prayer provides many parallels for ACSI schools (Mayotte, 2010). “Spiritual writers readily note prayer’s power to transform attitudes, actions, relationships, and worldview” (Mayotte, 2010, p. 332). The participants in this study were teachers of primary and secondary Catholic schools. “The routine ritual of praying together not only expresses the faith of the group, but also reinforces values of Catholic school culture” (Mayotte, 2010, p. 343). It was interesting to review what other faith traditions have in place to nurture the next generation. I thought it profound when this researcher said, “The praying community may indeed experience ‘Christ in their midst; and be strengthened for Catholic school ministry” (Mayotte, 2010, p. 348). Mayotte alluded to what Jesus said in Matthew 18:20, “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (New Kings James Version).

**Biblically integrated curriculum.** “The greatest gift we can give our children is the gift of teachers, both at home and at school, who teach from a biblical worldview” (Schultz, 1998, p. 77). Schultz’s (1998) work recommended to parents that they must go much deeper with their child(ren)’s training than just the church the family attends. Education was debated to be another



huge factor in training the child in the ways of God. Education for the Christian household should be based on truth, which is accomplished through teachers with a biblical worldview and biblically integrated curriculum (Cunningham & Fortosis, 1987; Gaebelien, 1968; Hamrick, 2005; Lockerbie, 1994; Schultz, 1998; Van Brummelen, 2002). No education is imparted without a worldview.

In regards to instruction to the soul in CE, Van Meter's (2009) work looked closely at worldview and how the mind of the adolescent is formed during their years in Christian schooling. Van Meter (2009) wrote about the parents who choose to send their children to a CS to receive Biblical training in all subject areas "Since these students were attending a Christian school, they had repetition of being exposed to teaching regarding the existence and nature of God as portrayed in the Bible" (Van Meter, 2009, p. 31). Education from a Biblical perspective educates the mind and the soul. It exposes the human soul to its condition; only then can we understand how to put our lives together (Schultz, 1998; Cunningham & Fortosis, 1987).

Van Brummelen (2002) outlined the importance a CHS choosing the right curriculum. He concluded that the academic work of the school day was a type of worship and an avenue from which students can know Christ. Academics, Van Brummelen (2002) wrote, are also part of the spiritually nurturing atmosphere in a CS. The Bible is not used as a textbook for all disciplines but is used as a framework and a lens to see all subjects (Cunningham & Fortosis, 1987; Schultz, 1998; Van Brummelen, 2002). Students who attend a Biblically-integrated CHS are nurtured in their faith daily in their academic course work. This encourages intentional disciplines in academic rigors.

**Bible study and memorization.** Christian high schools typically have Bible classes and scripture memorization as part of programming. Biblical integration is one facet of the

curriculum but a concentrated effort on just the study, meditation, and memorization of the scriptures is another part. Hamrick (2005) warned Christian school educators to handle this responsibility with care. “We can study the Bible and miss God” (Hamrick, 2005, p. 25).

Hamrick (2005) urged that Bible study and memorization in a CS should be focused on getting to know God better.

A Bible class is not a substitute in a CHS for biblically integrated curriculum; however, it is the great joy of many CHS teachers to be able to freely teach the Word of God as a separate subject in their schools. The first basic assumption about truth from a Christian approach is that, “God’s Word is truth” (Cunningham & Fortosis, 1987, p. 71) Part of the nurturing process of a CS is the opportunity to tell the stories and teach the truths of Scripture (Gaebelein, 1968).

**Relationships with peers.** Teachers impact SN in the CHS environment with the students and the students with each other. “Christian schools, in particular, are concerned with educating students to integrate their Christian faith with their worldview so that they will conduct themselves and influence the world according to the values and principles of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures” (Campolongo, 2009, p. 70). The research in Campolongo’s article is specific to peer-mentoring programs in ACSI schools. Part of the SN that happens in the hallways of a CHS has to do with how peers learn to nurture each other. This is a byproduct of the school that happens through the intentionality of the environment. However, this body of research analyzed the peer mentoring model as an intentional approach to peer mentoring.

Campolongo (2009) reviewed peer mentoring as a way to build leadership on the CHS campus, and guidance counselors identified five areas in which it helped encourage students: personal awareness, social skills, learning skills, career interests, and character education (Campolongo, 2009). The researcher concluded that these intentional groups provide help for the

mentored but also prepare the mentors for future ministry opportunities in churches and within the community (Campolongo, 2009).

Wighting and Jing's (2009) study on the correlation between a sense of school community and religious commitment among students in a CHS examined faith and achievement. There was a positive correlation between the student's commitment to their beliefs and their ability to achieve academically. The article's discussion focused on the idea of community (Wighting & Jing, 2009). A strong sense of community reflects a holistic approach to education and inadvertently allows the student to increase in self-respect (Wighting & Jig, 2009). This type of study reveals the heart of the CHS.

"Building community means that we target all students, not just the select few who may be the natural leaders. Community means helping each person realize, appreciate, and celebrate the uniqueness and contribution of every member" (McCullough, 2008, p. 1216). Teachers and administrators should make peer interaction and community building a priority in the life of the CHS. Students need a sense of security to be successful in all aspects of school life.

**Holistic correction.** Christian education is notable for a holistic model of guiding student behavior. "The purpose of discipline is to disciple students in the Lord's way. Discipline is an opportunity to redirect students. Discipline opposes sin....It nurtures commitment to uprightness and reconciliation" (Van Brummelen, 2009, p. 3834). Due to working in a biblically-integrated school, it is essential that discipline be centered from biblical principles. Like most government schools, Christian schools want students to be developed into great citizens who contribute to society. However, there is an extra amount of accountability that ties the character formation back to the grounding of Scripture. Tripp (1995) stated:

Shaping influences are those events and circumstances in a child's

developmental years that prove to be catalysts for making him the person he is. But the shaping is not automatic; the ways he responds to these events and circumstances determine the effect they have upon him. (p. 10)

Some Christian families believe that Christian schooling is one of the shaping influences that help them guide their children.

This influence changed in the teenage years. As adolescents move into the synthetic conventional level of faith (Fowler, 1996), shaping influence in regards Christian practice continues to be important. Fowler (1996) said, “Faith must provide a coherent orientation in the midst of that more complex and diverse range of involvements” (p. 173). One of these involvements is noted as schooling.

The Apostle Paul wrote in the New Testament, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (II Timothy 3:16, New International Version). Pennings et al. (2012) interviewed over 1300 graduates from private and public schools across Canada. Alumni were asked a variety of questions that would indicate how their public, Christian, non-religious private, and Catholic schools shaped their lives. “When it comes to deciding right and wrong Christian school...graduates rely on the God and /or the Bible to make decisions” (Pennings et al., 2012, p. 49). Christian school graduates are formed by Scriptures like II Timothy 3:16. In a holistic model of correction a CS teacher and administrator look to the truths of God’s Word as guidelines for guiding student behavior.

The Ten Commandments, the book of Proverbs, and the gospel of Matthew chapters five through seven are prime examples of guidelines that teachers and administrators can use to influence their school policies to develop students. Hamrick (2005) wrote about Christian schools forming character, “True character is not learned; it is produced. It springs out of a mind

that is so focused on the Lord that one changes into His image” (p. 16). Hamrick’s conclusions about character lined up with Smith (2009), who suggested in CE, leaders must target the heart, because that is the nature habitat for desire. Correction and discipline in the CS world is to help students see Christ and desire to be like Him.

### **Summary**

Fowler’s (1981) FDT laid the theoretical framework for my qualitative, phenomenological study on SN in CHSs. Encouragement, training, and education in spiritual things begin at home (Bushnell, 1861); it is reinforced in the heart (Willard, 2002), and SN should be at the center of all education of youth (Shultz, 1998). This research will help to answer the overarching question mentioned on page 22, “How does spiritual nurture impact the development of faith with adolescents who attend a CHS”?

Bushnell (1861) and Willard (2002) provided insight into the depth of SN necessary to provide quality Christian education. Bushnell (1861) was considered the father of CE as a separate discipline in the life of the church. Bushnell (1861) lived during a time and place in American history where Protestantism was a driving force. His vision for education included a public forum that would combine versions of Christianity and help promote Protestantism (Stull, 2005).

Willard (2002) was a well-known scholar concerning issues of inner formation of the soul. His work spoke to the theology and praxis of spiritual disciplines. In *Renovation of the Heart*, he expanded on Proverbs 4:23. This passage is about guarding the heart for out of it springboard all the issues of life. It is often used in circles to reach youth encouraging them to give their ambitions over to Christ. His writing provided a framework for living out the Christian faith.

Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) affiliated high schools are unique places of learning that have their own philosophies in educating young people. This literature review has examined the most respected thinkers in the world of Christian schooling (Cunningham & Fortosis, 1987; Dexter, 2007; Gaebelein, 1968; Graham, 2009; Hamrick, 2005 Schultz, 1998). Schultz (1998) was strongly opposed to Christian parents deciding on public schooling for their children. His work was examined in light of providing the knowledge of the distinct philosophies surrounding CSE, which easily transfers to the CHS.

Adolescence is a unique time in development. The insights of the primary theorist, Fowler (1981), about the views of adolescents and their developmental faith level have been examined. The secondary theorist, Erikson (1963, 1968, 1978), provided details about human development at the adolescent level. The young people in CHS are working their way through identity versus role confusion. The CHS mission is to guide towards clarity of identity (Schultz, 1998).

There are a variety of practical components that make up the learning experience at a CHS that aid in SN: prayer, chapel, Bible study, biblical integration, peer relationships, holistic correction, and teacher-student relationships. These components of SN combine to make the CHS experience one that cannot be rivaled by the local public high school. The CHS's impact is far reaching in the area of FDT.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

### Overview

The purpose of my phenomenological study was to discover the spiritual nurture that is an integral part of the Christian high school experience. The chapter will expand on the chosen transcendental phenomenological research design, the participants chosen for the study, and the setting. This chapter closely examines the procedures to complete this study and the researcher's role in relation to the study. Data collection is laid out through three methods: observations, interviews, and journals. Data analysis took place using epoche, horizontalization, clustering, coding, textual and structural descriptions, synthesis, field notes, memos, and peer review. To verify the data I use member checks, thick descriptions, and triangulation. Chapter Three is essential to understand how my study was conducted.

### Design

“Phenomenology is interested in the activities of consciousness and the objects that present themselves in consciousness” (Giorgi, 2014, p. 4). Phenomenology is about capturing an essence of something experienced by a group of people. “What appears in consciousness is the phenomenon. The word *phenomenon* came from the Greek *phaenesthai*, to flare up, to show itself, to appear” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). It is researching the blend between what was real and what was imagined to be real. “In the broad sense that which appears provides the impetus for experience and for generating new knowledge. Phenomena were the building blocks of human science and that is the basis for all knowledge” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). Moustakas (1994) suggested phenomenology studies the structures of the experience and then interprets the situation where the experience occurred. Van Manen (1990) described the human science as explaining the lived experience; “Lived experience is the starting point and end point of

phenomenological research” (p. 36). Moustakas (1994) believed phenomenology is finding knowledge through reflection and experience.

Giorgi (2014) talked about the basic line of questioning that has been in the mind of the phenomenological researcher of the past. That first question is, “How do I measure the phenomenon I’m interested in researching?” (p. 62). Giorgi (2014) suggested that a better question to begin with is, “What the best access to the phenomenon I am interested in researching, given the question I am seeking to answer?” (p. 63). The qualitative design helped to explain the experience versus measuring it.

The first part of the process is the epoche; using this method I set aside all pre-judgments on the topic of spiritual nurture in CHSs (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Transcendental phenomenological reduction exists with the concept of intentionality. Intentionality is uncovering the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Basing much of his work on Husserl (1999), Moustakas (1994) delved into the concept of intuition. It is the launching off point to arrive at the knowledge of the human experience. Intuition is what actually presents itself. Moustakas (1994) described all three components of transcendental phenomenological reduction; transcendental in the sense that the experience moved beyond the everyday to the pure ego in which everything is freshly perceived. Phenomenological reduction transforms the world into mere phenomena. The reduction leads back to the source of meaning and existence of the experiential world. Synthesis is the fresh take on knowledge with intuition and finding the knowledge through personal experience. Moustakas (1994) reflected on being led to knowledge by his own sense of self. It is important to work with participants to help them develop synthesis of their own lived experience, and Van Manen (1990) wrote about this in depth.

To do a phenomenological study of any topic, therefore it was not enough to simply



recall experiences others or I may have had with respect to a particular phenomenon.

Instead I must recall the experience in such a way that the essential aspects, the meaning structures of this experience as lived through, are brought back, as it were, and in such a way that we recognize this description as a possible experience, which means as a possible interpretation of that experience. (Van Manen, 1990, p. 41)

Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell (2004) stated, “The way of analyzing phenomenological data, according to Moustakas, follows a systematic procedure that is rigorous yet accessible to qualitative researchers” (p. 6). Van Manen (1990) used an approach between interpretive and descriptive phenomenology. I used a Moustakas (1994) approach, which concentrated more on descriptive phenomenology. A transcendental phenomenological researcher needs to understand the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2007). As the researcher, I conducted interviews with participants in order to describe the essence of the lived experience. In order to capture the essence of a phenomenon, I needed to interview enough participants to understand the whole context. The questions the participants answered, as part of their journals, helped to define the context of the whole essence. It was important for me to analyze the data for significant statements and themes that emerged that help described the lived experience (Creswell, 2007). Giorgi (2012) recommended reading the whole description in order to get a sense of the entire situation and also going back to the beginning and rereading.

“Phenomenology does not dictate to phenomena but rather it wants to understand how phenomena present themselves to consciousness and the elucidation of this process is a descriptive task” (Giorgi, 2012, p. 2). Giorgi (2012) also indicated that researchers should be extra sensitive to the psychological well being of the participants and the phenomenon that will be researched. This was important guidance for me as the researcher of a study that involves

adolescents and faith. It has already been established in this study that adolescence is a vulnerable time in life and issues of faith are sensitive areas to research.

“In phenomenological research, the question grows out of an intense interest in a particular problem or topic” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 104). The research design was a transcendental phenomenological study. “Qualitative research is intended to approach the world ‘out there’ (not specialized research settings such as laboratories) and to understand, describe and sometimes explain social phenomena ‘from the inside’ in a number of different ways” (Kvale, 2007, p. 123). Phenomenology was chosen for this study because it was clear that for SN to be uncovered, it was a collective voice that needed to be heard. One voice is heard in a case study, and I felt with this study I needed to broaden the voice. The design implemented by the data collection methods. As Moustakas (1994) stated,

Phenomenology, step by step, attempts to eliminate everything that represents a prejudgment, setting aside presuppositions, and reaching a transcendental state of freshness and openness, a readiness to see in an unfettered way, not threatened by the customs, beliefs, and prejudices of normal science, by the habits of the natural world or by knowledge based on reflected everyday experience. (p. 41)

The details surrounding SN in CHS were important. The details were collected through the epoche, gathering significant statements, clustering the statements into themes, effects of the central phenomenon, textural descriptions, structural descriptions, and establishing the essence (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004).

The purpose of this study was to be able to hear the voice of the participants surrounding the phenomenon. This study required taking the participants on a reflective process.

Phenomenology is the accepted process of understanding that knowledge is rooted in meaning

(Moustakas, 1994). Choosing transcendental phenomenology is to reflect on my subjectivity to the topic as a human instrument (Maxwell, 2013). This topic has a great deal of meaning to the Christian school community, the life of the church, and the Christian home. I looked for descriptions of SN as it related to the faith formation of adolescents and the impact of SN praxis in the CHS.

“The phenomenological epoche does not eliminate everything, does not deny the reality of everything, does not doubt everything—*only the natural attitude*, the biases of everyday knowledge, as a basis for truth and reality” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 110). This was the original vantage point, and in my study, I looked at my own experience in CHS. The epoche is a way I could enter into consciousness and open my mind up clearly seeing my version of the lived experience. This is a way to put all prior attitudes and ideas aside and to start with a fresh slate. “In the epoche, no position whatsoever is taken; every quality has equal value. Only what enters freshly into consciousness, only what appears as appearance, has any validity at all in contacting truth and reality” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 88).

This is the first step to mining out the essence of the phenomenon. “It is in reference to others, their perceptions and judgments must be put aside to achieve epoche and only the researcher’s perceptions were retained as indicators of knowledge, meaning and truth” (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004, p. 7). The epoche is the beginning of a journey towards the truth of what is happening in a situation. Husserl (1967) called it a solitary philosophical situation with self. By getting all of my own feelings and preconceived notions out on the paper, I was able to face the interviews with the participants with more clarity, honesty, and vulnerability.

Through the process of the interviews with the participants, significant statements emerged about the SN in Christian high schools. I made a running list of these statements and

categorized them into themes. “The researcher then analyzes the data by reducing the information to significant statements or quotes and combines the statements into themes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 159). The statements and themes became important to conduct the next step of transcendental phenomenology mainly: textual descriptions. The statements were considered equal and taken down without judgment.

In order to frame the textual descriptions, I needed to find out: “What participants experienced” (Creswell, 1994, p. 60). Moustakas (1994) stated that it is the researcher’s job to create a comfortable environment where the participant can best describe their experience. “This is called a textural description and includes thoughts, feelings, examples, ideas, situations that portray what comprises an experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 47). Approaching the interviews casually and with sincerity created the comfortable atmosphere. Uncovering what the participant experienced was one part of the essence and then I developed the structure for that experience.

A structural description of the experience is “how they (the participants) experienced it (the phenomenon) in terms of the conditions, situations, or context” (Creswell, 2007, p. 60). Both of the textual and structural descriptions came together to describe the experience the participants has had or was having. The blend of these two descriptions created a synthesis of truth in the situation (Moustakas, 1994). “In the grasping of the meaning of experience, we are engaging in a process of functioning intentionality; we uncover the meanings of phenomena, deliver them from the anonymity of the natural attitude, move them toward an inclusive totality of consciousness” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 31).

The voices that represented the phenomenon were the students of the CHS. Personal faith passed on from one generation to another is an important part of the CHS experience. My study

adds to the body of research in a new way by applying Fowler's FDT (1981) to SN provided for the CHS student.

The process of designing a qualitative study begins not with the methods—which is the easiest part of the research, I believe—but instead with broad assumptions central to qualitative inquiry, a worldview consistent with it, and in many cases, a theoretical lens that shapes the study. (Creswell, 2007, p. 37)

The study looked to Erikson (1963, 1968, 1978) on issues of identity as related to faith formation. “The reliability of young adult commitments largely depends on the outcome of the adolescent struggle for identity” (Erikson, 1978, p. 71). I processed the phenomenon faith identity and how it was formed in SN provided in the CHS environment.

The research for my study on SN in CHS included me bracketing out my first thoughts and prejudgments as they related to what I am bringing to the study (epoche). This transcendental phenomenological approach to SN in CHS includes bringing together the textural descriptions of the essence and the structural descriptions of the essence. Textural descriptions (what is being said) and structural descriptions (the context in which it is being said) provided a reality for what is happening. The human science of phenomenology helped me to expose student perceptions of SN through the process of interviews with questions rooted in Fowler's (1981) FDT. The statements the students made during these interviews were key to create themes of meaning to the subject of SN in CHS environment. Observations and journaling were significant ways of understanding the lived experience.

### **Research Questions**

Moustakas (1994) wrote that in phenomenological studies the researcher should form a

question based on personal and social significance. The topic of my research, SN in a CHS, is deeply rooted in my interest of CSE. “The researcher's excitement and curiosity inspire the search. Personal history brings the core of the problem into focus” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 104). The central question for this study is: How does SN impact the development of faith with adolescents who attend a CHS? Bushnell (1861) and Willard (2002) described the courtship of faith to be a process that is best started when individuals are young and is very intentional in its approach. Fowler (1981) wrote that with a concentration on intentionally to nurture faith, children might indeed help youth to accelerate in the stages of faith. However, Fowler (1981) cautioned this should not be the goal of SN, but it may simply be the result. The central question at the heart of CHS is the extended spiritual nurturing that Bushnell (1861) recommended for the family, Fowler (1981) recommended for faith development, and Schultz (1998) recommended for a schooling system.

Additional questions were: (a) what themes arise in relationships with teachers to help adolescents build faith in a CHS setting and help build Faith Development Theory? (Abel, 2011; Benton, 2008; Fowler, 1981; Graham, 2009; Harrison, 1999; Rumer, 1966; Van Brummelen & Koole 2012; Winn, 2010), (b) what themes arise in the relationships between peers that help with faith identity and Faith Development Theory? (Erikson, 1963, 1968, 1978; Fowler 1981; Kiesling et. al., 2006; Leslie, 2005; Letsinger, 1996; Smith & Denton, 2005), (c) what statements about the school environment help to understand the impact of spiritual nurture on faith and faith development theory? (Fowler, 1981; Rhea, 2011; Roehlkepartain, Benson, King, & Wagner, 2006; Smith & Denton, 2005; Van Brummelen & Koole, 2012), (d) what are the student thoughts and feelings about building faith while attending a CHS? (Bertram-Troust & DeRoose, 2007; Davis, 1986; Schultz, 1998), and (e) how does this impact Faith Development Theory? This

study intended to capture the phenomenon of SN in the CHS by interviewing the students. Moustakas (1994) suggested the themes be considered horizons that appeared as the topic was explored.

### **Participants**

Those who volunteered to become participants were an integral component of this research process. “The aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and were able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 15). In order to create the proper base of research, the right participants needed to be chosen who could provide a description of the phenomenon. Initially, as the researcher, I selected those who I believed to be a purposeful representation of SN in CHS. Further, the individuals were willing to participate in lengthy interviews, surveys, and journal writing (Moustakas, 1994). The participants in this study were from a CHS in eastern Canada. I expected to make connections within the largest CHS in the Maritime Provinces and interview 15 students. The number of students was based on Moustakas’ (1994) advice in chapter six of his book on phenomenological research. Initially, I contacted the principal by phone and then visited the school to seek favorable participants. The principal was an important part of connecting with a purposeful sample.

I was open to the interview process past 15 participants if saturation had not been reached with emerging themes. Individuals emerged as excellent candidates to interview based on what initial candidates recommended—“snowballing” was permitted in the study (Maxwell, 2013). Snowballing is the idea of continuing with new themes until they stopped (Creswell, 2007). These students were part of an ACSI high school and were intentionally selected for perceived experience with this phenomenon. “Polkinghorne recommended that researchers interview from

5-25 individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 61). Given the flexible recommendation from the literature, I focused on finding 15 individuals willing to go in depth with their CHS faith experience. The students attended an ACSI high school for two years. Students had been attending a CS for a period of time before they would be able to articulate the spiritual nurturing process. They were both male and female to demonstrate the diversity on campus. They needed to identify themselves as evangelical Christians and they needed to identify that they grew up in an evangelical Christian family. I used the Barna Group’s (2015) definition of an evangelical Christian:

Evangelicals are born again, meaning those who say they have a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. They believe they will die and go to heaven because they have confessed their sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior....This faith is very important in their life today; believing they have a personal responsibility to share their faith. They believe Satan exists; believe that eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not works; believe Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth; assert the Bible is accurate in all the principles it teaches; and describe God as all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect Deity who created the Universe and still rules today. (Barna Group, p. 4, 2015)

An important part of capturing the phenomenon was choosing the purposeful sample in the most homogeneous way possible. The principles followed in the home were reinforced at school:

The school’s role must be established providing support to the home. Schools can never replace the home as the primary place where a child’s training and education take place. Christian homes must be certain that their children’s school was founded on the same biblical principles and values by which their home operates. By choosing a school



that holds to their Christian beliefs and values, parents ensure that their children will receive a consistent education both at home and at school. (Schultz, 1998, p. 109)

Schultz (1998) reflected on the church's role in the life of a child/young person and how a three-legged stool was demonstrated the church, the school, and the home. For the purpose of not being too narrow, I looked for participants that align with two-thirds of this analogy.

Once the parents granted permission, I explained to the participants what their role was in regards to helping capture the essence of the phenomenon. It was explained that I worked through the human science of the lived experience (Van Manen, 1990). The participants were central to the entire study in phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). As the interviews came to a conclusion, I expressed my gratitude to the participants and allowed them to read their transcripts to check for accuracy in their interpretations of faith and life at the CHS (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen; Creswell, 2007).

The actual type of sample was a criterion sample: "All cases that meet some criterion; useful for quality assurance" (Creswell, 1994, p. 127). The students who volunteered agreed that they were Christian, had been at the school at least two years, and were between grades 9-12. This criteria made the sample purposeful.

### **Setting**

The Eastern Canadian district of ACSI is spread across five provinces, which is a broad expanse of almost 2,000 kilometers. This spread is indicative of Canadian culture. The Atlantic Region of Eastern Canada is a small landmass with an even smaller population base. Our CSs are part of larger Maritime centers.

I am a principal at a CS in New Brunswick, and I am elected to represent Maritime schools on the ACSI Eastern Canadian board. I chose this region because I feel invested and

connected to the schools. I wanted a representation of the spiritual nurturing from CHSs in this region. It was my intent that this will bring some unity to our common purpose. The ACSI regional director works out of an Ontario office where the largest numbers of our Eastern Canadian schools are located. The regional office is overseen by an elected board of principals from each part of the region. ACSI schools are basically organized as Maritime schools and Ontario schools. The ACSI schools in Canada are not “accredited” by ACSI as they are in the United States. The Ontario and PEI schools have a number of provincial guides to follow within the life of their schools. It is important to note that in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia the government does not impose any regulations on private schools. Being a part of ACSI is an important support system for Canadian Christian schools, especially in the Maritimes where there are no other organizational options. Although schools are not held accountable to a list of standards and outcomes, it is a tightknit community between schools and the mission and vision of ACSI is respected and for the most part carried out. The fact that ACSI does not offer accreditation in Canada could impact the interpretation of the study. It is important to understand that schools observe the vision and mission of ACSI global, but they were not held to or evaluated by ACSI standards.

I chose to select my participants from Halifax Christian Academy in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Halifax Christian Academy is the largest CS in the Maritime regions and hosts the largest high school department in the Maritime Provinces with over 60 students between grades 9-12. Halifax is home to several prestigious universities, including Dalhousie, St. Mary’s, Mount Saint Vincent’s, and King’s College. Halifax Christian Academy is intentional about the spiritual nurturing of their students. Halifax Christian Academy has an open enrolment policy; non-Christian students and families are accepted as long as they respect the schools right to teach

from a Christian perspective. There are students from different types of backgrounds, including Muslim families. However, many of the families involved with the school are evangelical Christians. This school was an excellent choice for a purposeful sample of participants.

Halifax is the largest and most multicultural city in Atlantic Canada. Halifax Christian Academy represented a number of different people groups within their community of families. Christian schools typically have all of the components of SN praxis that were researched in chapter two: worship, prayer, Biblical integration, Scripture memory, teacher-student relationships, holistic correction, and relationships between peers. I was able to observe each facet of spiritual praxis and discussed these aspects with the students during the interviews. There were questions related to each part of the spiritual nurturing process in the journal.

### **Procedures**

There were a number of procedures to complete this study. The dissertation prospectus needed to be passed and the development of a dissertation proposal followed this in EDUC 989. The dissertation proposal was submitted to the research consultant. The preliminary IRB forms were submitted, and then I awaited approval. Once permission was granted, my research could begin.

The first thing on the list was to secure participants. I called Halifax Christian Academy and followed up with a visit. Initial information was given out to students as I cast the net to secure their interest, their willingness in the study, and their consent to be participants (see Appendix A). Once I had the consent and assent confirmed with the participants, I began setting up times for interviews (see Appendix B). The interviewees were minors, and I needed consent forms filled out from both the family and the school. I needed to make arrangements for places to meet and to interview and the means to video with audio for future transcription. Arrangements

were negotiated for the online journals. I made a site visit to the school before making recommendations about where best to do observations.

To follow the proper phenomenological guidelines Creswell (2007) recommended, I located the participants by looking for people who have experienced the phenomenon. My questions were centered on Fowler's (1981) FDT and the SN of CHS (Bushnell, 1861; Schultz, 1998; Willard, 2002). The chosen participants had attended CS for at least two years and identified as evangelical Christians. As recommended by Moustakas (1994), Polkinghorne (2005), and Creswell (2007), 15 participants were chosen for the interview process. The participants were interviewed more than once, and they were given the opportunity to review their transcriptions. The transcriptions were coded on my computer.

### **The Researcher's Role**

In conducting the research I was careful to take the role of "human instrument" in this study (Moustakas, 1994). I researched and listened for the collective voice of the CHS students. I have a working relationship with many principals in the Maritime region. I had developed a relationship with the previous principal at Halifax Christian Academy (who still has an active role in the school) and the current principal. I chose transcendental phenomenological research because I wanted to bracket out my own feelings on the topic and let the participants' voice be heard. "The phenomenological epoche does not eliminate everything, does not deny the reality of everything, does not doubt everything—*only the natural attitude*, the biases of everyday knowledge, as a basis for truth and reality enters freshly into consciousness" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 84). I chose to do the research outside of my own school since it would be difficult for me to get accurate results from the students.

I graduated from a Christian high school in 1992. I enrolled in a Christian School Education program at Kingswood University (formerly Bethany Bible College) and graduated with a degree in Christian School Education in 1996. I began teaching two years after graduation and also began a Master's Degree program at Cairn University (formerly Philadelphia Biblical University) and I graduated with my Master's of Science in Education in 2003. I have been enrolled in the Ed.S/Ed.D at Liberty University since 2007.

I wonder about faith development in my own life and how I was impacted by my 12 years of CSE. As I read through Fowler's (1981) work and study Bushnell (1861) and Willard (2002) on SN, I see how God used the SN praxis of my CSE to build my faith. For the last 18 years I have worked with students on the journey of SN in their CSE. A CHS was the only place an adolescent could receive an education that focused on pedagogy of faith rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition. I am passionate about helping parents understand what the CHS can do for their child in regards to faith development.

### **Data Collection**

There are specific ways to collect data within qualitative research. Collection of data for the qualitative researcher does not happen in a laboratory, but it is about collecting information from real life situations.

The perceptions that emerge from angles of looking Husserl (1999) [the grandfather of transcendental phenomenological research] called horizons. In the horizontalization of perceptions every perception counts; every perception adds something important to the experience. The entity or object was never exhausted in properties and meanings.

(Moustakas, 1994, p. 53)

Moustakas made the point that qualitative research is going out and collecting human perceptions around a phenomenon. The first thing I needed to do was find the participants willing to tell their story, be observed, and write their perceptions down for me in the form of an online journal.

Creswell (2007) indicated that people must be chosen who have experienced the phenomenon.

Data collection for qualitative research should come from a variety of methods.

“Triangulation involves using different methods as a check on one another, seeing if methods with different strengths and limitations all support a single conclusion” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 2286). The majority of experts in qualitative research recommended triangulation with at least three sources of data collection (Creswell, 2007). This study included interviews, observations, and journals. All three of these methods of data collection were reviewed in great detail. The data was stored in specific computer files and backed up by an external hard drive. Data was coded in a way to protect confidentiality. Password protection was used to limit file access.

## **Interviews**

“For a phenomenological study, the process of collecting information involves primarily in-depth interviews” (Creswell, 2007, p. 131). Interviews were conducted with students. The interview questions helped guide the process and can be viewed in Appendix C. Rapport with the individuals being interviewed was established in advance, and I asked for assistance from someone who was an expert in the field of helping with the SN of students in the life of a CHS.

“The interview is a conversation that has a structure and a purpose determined by the one party—the interviewer” (Kvale, 2007, p. 380). When conducting the interview, it is important to have enough time to complete whatever issues emerged as the interview progresses. Kvale’s (2007) book about conducting interviews has a great deal of insight as to how to pace out and plan for the best interview possible. He discussed the art of interviewers as miners and not

travelers. In other words, the researcher is going deep to gain the information instead of just skimming a lot of surface. Qualitative researchers must be prepared to mine the data with thoughts of their analysis later in the process.

“The interviewer is responsible for creating a climate in which the research participant will feel comfortable and will respond honestly and comprehensively” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). I relied on Moustakas (1994) and Kvale (2007) as I executed a plan to set up interviews, formulate interview questions, and follow up on interviews with individuals. Moustakas (1994) was direct about how the researcher of a transcendental phenomenon needed to bracket out his or her connections and background previous to the interview through the epoche.

“The participants are asked two broad general questions: What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 61)? The interview questions were based on Creswell’s review of Moustakas (1994). A layout of the interview questions can be referenced in Appendix C.

The purpose of the student questions was to gain insight into their environment at school. I desired to gain honest thoughts about how they felt about the interactions taking place with teachers, peers, and the praxis of SN in their CHS environment. Erikson (1978) he cited trust as one of the important factors of finding identity. These questions helped to uncover the amount of trust the student had in the spiritually nurturing environment of the CHS.

All the interviews with the students needed to be transcribed. Kvale (2007) suggested that videotaping was very time consuming. Notes were taken, but not so many as to distract the participants. “The amount of form of transcribing depends on such factors as the nature of the material and the purpose of the investigation, the time and money available” (Kvale, 2007, p.

1996). I used Quick Time on my Mac Computer as the key source to voice record the interviews. I hired a graduate student to transcribe the voice interviews to text.

“The very nature of qualitative interviews is their openness. No standard procedures or rules exist for conducting a research interview of an entire interview investigation” (Kvale, 2007, p. 913). I met with the participants initially to get to know them and introduce the “what” of the study as Kvale (2007) suggested. I continued a journal of my own thoughts throughout the process. I conducted a second interview with the students using the questions provided in this chapter. A third meeting was set up to explain the journals. During the fourth meeting, I went through the transcriptions with the participants.

Creswell (2007) wrote the necessity of being respectful of the time of the participants and keeping the time of the interview(s) to the time promised. I wanted each interview to be under 45 minutes. The interviews were the most important part of this study of SN in the CHS. The comfort of the participants was essential to the success of the study.

### **Observations**

Observations were an important part of my qualitative study seeing the participants in their context. Moustakas (1994) spoke to the blending of what is present in the imagination and what is present in reality and sorting through all possible meanings. Observations in a phenomenological study are ways to getting to these vantage points as the researcher. Creswell (2007) warned of the drawback to observations such as knowing what role I took as the observer. Creswell (2007) also recognized how overwhelming the amount of information there is to take in with observations.

I intended to spend a total of a week of school days observing in the school where the research was taking place and where the interviews were conducted. As recommended by



Creswell (2007), I began the observations by taking notes down about what I saw. I followed that up with getting more involved with the students so I could gauge their responses to situations. I desired to observe the praxis of SN within the school. I was placed in a location where I could observe peer interactions: the cafeteria, locker area, student union area, and classroom. It was also be helpful to observe the student-teacher relationships in the classroom. It was essential to observe the chapel program, Bible classes, and regular biblically-integrated classes. I believed the observations revealed informal things about the participants that helped make sense of how their training was helping them on a practical level.

In order to accomplish this, I received permission to be at the site and observe interactions. Creswell (2007) mentioned the need to capitalize on whom I observed in the process. I decided I wanted my role to be a participant or an outside observer (Kvale, 2007). It was necessary to formulate a model and to extract information from a CHS environment. Observation, according to Maxwell (2013), helped me draw inferences to individual situations that may not have been uncovered with interviews alone. Descriptions of the settings, introductions of the setting, and withdrawal from the setting to collect the data were all necessary components to the process of observing situations (Creswell, 2007). I video recorded portions of the observations.

The notes I made reflected what was actually happening in the environment and what I believed to be happening (Creswell, 2007). I made several trips to the Halifax Christian Academy to understand which locations in the school would position me best to observe the students. I was introduced as an outsider and worked to become part of the background while observing. Creswell (2007) recommended after completing the observations, inform the participants and show the research that was being used.

## **Journaling**

A researcher needs more than one method of data collection to reexamine his or her understanding (Maxwell, 2013). There was an online journaling section for students. The questions asked to the participants as part of the journaling process were rooted in Fowler's (1981) questions on faith and how people extract meaning out of life. The journaling questions can be found in Appendix D.

I kept a personal thoughts and feeling journal while conducting the research. Moustakas (1994) uncovered interesting research about longing. He observed that, as human beings, individuals have deep longings to understand things and to understand each other. I believe journaling was a way to get to the root of some of the longing that may be present with students in regards to SN. There is a longing for spiritual nurturing in the human spirit. However, in the sense of the study, longing was considered to be a driving force of mining out the information of the phenomenological study. Journaling questions were posted to the interviewees' pre and post interviews. These journals were considered a valid component of the research and considered field texts (Creswell, 2007). Primary sources like Moustakas (1994) helped to clarify my phenomenological thinking about SN.

The experience of longing is a thirst to connect deeply. The myriad objects of connection are unique expressions of humanity. Like fingerprints, they reveal whole worlds of each person's inner self. They reveal individual constellations of desire and unique journeys of: possibilities, wholeness, completion, love, as they are put into play as part of school life. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 152)

The journals were a way for the students to self-reflect on faith in their lives. It was interesting to observe the text and how well they can articulate issues of faith.

## **Data Analysis**

It is important that triangulation is achieved when collecting data. Three forms of data collection are necessary. Those forms of collection all have strategies for analysis (Maxwell, 2013). Creswell (2007) recommended a number of analytical procedures for a phenomenological study. I kept a log and bracketed out my own opinions. As stated earlier, Moustakas (1994) called the bracketing process an epoche. “The epoche is the first step in coming to know things, in being inclined toward seeing things as they appear, in returning to things themselves, free of prejudgments and preconceptions” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 90).

### **Coding and Transcribing**

In the interview portion of my data, I created and organized files of data into themes. “The main categorizing strategy in qualitative research is coding” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 2408). I began coding initially in the margins. Creswell (2007) recommended a template for coding: epoche, significant statements, meaning units, textural description, and structural description. The conversations with the participants will be recorded and then transcribed into documents. I produced the conversations word for word and prepared them as documents for the interviewee to review. This was required a second interview session.

### **Horizontalization and Clustering**

Multiple statements emerged in the beginning and then by putting the themes through a data spiral (Creswell, 2007), they were synthesized into an account of the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) described the act of horizontalization as seeing the statements appear on what could be thought of as a horizon and when one disappears another comes on the scene. “Any lived experience description is an appropriate source for uncovering thematic aspects of the phenomenon it describes” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 92). The essence of the phenomenon needed to

be established at this point. It was important to establish what was happening in the midst of the experience. Themes surfaced after looking at the interview transcriptions. I clustered the themes into tables (Creswell, 2007).

### **Textural and Structural Descriptions**

Moustakas (1994) wrote about the textual description of data analysis. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. Then I evaluated what themes emerged from the text. From excerpts of the text, I captured the phenomenon and the conditions and relationship to the phenomenon became apparent. This was the part of my study where the research yielded fruitful analysis of the phenomenon of SN.

Moustakas (1994) wrote about the structural description analysis of the phenomenon. This type of analysis uncovered the essence and meaning of the experience as individual textual structures were analyzed. The researcher considered how the individual textual descriptions connect to the topic. In this study, I considered the textual structures from the students and how they relate to SN. Individual textual structures were compiled to hear the collective voice with composite textual description. Individual responses were connected to the theme, and then they were all connected to each other in phenomenological data analysis.

### **Synthesis**

The final gate of connecting strategies (Maxwell, 2013) according to Moustakas (1994) was the concept of synthesis. How does the individual impact the theme? How does the individual's textual analysis impact the collective voice and create the phenomenon and the essence? The synthesis took it to a level of understanding as to how all of this described what was actually happening in a situation. In this study, the phenomenon of SN impacted students' connection to the CHS.

### **Field Notes for Observations**

Field notes were taken with all observations. Observations took place casually within the school with the potential of some things being video recorded such as chapel services or classroom instruction. In chapel and in class, I placed the video device to observe the students' expressions versus having the video camera filming the teacher. This part of the data was important to form the context of the study (Creswell, 2007). It provided reflection in the place where the phenomenon was experienced. Providing a detailed description of the context where the phenomenon unfolded helped the essence of the phenomenon to be understood. The observations needed to be structured so that they could be a productive part of the research. The field notes included a description of the participants, observations used all of the senses, notes made with looking and not listening, notes made with just listening and not looking, photographs taken and kept in sequence as a deeper look into the situation, and simple direct observations (Kawulich, 2005). As the researcher, I also wrote out experiences and reflections. I watched for significant themes to emerge.

The goal was to establish an online place where the participants would answer reflective questions and give insight into their experience with faith. Spiritual nurturing themes emerged from rigorous analysis of the online journals. The themes were grouped into larger themes. Those documents and the personal components of the online journals helped to clarify the essence of the phenomenon. These documents provided a textual sense of the study (Creswell, 2007).

### **Writing Memos**

Writing memos while collecting data was helpful to analytically connect to the data, (Maxwell, 2013). This became helpful when backing the data into categories and graphing out

the concepts and how they related to one another. The themes broke out with descriptors. The recorded statements were reviewed. Member checks were performed and those interviewed about SN in CHS had the opportunity to look over the notes and transcriptions of their interviews to see if they agreed with the interpretation. I had an expert in the field look at the research and debrief on the process.

### **Trustworthiness**

It was essential that trustworthiness be considered in the study. Credibility was established in this study in a variety of ways. To start with, I outlined my own qualifications for doing this study. This proved that the research was something I was capable of processing because of my background in education and my earned bachelors, masters, and specialist degrees. This was essential since I was the “human instrument” in the study (Shenton, 2004).

Maxwell (2013) provided a checklist for trustworthiness (validity) within qualitative studies. I incorporated a number of them into my study. These included long-term involvement, rich data, respondent validation, discrepant evidence, triangulation, and comparison (Maxwell, 2013). I used long-term involvement by repeating several observations so I could be sure of my theories.

### **Triangulation**

There were three types of data collected to perform triangulation (Creswell, 2007). “In triangulation, researchers, make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). I used an outside audit, thick descriptions, and a member checks.

### **Peer Review and External Check**

Peer review or debriefing provided an external check of research process (Creswell, 2007). The role of the person who helped with a check is to ask questions on the other side of the research. This process needs to be documented. Asking a peer to provide feedback helped me understand my own conclusions (Maxwell, 2013). I chose a peer to provide this check to accomplish the goal of triangulation (Creswell, 2007). The qualifications of this peer was a person who had a doctorate degree and had a working understanding of Christian education.

### **Member Checks**

Member checks (respondent validation) were also essential. This involved going back to the transcriptions and making sure that what was said was what was “meant to be said” by each participant. Intervention happened when something was discovered and the participant observed changed his or her tactic. Comparison between individual interviews, journal entries, and observations were key to creating a trustworthy study. By analyzing the interviews, I was able to “transfer” the interview to other subjects and situations (Kvale, 2007). To ensure the honesty of the participants, I did not conduct research in the school where I am principal.

### **Thick Descriptions**

There were thick descriptions of the context surrounding the emerging themes (Shenton, 2004). Thick descriptions mean providing a context for the information. “Rich descriptions, that explore the meaning structures beyond what were immediately experienced gain a dimension of depth” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 152). Van Manen (1990) went on to discuss that researchers must show what the text is trying to teach them. Creswell (2007) recommended thick descriptions as a means for understanding the narrative and the emotion behind the phenomenon.

Moustakas (1994) used the word “synthesis” in relation to trustworthiness (validation) of research. It is important to confirm that the researcher and the participants are saying was the same thing. This topic of study could be incorporated into other sections of ACSI. The research could be conducted in other religious school organizations. For example, it could be conducted for Catholic or Anglican schools. It could also be conducted for younger students or post-secondary students.

### **Ethical Considerations**

“Human science researchers are guided by the ethical principles on research with human participants” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 109). The first ethical consideration in this study was attaining permission from the schools, students, their parents and the teachers (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). I analyzed to insure the study was clearly part of ACSI’s vision for schools. The information shared was of a personal nature, so confidentiality was a must and important to establish. All participants were informed that they could back out of the study at any point in time. A relationship was built with the schools and participants involved. Each participant was considered a co-researcher.

Moustakas (1994) reminded the researcher to constantly reduce the anxiety of the participants. He cautioned that the researcher should always tread lightly and that the participants felt empowered by the fact they could alter data through the trustworthiness process. My study incorporated these ethical considerations when interviewing and observing the students.



## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Overview

The purpose of Chapter Four is to provide an analysis of the data of the study. This chapter demonstrates the phenomenological methodology as presented by Moustakas (1994) in his book, *Phenomenological Research Methods*. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the SN that is an integral part of the CHS experience. The data will examine this phenomenon. Triangulation was used and the three forms of data collection were observations, journal entries, and interviews. Observations were reviewed from classes, chapels, hallways, lunch breaks, and the year-end graduation and awards.

Students were contacted online for the second form of data collection--journal entries. Participants were given seven questions to answer on their own. Their responses were evaluated for stages of faith, and this information will be given in a narrative form. The last source of data analysis was the interviews. The analysis for the interviews was horizontalization, clustering, and textual and structural descriptions. After the collection of significant statements, the main ideas were coded for themes. Seven themes were brought to light, including competent professionals, spiritual mentors, like family, confirmation of faith, building blocks of faith, steeping in stage three, and walking towards stage four. The collection of this data can be reviewed in Appendices F and G.

### Participants

#### Participant 01

Participant 01 is a female in 12<sup>th</sup> grade, and she has been enrolled in the school since grade three. She mentioned there was only one other member of her senior class that has been there longer than her. This young woman was looking to go into public relations, and it was

evident from her demeanor that she will be successful in this field. She was outgoing and talked with ease about her faith. This was a confident young woman. Participant 01 was chosen by her peers to be the speaker of the graduation class. She was the president of the student activity council this school year, which means she was in charge of planning fun activities throughout the school year. She was also part of the band and the worship team.

Participant 01 laughed and talked about the drama she experienced with her peers (especially the other girls) during her junior high years at HCA. She said teachers at the school helped her and her friends to work out their personal problems. She spoke at length about her friends through the years. Some had left and gone to public school but many were in her class or a grade or two behind. Her church experience also seemed to be important to her, and she spoke about her friends that were part of her congregation. When Participant 01 spoke of her friends at HCA, she spoke with great warmth and noted how easy it was for them to talk about issues of faith together.

She believed she has made good choices in regards to what she referred to as “partying”. She mentioned other friends have made poor choices in that area. Participant 01 said she spoke up to kids who were making those choices and told them exactly why she did not agree. This was a change from who she was a few years ago.

Worship team, she expressed, was a big part of her life both at school and at church. Participant 01 revealed that she desired to reach the other students in the school through music and was concerned about the chapel messages being convicting. She lamented she needed to be more concerned about the other students than just how we look or sound. Her heart was reflected in her words of wanting her fellow students to find God during their chapel services. In reflecting what stage she was in, I think these words from her were significant.

I believed there was a lot of evidence that Participant 01 has steeped at Fowler' stage three and was getting ready, by the work of the Holy Spirit, to reach for stage four. She seemed to be very thoughtful about her walk with Christ, and even though there were no doubt more difficulties in her future, she seemed to understand the strength that comes from within her and her walk with the Lord. Her plan was to attend a university in the city in the fall for psychology. This experience will provide the type of separation Fowler (1981) talked about that was necessary to move to Stage 4.

### **Participant 02**

Participant 02 is a male in the 12th grade, and he is a quiet young man who has spent his whole academic career at HCA. His joke was that he even spent a whole year at the school while his mom was carrying him, as she has been a teacher at the school since before he was born. As his interview continued, I began to understand I needed to give him time to answer the questions, as he wanted to think about them.

Participant 02 said that one of the things he liked about his friends at HCA was the fact that he could talk about the Lord with them. He said that he did share the Lord with unsaved friends outside of school, but he did not typically find them responsive. He based his Christianity on the fact he has asked Christ into his life, was baptized as a child, and based those truths on the Bible. I thought it was interesting that Participant 02 said he enjoyed the speakers in the chapel services and the music, but he does not like singing. I noticed in the chapel observations that many of the students did not participate in the singing. It was interesting to hear this participant add the insight that he did enjoy the music but not participating.

This participant plans to attend a local community college in the fall to major in Information Technology. In observations, Participant 02 was often on technology, either a

computer or in his free time, on a hand held video game. In the online journal portion of my study, he answered that video games were something that he focused on in life. Technology was obviously an important part of Participant 02's life and will become a major professional focus in the future.

When looking at where this 12<sup>th</sup> grader was in regards to Fowler's (1981) stages, I believe there are some key things to consider. He was convinced of his faith in Christ and was willing to share with friends. He was an obvious introvert, which made it hard to read deeply into his life, spiritual or otherwise. One very helpful observation was *The Servant's Heart Award* that this participant was awarded at the graduation award evening. This was an award for the student who has clearly demonstrated a care for others through acts of kindness and compassion. For this participant to be awarded this honour spoke volumes about his Christian character. His kindness towards others shows that his faith was more than just words.

### **Participant 03**

Participant 03 is an international student from South Korea at HCA. He is a male in grade 12. He has been at the school since grade 10. After hearing his story, it would seem he arrived at HCA in a very roundabout way, and because the school was willing to take him at the last minute, he enrolled. This student was hard to track down for an interview. He has a reputation in the school for constantly being behind in his schoolwork, so it was difficult to get him to take the time for the meeting. Once he settled in, however, the conversation flowed nicely. This was the participant I could not get to do the journal questions; this was consistent with his student profile.

I asked Participant 03 how he knew that he was a Christian, and he responded that he has gone to church and Christian schools all his life. This seemed like a shallow response in the beginning of this interview about faith. However, after asking him the questions, I got more of a

sense of strength of faith. He believed the chapel services were a chance to go to church through the week and that it gave all students a chance to grow spiritually. The participant also said he could trust his teachers to give him good advice. His post-secondary plan was to take science at a university in the city in hopes to get into pharmacy. He planned on moving out of his homestay and into an apartment with his grandmother.

Participant 03 does not express signs of moving towards the stage four level of faith. His faith does not appear to be introspective. It was tactic and void of depth. I believe this participant was a Christian but is still relying on an outside authority to guide his path. He did express that Scripture memory, prayer, Christian teachers, and Christian peers all were making an impact on the growth of his faith.

#### **Participant 04**

This male participant, Participant 04, came to HCA in grade eight and currently finished grade ten. He offered a very lively interview and was eager to give his testimony and talk about his faith. Participant 04 was very outgoing and eager to do the interview. Before coming to HCA, this participant was homeschooled. This young man has been through a lot in his life. His grandparents are raising him. His grandfather is a pastor in the city and they have an outreach for underprivileged people. The church has outreaches including a clothing and food bank. Participant 04 spoke with excitement about helping with the ministry. He spoke in detail about his own calling to formal ministry. He plans to go to a Christian university about five hours away from Halifax to train to be a pastor.

Teachers at HCA mentioned to me how Participant 04 had changed over the past year. This participant expressed a spiritual awakening in his own life that had changed how he did everything, including his schoolwork. He is being sponsored to be at this school because his

parents/grandparents could not afford to have him at the school. He testified several times in our interview about God's goodness to him. It was powerful to hear such a young man recognize the hand of the Lord in his life. He testified that before he grew closer to the Lord, he resented being poor and could not wait to change his circumstances. Now he expressed a sense of contentment with all God had provided for him.

Participant 04 was now working on extra credit courses to skip grade 11 and go right to grade 12 in the fall. He was anxious to move on to college and get started on his career in ministry. His growth was recognized at the year-end award ceremony. He was awarded *the Dennis Calder Memorial Award*, which was awarded to a student who has displayed noteworthy growth in any number of areas of his or her life during the past year. This award was cash towards tuition for the following year.

This participant had trouble with social situations. Participant 04 was uncertain of any friendships in the school. He socialized with all of the high school students, and got along with everyone, but he felt that he did not have any close friends at school. He talked about not being able to trust the other students. He observed that the students do not drink or do drugs, but they do not follow Christ the way they pretend. Teachers also observed this about the participant and believed his social skills leave room for improvement.

In contrast to how Participant 04 felt about his peers, he felt the opposite about his teachers. He really saw his teachers as mentors and even his friends. There were two teachers that he cited as true mentors who he could go to with any of his personal problems. These teachers encouraged him academically and spiritually. Participant 04 said the teachers go above and beyond to look after their students, and they are one of the things he really liked about HCA.

When I asked Participant 04 how he knew he was a Christian, he talked about the fact that going to a Christian school was not enough to maintain a spiritual life. He believed it was asking God's Holy Spirit to give you the desire to know God more and be into His Word more often. He believed HCA gave him a chance to interact with God's truth on a regular basis and have teachers as Christian role models and mentors. Participant 04 was only 16 but there were signs that stage four faith was on the way for him. He thought for himself in regards to issues of his personal faith. He was a newly surrendered Christian, and it has made a difference in many areas of his life, which included new academic initiative. He was so determined to get to his pastoral training that he was taking extra courses to skip grade 11 and go right into grade 12 the approaching fall semester. Participant 04 was hungry to go deeper with faith and take place in that community of faith as a minister.

### **Participant 05**

Participant 05, a grade 11 female, has been at HCA since preschool. She said her classmates became much more like siblings after attending school in such a small environment. They debate a lot in class, especially Bible class, where they compare other religions to Christianity. She said she really enjoyed this part of her HCA classes. When describing her testimony of knowing Christ, she mused that she was truly dedicated to following Christ and helping others find Him.

Helping to lead the worship band is one of her passions at HCA; she also helped with children at her church. She was mentioned earlier in my observations as the student in uniform with the guitar strapped to her back and walking to school. She is a kind, supportive part of the student body. During the HCA year-end awards ceremony this participant did not get awarded anything outstanding, nor did she make the honour roll. She was a steady student but omitted that

she struggled as a student and had to work hard. Her demeanor was quiet and calm. She did place at the first level of the Duke of Edinburgh Award for community service, skill development, physical recreation, and an adventurous journey.

Participant 05 wanted to graduate and major in psychology at a local university. In my observations, she often talked to different students and was a calming influence. During the grade 11 English class observations when other girls were being dramatic, I noticed the calm spirit of Participant 05. She will no doubt be very good with psychology, but will have to really apply herself, given her omissions about schoolwork and the fact that she was not on the honour roll.

I considered a faith stage for Participant 05. She has moved through one valley of doubt and had seemingly figured things out between herself and God. There was nothing in her observations that was contrary to whom she portrayed herself to be. Since the interviews I have become Facebook friends with many of the participants, and her profile seems as gentle and warm as I thought her to be during her interviews. I believe she is a thoughtful stage three and will welcome stage four faith into her life when she experiences changes in school next year as a senior and the shifts with university culture.

### **Participant 06**

Participant 06, a grade 12 male, has been at the school since grade seven. This young man is quiet and thoughtful. He was quiet even with his peers but congenial and comfortable. He was taking a number of highly academic courses. This participant graduated with honours with a significant entrance scholarship to Dalhousie University. He wants to be an engineer. It was a privilege to interview so many participants from the 2015 senior class.



Participant 06 said that he does not have very close friends at HCA. He said he got along with all of his classmates and considered many of them friends but not close friends. He said the one close friend that he had that he would talk about spiritual things transferred to a different school second semester. He appreciated that there were so many students at HCA from different cultures. He believed that it was an added bonus to his education to learn from classmates who were from other places in the world. He also confirmed that during his time at HCA, he was never pressured to drink or do drugs. However, he mentioned that HCA does not exhibit the strength of Christianity his expectations thought it should when he first came to the school.

Participant 06 was beginning to think through this faith for himself. He had lived in the same place all his life, gone to the same church is whole life and been a part of this school since grade seven. As these factors begin to change with a large university and new circles of opportunity, Participant 06 may move relatively quickly into stage four. During the observations, I have this snapshot of this participant in my mind raising his hand in worship singing during a chapel service and singing very quietly. I got the sense he was a sea of quiet water that runs very, very deep, and that he will be a real leader someday in his calm, steady way.

### **Participant 07**

Participant 07 is a female student in grade nine. It was interesting to compare some of the younger participants to the older participants. She had attended HCA for the past three years. Before her family moved to Halifax, they lived in PEI, and she attended a Christian school there. She said her parents always wanted to go to a Christian school and could not so they sacrificed for her and her brother and sister. Participant 07 said she cared deeply about fairness and does not like to hear anyone being teased or bullied. She believes there was some teasing that goes on at HCA but it was not extreme. She said she was a not close friend with all of the people at her

school, but she does have some really good friends. Most of her good friends were in grade eight. This participant said the other students in the school definitely know that she is a Christian. She said she listened to only Christian music and conducts herself in a way the others know is Christian.

She saw the experience at HCA helping her with her spiritual growth, but perhaps not as much as her church. Her friends from church also attend the school. She enjoyed playing on the chapel worship team and also has older friends as a result. Participant 07 mentioned that she loved to sing songs that have such a deep meaning like the worship songs they perform in chapel. She shared about reading her Bible in devotions and how God used His word in her life. She said she would like to go to Kingswood University and train to be a missionary. “I had a vision that I was walking down this brick road with little African kids all holding my hands, so I really hope that happens”.

### **Participant 08**

Participant 08 is an accomplished female student who is in grade 12 at HCA. The international students from Tanzania have a number of hurdles when they were attending school on a completely different continent, especially if English is not their first language. She has been at HCA since grade nine. She was not sure why her parents chose HCA, but knows now it was God’s will for her life. She had a beautiful demeanor and a warm smile. In her testimony she said she was much more comfortable at HCA than the schools in her homeland of Africa; the teachers, she said, were much kinder. Unlike some of the other participants, she had a comparison factor. She said the teachers in her school back home would hit the students, call them dumb, and still call themselves Christian. At HCA she believed the teachers really demonstrated their faith in their actions.

This young woman has been through a great deal with her family situation, and since coming to HCA, has found a relationship with the Lord. She said her homestay family had really helped her come to know who God was in her life. It was a beautiful testimony to hear her singing the night of the graduation *The Power to Redeem*. It was also thrilling to see her awarded a \$36,000 scholarship from Mount Saint Vincent University. Her teachers expressed how hard this student has worked to improve her English and her studies. Everyone was celebrating with her the night of graduation when she was officially awarded the scholarship.

Participant 08 had a powerful testimony of what the Lord can do when moved out of one set of circumstances and into another. Because she has already separated from family and was making her way in a new country, she may already be on her way to stage four. However, her walk with the Lord was relatively new without the background of teaching and growth of many of her classmates. Yet, I could feel the sincerity of her commitment to the Lord after spending time with her. During her observations, she was always doing her schoolwork the way she has been asked and was looking to help others with their struggles. You can also tell she was a true friend and compassionate person, despite all she has been through herself.

Participant 08 planned to study science with her university scholarship. She was not completely certain what she will move on to after that. The university is in the city, so she will be able to have contact with the homestay family that has meant so much to her. The church she attended does not have a youth group, so she said the chapel services at school were like a youth group for her. She said she has listened in chapel to try to learn what she can about God. She was eager and hungry to know more. Worship team was also an important factor to her. This participant loved to sing, and the worship team gave her that outlet. She highly valued her time at HCA.

**Participant 09**

The next participant is a 10<sup>th</sup> grade female who had been at HCA since grade eight. Participant 09 said her parents sent her to HCA because she was getting on the wrong track in public school. She said some of her old friends from public school have gotten into drugs and drinking since she left. She said she tried to invite her old friends to youth group, but they usually turn her down because they do not want to go to anything Christian. This participant said she had good friends at HCA, and they were truly like a family. She said she did not just get to know the person but literally their whole family.

She said she would like to go to a Christian university when she finished school, but there were not really any in Canada that offer nursing. We talked about Trinity Western out on the west coast, but it is also very expensive. I thought it was profound that this young woman talked about the school building being run down in some ways, but that God's light shines through despite the age and decor. She said evidence that she knew God was working in their school was the fact that the grade seven girls were doing a Bible study on an appointed lunch hour. They were obedient to what God called them to do, she said. This was evidence to her that God is really working in the hearts of students at HCA.

She went on to further explain her difficulty with anxiety and how praying and going over Scripture helped her to do better with that. She was going on a summer mission trip with Kingswood University and was looking forward to serving inner city communities. When evaluating stages of faith, I believe it was safe to say that this student was developmentally placed in stage three. Over time if she continued to take opportunities of growth in home, church, and school, she will no doubt have the heart preparation for stage four.

**Participant 10**

Participant 10 is a female, enrolled in grade 10 at HCA; she has been at HCA since kindergarten. Our conversation began with her talking about the mission trip she would be part of with Kingswood University. She has a very outgoing personality. She was anxious to do the interview. Participants 09 and 10 were very good friends and were observed together most of the school day. They were both excited to be going on this summer mission trip together. She spoke highly of her HCA friends. She described her Christian friends at HCA as kind and compassionate. She said they were different than her non-Christian friends outside of school. Having friends to talk about problems in light of faith was a relief to her. She was an honours student who won the top average award for her grade 10 Canadian history course.

Participant 10's Christian testimony revealed that she felt God with her everyday. As she continued to express her faith she identified that the retreats held at the beginning of the school year by HCA were a tremendous help to her. I believe this young woman was at the beginning of stage three. I think she had lots of maturing to do through grades 11 and 12 before it would be clear if she were positioned for stage four. There has really not been any reason for this participant to step outside what she has always known to examine it systematically (Fowler, 1981) at this point in her life.

**Participant 11**

The next participant was a quiet student who was hard to get to know. She kept her thoughts very close to herself, and it felt like she had a real wall up around to keep her from being vulnerable. She had spent the last three years at HCA, and previous to that she was in a missionary school in Africa where her family was posted for missionary service. Her demeanor could almost be interpreted as rebellious. After I asked her a second time about her testimony she

did say that she prayed to ask God to save her when she was four. I believe she saw herself as a Christian; I evaluated her at a young stage two (mythic-literal) faith. She saw herself in the community of Christians and part of them, but I could not discern a clear testimony past the prayer at four. Her journal entry had no mention of relying on God, or following God's will for her life.

In observations I saw a polite, quiet, diligent student. This young woman made honours this past year and was awarded for the highest averages in three classes: comparative religion, English, and French. She was in a friend grouping with two other participants. Teachers commented that this group of girls was known for being low-lying bullies. It made me wonder if Participant 11's lack of commitment to Christian was not perpetuating the behaviour inside the group. She indicated that right at the point of time of the interview there was drama with her HCA friends. She felt the students at HCA acted more or less like Christians, but her responses on all accounts were apathetic.

### **Participant 12**

Participant 12, a grade 9 male, was the faculty choice for class president at the grade nine graduation and was a delight to interview and observe. This young man is a strong academic student. He said he liked HCA because of the Christian environment created by his teachers and his peers. He had a best friend that started with him in kindergarten, and they are still classmates today. He believed his parents sent him to HCA to protect him and his siblings from a public school environment.

He expressed his testimony simply that he had given his like to the Lord and would identify as being born again. Faith for this student would be stage three. He has made a personal commitment of faith and was free to discuss this with others. Developmentally, it did not appear

that he was at a point yet to really start breaking his faith down and putting it back together systematically for himself. Even in doing the journal questions, I got an email or two from his mom. I believe she was monitoring the process with him. However, there was a lot of meat in his grade nine graduation speech. In this speech, he spoke of going the extra mile with everything in life because we work as unto the Lord as mentioned in Colossians 3:23. He placed with the highest average in: art, English, geography, math, physical education, and science. He is thoughtful, kind, considerate, and was often seen serving. He is a natural introvert.

### **Participant 13**

Participant 13 is a grade 10 male at HCA, and has attended the school for six years. He said he had lost many of his close friends over the years to public school but had a remaining best friend and a girlfriend at the school. He said he was losing contact with his non-attending friends because they were in a completely different environment. He said he does not really get as much out of chapel as he thought he should. He wondered if different leadership would help. He talked at length about the mix of students at HCA and that everyone got along despite the fact that in some classes there were Christians alongside of Muslim students. This young man sees students at HCA as open-minded and able to learn together in classrooms and chapel without tension.

Teachers confided that Participant 13 was a pleasant young man to teach, but it is difficult for him to get his work in on time. This was observed several times during the observations. He wants to be an RCMP officer in the future. Even with a girlfriend in the high school, I never observed his behaviour to be out of line in any way. They talked often in the hallway but never seemed to be in breach of the school social conduct code:

School is a place where students are encouraged to form friendships with other students

of both sexes. Students are discouraged from pairing off and associating with one other person exclusively. Such activities as hand holding and being alone in a secluded spot are not acceptable behaviours for HCA students (Halifax Christian Academy Student Handbook, 2014-2015).

### **Participant 14**

Participant 14 is a female in grade 11 at HCA. This student played in the school worship band. She opened up about some of the difficult things that she has experienced in a personal family situation. This situation really had her contemplating her personal testimony. Walking through the family crisis, she leaned on the Lord in a new and more powerful way. She said her friends at HCA were the absolute best support system. She felt that if she had stayed in public school, she would have been drawn away from God and not to Him.

This young woman was part of the worship team as a singer. She believed it was very important and sacred to lead others in worship. She stated,

I really feel like a lot of the people at HCA are not Christian, but when we go on retreats, and have chapels that is when it really touches people....When you are leading worship you are going to be engaging and want to get to the next level.

Because of the difficulty she had weathered with her family, Participant 14 said this about her testimony, “Now I know that I have an amazing story and a testimony that I am going to be able to share with other people”. Because of the crisis as a young teenager, this participant might be closer to stage four than some of the other students. It was fascinating to hear her describe the outreach she and her friends had with younger girls in the school. She said they meet with the younger girls on a regular basis to do something special to build relationships with them. This way the younger girls would have rapport with them and come to them with their



problems. “If someone was hurting, it was normally one of the older girls who sees a younger girl that was hurting, you take them like they are your own sister.”

### **Participant 15**

The last participant, Participant 15, is a male in grade 11 at HCA. He was seen as a school leader and led the school worship band. He reflected on chapels and said it was a downer when the other students did not sing along with the band. He mentioned that chapel services tended to be uplifting, and that he prayed the message would reach their non- Christian peers. Participant 15 would like to study worship leading at Kingswood University after he finishes grade 12 next year.

This young man was observed as being kind, caring, and congenial. He seemed to have a number of friends around him at all times. It was evident his friends meant a lot to him. His testimony was reminiscent of Bushnell’s (1861) philosophy of salvation. Bushnell (1861) believed that the child who was born into a Christian home would always understand themselves to be Christian, and when they came of age they would conform to the faith of their parents.. There were many expressions of faith in Christ in this participant’s interview and journal questions. I thought it was interesting that his testimony correlated so closely to Bushnell’s (1861) description of children who were born into Christian homes. I believed this young man has had very little hardship in his life; therefore, there has not been a significant crisis to move him beyond stage three at this point in his journey. His heart was sensitive to the Holy Spirit and no doubt will continue on the path nurtured towards stage four in young adulthood.

### **Results**

The purpose of my study was to ask high school students attending a CHS questions about the spiritual nurture they were receiving at their school. I chose to use a purposeful,

criterion sample for my phenomenological study with all adolescent participants identifying as Christians.

Although there is always an overlap between looking from one perspective and viewing something as a whole, it is possible to separate the object as a point of focus from my experience of it as a whole, to take one angle of it and look freshly once more, and then another angle, connecting each looking with my conscious experience. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 93)

My 15 participants have all had an experience of spiritual nurture in their CHS. The questions in the interviews revealed different perspectives and voices that would lend themselves to one phenomenon.

### **Data Analysis**

**Epoche.** I made a conscious effort to see the themes in the participants as they came to life in their testimonies. I have known a number of Christian school students in my own schooling and over the span of my career in CS. However, I did not want to assume anything about the participants of my study based on my past experiences.

The phenomenological epoche does not eliminate everything, does not deny the reality of everything, does not doubt everything—*only the natural attitude*, the biases of everyday knowledge, as a basis for truth and reality. What is doubted are the scientific “facts,” the knowing of things in advance, from an external base rather than from internal reflection and meaning. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 110)

I made notes in the margins of my observation notes and in the margins of my interview notes, as well as made notes of what kinds of prejudgments that were in my mind going into this study. As a Christian educator, I wanted spiritual nurture to be evident with these participants, but I

separated that prejudgment from my mind. I wanted to watch the picture emerge from a totally fresh perspective as though I was a total outsider observing what happened in the CHS world.

**Horizontalization.** After reading through the interview transcriptions, significant statements of spiritual nurture were identified on the metaphoric horizon. Each statement was treated with equal value (Moustakas, 1994) and that allowed the students to feel at ease giving his or her perspective of SN in the CHS. The data collected for my study was under two general questions that Creswell (2007) stated: “What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? What contexts or situations have you typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon” (p. 61)? The responses gathered significant statements about SN that could be clustered into meaningful units.(Creswell, 2007). “The invariant horizons point to the unique qualities of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 129). Seven themes emerged from the statements win the interviews. These statements put a literal voice to the SN that takes place in the CHS.

There were 96 double-spaced pages collected from the interviews themselves. Each interview was coded as per the responses for each section. These codes were formed into a word document table (see Appendices E & F) with the question posted on the side, the participant coded above the responses, and the significant statements number and letter coded horizontally. The significant statements in the transcriptions were colour coded. There were many significant statements. An additional coding chart was developed to have further understanding of how individual participants responded. This chart can be seen in Appendix F.

**Clustering.** As I read through the transcriptions, I collected significant statements that students made about the SN they were receiving at the CHS. Through this process, I began to gather the statements into themes. Repeated statements were removed from the process. Each

statement was coded and the codes were gathered into clusters of meaning. There were seven themes determined in this process: Teachers as competent professionals, teachers as spiritual mentors, students were like family, salvation experience expresses itself as confirmation of faith, building blocks of faith found within the CHS system, CHS students were steeped in Fowler's (1981) stage three of faith, and many CHS students were walking towards Fowler's (1981) stage four.

**Textural and structural descriptions.** "From the horizons of each participant's experience was a textual description" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 133). The textual description was "what the participants experienced" (Creswell, 1994, p. 60). Moustakas (1994) said that it was the researcher's job to create a comfortable environment where the participant can describe their experience. I believe that comfortable environment was struck during the interviews. I felt I connected with the students right away, and being around doing observations for several days helped me to interact a bit before our interviews. Through these interviews, I received the thoughts of the participants, how they felt about things at his or her CHS, and how they relayed situations and examples. Their ideas of SN in their CHS formed the narrative around the phenomenon. Students said they were encouraged spiritually on a regular basis by teachers and peers. They also said the content of their classes encouraged them towards faith. Prayer and Scripture memory were indicated verbally to be building blocks of his or her personal faith. The journal entries provided statements of where the participants were in his or her level of faith in regards to Fowler's (1981) stages. The statements of the students were the basis of which the essence of SN in his or her CHS was concluded.

Structural descriptions were formed to understand where they experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The structure was built by understanding what the context of SN

was at HCA. The structure formed around the participants' thoughts about classes, chapel, teachers, peers, and content and how each participant accepted each situation created his or her structural description. Phenomenology is a human science and data was collected as I combined what the students said with how (textual description) they were responding to the context (structural description). The students experienced the phenomenon of SN in class, chapel, school retreats, homeroom, and in conversations with teachers and peers. Observations became an important part of determining the structural descriptions. I could see the SN happening within the walls of HCA. It was happening in the classroom, in the make shift chapel room, in the vice-principal & principals' offices, in the hallway during conversations between students, and at the retreat location (a local camp). There was no part of the building that was exempt from SN. For example, the most of the female participants mentioned the ladies room where they received the most encouragement from peers.

The content of the textual and structural descriptions was compiled one theme at a time through the three forms of data collection: interviews, journal entries, and observations. The central question used to develop themes was: How does SN impact the development of faith with adolescents who attend a CHS?

**Journal questions.** Fowler's (1981) FDT provided the theoretical framework for my study, and it was this framework that provided the lens for the student interview questions. In addition to interview questions, the students were asked to submit answers to [faithfacts01@gmail.com](mailto:faithfacts01@gmail.com). This allowed the participants to think through a series of questions in a different format than the face-to-face interview questions. These questions were based on Fowler's (1981) FDT questions on faith and how we extract meaning out of life (see Appendix E).

The students were asked, “What are you devoted to in your life?” They had more than one response, however, 12 out of 14 replies said God. The follow up responses were responses of friends and character. Friends and character were both godly choices as well. Their aspirations were focused on God-ordained points. When the students were asked about their dreams and goals, 12 responded with a different career or profession they wanted for their lives. However, nine of them also responded with finding God’s will as a life goal. “What do you fear?” was a journal question and 5 out of 14 students responded with the devil and temptation. These students indicated by their responses that they want to follow God with their lives and were concerned about anything that might take them off of that path. The answers were quite diverse after the first response. Participants went on to express: death, university acceptance, their parents, and being silenced as things that they thought as frightening.

The participants put a lot of thought into their answers. The codes reflect the abridged idea of how they responded. When asked what powers they relied on, God was the response for 12 out of 14. Eight out of 14 said parents to this question. The next largest response was friends. The participants were asked what were they most committed to in life and in death. Their responses had an initial singular focus—God’s plan. Thirteen out of 14 students said they were committed to God’s plan and whatever that might bring their way. Seven out of 14 also said they were committed to their family. Their commitment to faith was evident in their responses.

“With whom do you share future plans? Dreams? Daily Life?” The highest response from this question was friends. Eleven out of 14 participants said it was their friends that they talked the most to about the future. Second to friends was family with responses from nine out of 14. The last question they were asked was about what their most sacred hopes, goals, and purposes were in their lives. The number one response was God’s call. Nine out of 14 students

responded this way, with five out of 14 also responding that pleasing God was one of their most sacred purposes. I thought one of the most interesting responses to this question was being a blessing. Students saw themselves as servants to others and it was their profound calling to be a blessing to others that came their way.

**Interviews.** I met with 15 different participants to interview them about their experience attending a CHS, specifically their high school, HCA. The interviews lasted between 25 minutes to 60 minutes. The participants were warm and receptive. Most students were excited to share their stories with me. Using the theoretical framework, I formed an overarching question: How does spiritual nurture impact the development of faith with adolescents attending a Christian high school? This led to the development of questions and sub questions.

I tried to frame the questions in a way that the students could understand. The fellowship with the students during the interviews was sincere and sweet. I audio recorded the interviews with *QuickTime Player* on my Mac Computer, and I made brief notes about each participant during the time of the interview. I also did a post interview with them after the transcriptions were available for review. The questions for the interview can be reviewed in Appendix C.

The 31 codes from the transcriptions can be found in Appendix F based on the answers and observations from the participants. Appendix G organizes the codes to further explain how the significant statements were moved to individual participant codes. These codes were then later observed with the participants to strengthen their validity. The top four reoccurring codes were: teachers having a high level of professionalism (mentioned 22 times), teachers demonstrate the fruit of the spirit (mentioned 42 times), CHS was a place to ask questions about faith and find answers (mentioned 37 times), and students get to know each other really well (mentioned 38 times).

The relationships with teachers, the relationships with peers, and the school as a place to find wisdom were the reigning thoughts for my participants. The participants were being nurtured daily by the teachers who taught at the school and the students who were their peers. Even the fact that so many students commented that school was a place they can ask questions about faith was indicative of the relationships they have with their teachers.

**Observations.** The observations on the HCA campus went well. I visited the campus 12 different days. I was able to observe four lunch times, three chapels, and several classes between grades 9-12 with a variety of different teachers. I also spent a considerable amount of time observing hallways, school dismissal, and homeroom classes. The themes surfaced as I observed the environment and the students.

I coded the observation notes in the same vein as the interview transcriptions. The observations reinforced the themes from the interviews. One recurring code was that the students respected the teachers as competent professionals and would approach them as spiritual mentors. Another theme that was observed among the participants was that they treated one another like family. The participants were observed many times displaying friendship one towards another. Participants were observed walking through the building blocks of faith that were part of their education. Observations were made in their chapel services and homeroom devotional times that indicated their level of commitment and involvement. The personal faith of the participants was evident. The student spoke up in classes about elements of faith. They also demonstrated kindness and compassion towards their peers. The depth of personal faith and some students demonstrated stage three of Fowler's (1981) level of faith. Also in some cases it was observed that some participants were walking towards Fowler's (1981) stage four. With the participants playing on the worship band, I could really sense their desire to serve, and let the students in the



school know how strongly they felt about their relationship with Christ.

The codes got compiled into themes that share the collective voice of the participants. The themes explain in detail how the participants feel about the SN they were receiving in their CHS. The observations gave me insight into the daily lives the participants at HCA.

## **Research Questions**

**Research question 1.** “What themes arise in relationships with teachers to help adolescents build faith in a CHS that help with FDT?” I interviewed the participants with the first series of questions about their teachers. Their reactions were mixed. They almost all looked towards the door of the office where the interviews were conducted to make sure the door was closed and that the teachers could not hear their responses. All the participants had positive responses with a few negative statements about isolated situations. The participants talked about their teachers as high function professionals. The teachers inspired them to reach higher and set high goals. There was also a sense that the teachers were very good at their job and conducted themselves with a high level of professionalism. The teachers were also seen as spiritual mentors. The students described times when teachers have prayer with them and times when they spoke directly into their lives on a spiritual level. This section reflected the significant statements and themes that gathered information on the teachers as a part of this research question: Competent Professionals and Spiritual Mentors.

***Competent professionals.*** Every student had something to say regarding their teachers being very good at their jobs. These students believed that their teachers were some of the best regarding content knowledge, flexibility, and going the extra mile for their students. Many of the participants have never been to public school, but through their friends outside of HCA they have a comparison in their minds.

Most participants agreed that their teachers inspire them to do their very best academically. Participant 01 said:

They always want to help solve a problem and always try to keep a right attitude. A lot of other teachers who wouldn't be like an unbeliever would like try to make the problem worse or look for an excuse and stuff...if they weren't believers or if they just worked they wouldn't be as personally involved or whatever.

She also expressed that teachers were generous about academics by being extremely fair with the students. They were generous with due dates and extensions. She believed they understand that at times the students were busy and involved in a lot extra-curricular things. Participant 01 admitted that sometimes she got frustrated with teachers about a grade, but then she was reminded to keep a good attitude and remembered that the teachers have many students and they were not perfect. However, her conclusion on that matter was, "Overall I have teachers who help me if I need help and who grade me fairly and who are very generous when it comes to times and extensions and things like that."

Participant 02 said that his teachers have a lot of passion for what they do. When I asked him how the teachers responded to the students academically he said, "They respond to us like personally a lot of the time. Because the classes here were smaller we get to know the teachers here much better. So we have a closer relationship with the teachers." Again, here there is an assumed comparison as Participant 02 says a "closer relationship". This comparison was threaded throughout many of the interviews with the participants. Participant 02 also said teachers respond academically to him as an individual. The Participant 03 talked about HCA being a small school, and as a result teachers really got to know the students. He said it was easy to approach the teachers about academic issues.

Teachers going the extra mile made a big impact on Participant 04. “Like Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ will email me extra work without even asking him”. He recalled another time when he had been away from school due to illness. His father came to the school for an event and the science teacher tracked him down so that he could photocopy the notes for his son and keep him caught up. Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ had to go to his car, get his binder, and then photocopy the notes. “They definitely care.”

Participant 04 also brought up a comparison of his HCA teachers versus teachers in other settings: “Like I know in public school even the teachers are swearing, and they don’t care if the students are swearing, but here everyone takes it seriously. I visited public school one time and I was with my friend, and we were walking down the hallway and the teachers were complaining about how the principal is running the school.” This student had been at HCA for three years and previously homeschooled. It was interesting how students sense that their teachers care more and are more attentive to their needs. Participant 04 believed that the teachers work hard to inspire students to do their best. “I think they are always striving even when people get negative, they complain about too much homework...”

However, he said when you ask a teacher for help outside of a class they are always there to help you. He mentioned Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ who helped him tirelessly with his math. As a student, he did not appear to be improving until the participant had a spiritual revival, which gave him new determination academically. This particular teacher had championed his improvement.

“Because all of a sudden when I decided to change my life spiritually and academically, they were there and didn’t go oh we’re not going to help him.”

During classroom observations, students were open to share their feelings in the class context. As I sat and observed a class of students and their teacher, I noticed the classroom was badly cluttered and in need of some fresh paint. Some students say more than others, but it was apparent everyone's opinion was valuable. Students do not raise their hand; they simply wait their turn and insert into the discussion. The teacher has a strong presence in the classroom. It was apparent he was well respected. These students were very comfortable with each other. Participant 08 was very engaged in discussion about animal rights versus human rights with Participant 01. I can tell that all of the students want the teacher's attention, especially Participants 03 and 06. Male and female students alike appear comfortable with this class content and the teacher. Participant 08 wanted to tell a personal story about the death of a pet. The teacher quiets the classroom so that everyone would listen. The students had strong opinions and they shared them with a great deal of confidence. They speak up and they speak often. The discussion moved from the intellectual to the students teasing each other. The teacher brought the class to conclusion.

Participant 05 started out talking about the teachers at HCA during his interview in terms of comparison to public school. She used comparisons of her friends who attend public school. She believed her teachers at HCA go the extra mile and put more care and attention into their profession. The participants talked about the teachers with a great deal of trust. This participant mentioned that the teachers care about how you were doing as a student and personally encouraged them to do their best. Participant 05 said if you were having trouble in a certain subject, they were right there to help you, and she passed along this story about one teacher: "My physics teacher is really great with this. She was like; yes I will totally help you. And she only works part-time. So she was willing to stay here during her lunch hours, which was usually when

she goes home.” She also mentioned that the teachers in high school at HCA wanted the students to understand the subjects that they teach, and the subjects they themselves have studied.

Participant 06 said you could tell the teachers have truly chosen to be at HCA; they were there because they want to be. What was indicated was this sense of purpose seemed to make them more professionally competent. Participant 07 said the teachers were extremely helpful. She also compared the teachers with public school teachers, “...But I don’t think it is as bad as it would be in public school, because I have heard a lot of stories. But teachers are good with that, they make sure you are okay and make sure everything was fine and speak to the other person (involved).” The sense was that teachers at HCA dealt with the interpersonal problems that came up.

The teachers had had been very helpful to Participant 08. She also compared the teachers to her former school. “Teachers in my country, my teachers would call you dumb. If I went and asked a question that I really did not understand, they would say you’ve asked this question a lot of times—you’re dumb and you cannot ask this question, sort of thing.” She said that it was liberating to ask teachers questions and get kind, helpful responses. The perpetual academic care for this student who was learning English as well as subject content spoke to the high level of professionalism of the teachers. “They are firm and I like that because sometimes you need that; they are firm but not harsh.”

Participant 09 said about the teachers, “They are just always putting their best foot forward in whatever they are doing. They just jump right in.” She also compared HCA teachers with her former public school teachers. “In public school you didn’t get hugs. If you’re crying or you’re upset at HCA there was a hug, and that makes everything better, it’s really great.”

Participant 10 said teachers really concentrate on the students doing well. She said her 10<sup>th</sup> grade

class was smaller than their class last year, so the teachers have more time to concentrate on their academic needs. “They do a really good job at trying to help.” She concluded that they were really good teachers.

Participant 11 really did not commit one way or another in regards to teacher professionalism. She was the only participant who did not make comments that committed to the issue of teacher professionalism. Participant 12 did comment to issues of professionalism, “they make sure they understand what they are teaching – they are quite knowledgeable as well.” He also said the teachers were very flexible, but that was coming to an end as exams were drawing closer.

The math teacher confided that Participant 13 was a nice young man, but was often late with assignments and has to be reminded to do homework. Participant 11 was very quiet, but worked hard and helped others in the class. All of the participants work hard and keep mostly to themselves. This teacher encouraged the students to work in pairs and confer back and forth on answers in math. These were serious students in this class with a task ahead of them to accomplish. This teacher had the students’ respect.

I think it was key that Participant 13 said, “They all want to help, nobody seems uninterested here.” I think this significant statement spoke volumes to the dedication the HCA teachers have for the profession of teaching, according to the participants. Participant 14 said the teachers were very understanding with extra help and showing them grace when they needed it on assignment deadlines.

The last participant concurred with many of the other significant statements. The teachers were great at what they do and really go the extra mile to make sure the students succeed. It was

like they were always inspiring the students to do their very best. It was obvious that the participants respected the teachers.

*Spiritual mentors.* In the world of spiritual nurture, these teachers become the front lines of that nurture. Many of the students interviewed see the teachers as spiritual mentors. Some students saw them as adults they could go to when academic pressures were weighing them down as well as personal pressures and anxieties. It was interesting to hear the students say that they believe their teachers are superior to those teachers in public school. The participants believe that their teachers demonstrate the Fruit of the Spirit as mentioned in Galatians chapter six. Participant 01 talked a great deal about the teachers praying in school. “Beginning of the day, the teachers take prayer requests or ask us if we have requests...they share their own requests to.” She said they would either pray for the student’s requests or other students will take turns to pray. “That is an obvious piece to me that they [the teachers] have relationship with Jesus.” Participant 01 said the teacher’s talk sometimes in their classes about their beliefs and their personal testimonies. Participants seemed most impacted by the direct conversations they could have with their teachers. Participant 01 said she would go to the guidance counselor [also a teacher] about anything that was bothering her on a personal level. She also mentioned that she could go to the guidance counselor or homeroom teacher about problems younger students may be having, and she said she would be assured the guidance counselor or teachers would deal with the situation. When it came to Fruit of the Spirit, Participant 01 said the teachers at HCA demonstrated faithfulness and dedication. She also mentioned how loving they were as individuals and they demonstrate their love for students in the classroom.

There were interesting observations to be made in high school classrooms at HCA. I had the opportunity to sit in on many classes at all 9-12 levels. This helped me to see student

interactions in the classroom. Classes at HCA are held in traditional instructional formats. Teachers use mostly direct instruction in their approach to instruct students. There is very little inquiry-based learning. The classes in high school are small with no class larger than 16 and some as small as two. These small classroom environments create close relationships between students and teachers; it also made for many close peer relationships

During Grade 11 English, I was able to video record and then afterwards observe the class. The English teacher was also the Bible teacher. In this class, Participants 05, 14, and 15 were present. The students were engaged and had fun in the class. There was a disagreement in the class with students who were not participants of the study. The participants stayed out of the disagreement and not get involved. They were frustrated with the student causing the problem. It continued to become apparent there was a divide between the students who identify as Christians and those who do not identify as Christians. The teacher handled the situation calmly.

The student/teacher retreat at the beginning of the school year was a reoccurring theme for most of the participants. They mention this as a time when they were apart from campus at the beginning of the year and hear a special speaker in several sessions and the teachers attend with them. "...And I think that if they didn't care how we started off the year and if they didn't care how our personal relationship with the Lord is, then they wouldn't do that; or put so much effort into chapels and different speakers." It was obvious that Participant 01 viewed the teachers as spiritual mentors.

As spiritual mentors, Participant 02 mentioned a number of things about the teachers at HCA. He said they were very good at keeping private information to themselves and not passing it around to other teachers or students. "They talk to us and ask us questions." Participant 02 felt that the fact that the teachers care enough to talk to the students and ask them questions showed



how much they care. He believed the teachers teach with a great passion. He said that the teachers identify as strong believers in Christ and mention their faith as they taught lessons. This participant said that he would approach his teachers about any problem that he had whether it was a big problem or a small problem.

Participant 03 said he has a good feeling about who his teachers were as people. "I know I can trust them and I know they are going to give me good advice." He said he knows they were active in church and you get a sense for who they are outside of school. Another thing that he brought up was the fact the teachers pray for them on a regular basis. Teachers also ask them about what was going on in their world.

"Yes they definitely care", this was a quote from Participant 04. He said the best thing about HCA was the quality of the teachers. He said they were always there for you and he has two male teachers in particular that act as mentors for him both academically and spiritually. He said, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ asks me how things were going and prays for me. Teachers were always talking about something from church and you can tell they were faith based and faith minded he said. Participant 004 said, you get a real sense they were doing their job in service to God. "Everything is founded on a Christian base, I think it is great that nothing is watered down here."

Prayer is an important start to the day, and even before I asked questions about prayer it came up in nearly every interview including Participant 04, "...Like through her prayer and through what she does puts her Christian life on display other ways." He said when the teachers uphold all the rules and don't complain to the students, they were putting their Christian life on display. Being supportive was also important to Participant 04. For example, he spoke about one of his teachers coming to see him speak at his church on a following Sunday.

This participant also mentioned the retreat and how God used the speaker to really speak to his heart. He also mentioned that two teachers really encouraged him at that retreat and volunteered to hold him accountable spiritually. He believed his teachers demonstrated character traits of: honesty, humility, a positive attitude, and patience. Many of the participants mentioned that the teachers listen to them; Participant 04 may have described it best: “ They respond to what I have said and they’ve heard like everything. So that was definitely how I know they care.”

During the third chapel observation, this same teacher spoke. He has a lot to do with the athletic program at the school. He is also a younger teacher, probably about 30. This teacher was involved in helping to make chapels happen each week. The teacher used the topic of worship as his main talking point. He told the students that worship is a lot more than singing. It was a lifestyle that we live in each and every thing that we do. This particular teacher was a graduate of HCA and told a number of funny sports-related stories that he remembered from his time at the school. He tied it all into an underlying theme about worship and how our lives were to worship the King of the universe. Participant 04 was the most engaged, although all of the participants seemed attentive along with most of their peers.

“It’s not just another student it’s a person”. These words from Participant 05 spoke to the individuality of each student at HCA. They are nurtured individually both academically and spiritually. The students are taught from a Christian perspective. This participant felt, as they approached high school classes, the teachers encouraged them to think for themselves in regards to faith and Christianity. She felt it was a safe area to have debates. Participant 05 said for her personally, it has been great to be encouraged to understand God and the Bible for myself. The teachers mentor the students partly by example, “Just the way they care about kids you can see

God shining through them.” They also give advice from a Christian perspective she said. This participant thought that the way the teachers respond to them as students presented opportunities to display a Christ like testimony.

This participant seemed impacted by the fact that sometimes the teachers took turns and spoke in chapel. She said that was when you can really see their spiritual side. “And really pushing on you, that God was there for you, and we were here for you. Which was really great to see them like that.” Participant 05 said she would be comfortable going to her teachers for academic or personal problems.

Participant 06 said teachers share their faith throughout classes, but none more than Bible class. He believed the teachers at HCA are patient, tolerant of others views, kind, and compassionate. He said he wouldn't go to them very often with personal problems; he didn't feel he was completely on a personal level with the teachers. He was one of the only participants who felt that he could not go to the teachers with any problem. Participant 07 felt that it was very helpful to go to the teachers at HCA with problems. This participant believed that the teachers have a strong faith in God and place their trust in him. She believed that outlook helped them to give really good advice.

Probably the student with the best example for spiritual mentoring comes from Participant 08. Coming from another continent to attend HCA, she had no idea about true Christianity. The teachers mentored her in powerful ways.

Also at the time I didn't really know what Christianity was at first. I thought I did, but I didn't really until my teachers explained it to me. So when I asked them questions about my faith, about family they were there to help me understand. So I have learned a lot, not just in class but also talking to them.

She also said that teachers reference biblical truth during classes and enlightened her understanding about many different things like science and history. This participant also mentioned that teachers would take students aside and pray for them if they were struggling, and she felt that was very important for the well being of the students.

Participant 08 found HCA a safe place to ask the questions that she had about God, life, and social issues in the culture. She communicated that she has had so many struggles that she wondered sometimes why she was even born. One teacher in particular had really helped her through these dark periods. They responded to her the following way:

They were telling me if you weren't created you wouldn't get to experience this short time where you would learn and grow in your faith in God. And just like all of that area of Christianity, where you struggle, but you learn to trust in him; you wouldn't learn any of that. You wouldn't know the joys of being here and having the good things in life.

This participant has gleaned all that HCA has to offer her. Her heart was positioned to take in the instruction of her spiritual mentors. She said her teachers were like friends to her, yet in her observations she was very respectful. Participant 08 says they really do care, "They have helped me so much. Through their faith stories they were able to be like, yeah this is going on right now with me and God has helped me through and he will be faithful to help you through it."

Participants 09 and 10 said the teachers really lead them by their own personal examples. They also read passages of Scripture to students who are struggling and prayed with them. This participant said they were kind and courageous and always present for the students.

Participant 10 had an excellent example of how the teachers were always coaching the students to be positive:

Even though we have missed so much time (due to snowstorms), they are just like okay, let's just keep going we can do it and their attitudes are just really good. That kind of helps us out a lot. It helps us look up to them a lot more. If they are more positive than negative....it helps us to be more positive.

This type of modeling obviously spoke volumes to the students as Participant 10 picked up on their attitudes to set pace with their own attitude.

Participant 11 had very little to say about teachers in regards to spiritual mentoring. I did not get the sense that she felt any teacher in the school was mentoring her in this way. She was the only participant who felt she couldn't confide in teachers or see God's light shining through them.

The next participant did not say a lot about teachers, but there was a different sense about his comments than Participant 11. Participant 12 said the teachers were very caring and encouraged the students to walk in Christian faith.

When asking Participant 13 about the character of his teachers, I loved that he said they exhibit a lot of self-control. "Like I am sure they feel like beating us on the desk sometimes, but they don't." He followed that up with, "And love, because they care about all of us." He also relayed how one time when he had gotten into a fight the guidance counselor took him aside and helped him set things right. He said he felt she really cared about him. Many of the significant statements centered on the love, care, compassion, and concern that the teachers have for their students.

Participant 14 spoke of the fact that you could ask lots of questions about faith at HCA to teachers. She mentioned that teachers have questions as well. She said, "You're just here to learn

as much as you can about God and build your relationship, so they are helpful with that.” There were many significant statements about the spiritual mentoring of the teachers at HCA.

The last participant referred to the teachers more as friends since he has known them for a long time (he has attended HCA for 7 years). The teacher’s faith really stood out to him as well as their love of God. He had a significant thought in regards to the fact that the teachers often speak directly into the student’s lives:

Well say if one of my friends is listening to a song with bad words, or saying something that isn’t godly, they tell them—like they tell us. They would be like, “Now that’s not going to help you grow in God right?” So areas like that they talk to us about.

I had the privilege of observing the graduation and awards ceremony for HCA as part of the field research. The handing out of the diplomas was very emotional. Each graduate had a power point presentation done for their turn to get their diploma. There were touching words from each parent on the slide as the student received their commencement papers; there were also pictures of the students at different phases of growing up. The teachers and the principal expressed moving words about each student who either won an award or graduated. The whole service drew attention to the great relationships the staff had with the students.

Directly speaking into the lives of the participants was a reminder from Proverbs 9:9 “Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still; teach the righteous and they will add to their learning” (New International Version). Throughout the significant statements made by the participants, spiritual mentoring came to light as a role the students saw the teacher commanding. All participants, except one, accepted that willingly and some even gratefully.

**Research question 2.** “What themes arise with relationships between peers to help with Faith Development Theory?” The participants talked at length about their friends at HCA.

Friendships are a very important part of the HCA/CHS experience. All participants were positive about their experience with peers at HCA except one participant. Participants spoke of being close because they were part of small classes. Many significant statements settled around peers being there for each other in supportive ways. One of the unique things about the friends made at HCA was the fact that they were free to talk about issues of God and faith with each other. Several participants mentioned talking about faith, and others said faith did not come up very often. It was also mentioned that peers become like siblings, and this can lead to disagreements. There was also a sense that there could be drama among the students. All students who brought this up believed the drama eventually got worked out. The last code of significant statements centered on words of love the participants felt for their peer,s and also how they enjoyed each other's company.

*Like family.* Participant 01 spoke fondly of her friends at HCA. "Like it's not a big deal anymore if you get in an argument because you can't stay mad at them forever because you need to talk to them." She talked about the fact that because the classes were small she really learned to get along with people because she needed them in her network. She said some students she probably would not have been a friend with if they had gone to a much larger school. Participant 01 thought this enriched the environment.

I asked the students about the differences between their friends outside of Christian school and their friends at HCA. Participant 02 said, "I would say the main difference is that the topic of God comes up more with my friends here." Many of the participants expressed that they were able to discuss issues of faith with their friends at HCA. There were significant statements centered on that topic. Students genuinely care about the wellbeing of their Christian peers.

During an advanced math class Participant 02's mother, a teacher at the school, stopped,

smiled, and waved in the doorway to Participant 02. Several of the high school teachers have students in the high school. This increased the family atmosphere within the high school department. Because of this, many of the barriers are removed and the student body feels much more like a family than a typical school. The students were very respectful, yet totally laid back. The teachers do not intimidate the students.

Participant 03 described his fellow students as, “Well first of all you know they are all mostly Christian and they are all nice.” This participant, an international student, felt welcomed by his peers when he came to HCA. During observations, it was evident this participant had formed close bonds with some of the other boys in the school. He said because the school is small, they were able to know everybody.

Participant 04 had different things to say about his HCA “family”. He mentioned that many of the students were two-faced and were not easy to trust. “For me anyway, you never really know who your friends are going to be from one day to the next on because there is so much drama, everyone is into each others business.” The idea of drama came up a few times when participants talked about their fellow classmates. Some mentioned they become like siblings and ups and downs were to be expected. Also with small classes it could be expected that students get on each other’s nerves.

Participant 04 was the only participant who did not really have any positive significant statements to balance out his view of student drama. From his perspective, other than a few students the drama was pretty constant. He said, “I have not established permanent friendships with anyone here that is my age.” Drama was cited as a code for the like family theme. In small settings with students together for so much of the day, the same kind of relationships can emerge as in a family with real siblings. This young man cited the teachers as his friends at the school.



Participant 05 said it well when she said, “It’s been cool growing up with them, and they’re like siblings here. Because they were constantly here and you’re getting to know each other and growing with each other and getting through school.” Participant 05 felt the close sibling feelings actually bred something really powerful for her life. “It’s cool how we have grown up together in that small environment and classroom.” Between these two participants, two-sides of the issue came into view. However, it was only Participant 04 who felt like he did not have friends at the school. During observations, I could see that the other students responded favorably to him, but he seemed uncertain about how to interact.

Participant 05 mentioned that several students had left the school over the years. This left some gaps with friendships, but overall she felt these voids got filled with other students who were either still at the school or others who joined along the way. “You know everyone’s name and who you get along with best.” This participant reflected the voice of the majority; the small setting equaled a large payoff in relationships.

When parents look to private schooling for high school, sometimes they look to protect their children from the pressures of public school. Several significant statements reflected that the students at HCA do not experience a lot of peer pressure. Participant 06 said, “I am never pressured to do things that are considered bad, like drinking or drugs or so on. I like that aspect I guess.” He said this when I asked him what he liked about his friends at HCA. Several participants expressed the same kind of sentiment. It was not an environment where peers were trying to lead peers down the wrong path but rather trying to build each other up.

***Talk about faith.*** Participant 07, a grade nine female, said she was comfortable talking about her faith with her peers. Her story goes just a step further where she actually talked about where she hoped her faith would take her in the future:

Yeah, we talk about the feeling God is calling me to Nepal and I have been for like several months. So I am trying to save up for that I think. Especially since the earthquake was kind of a big eye opener. Just things like that. And J \_\_\_\_\_ P \_\_\_\_\_ came from Kingswood University and his blessing. He said that God told him that I am going to be a leader and everything is like coming together and I love it. So I can talk to my friends about that.

Other participants also expressed that they could talk about issues of faith with their HCA peers. Still others mentioned that it was rare things of a faith nature came up between them.

“This year has been great, probably the best year here. My class really matured and we joke around and have a great sense of humour.” Participant 08, a grade 12 female, felt that her peers were good chums, and they have fun together. This was echoed several times by other students. There was a real sense of congeniality among the student body. This participant is an international student who attends HCA. She said at first it was hard for her to be understood by her peers. She believed her teachers understood her best when she first arrived at HCS. However, she talked about how she had grown to love her classmates.

The students at HCA get to know each other very well. Of course they don't mirror family exactly, but “like family” came to mind often when reading their testimonies of friendship. Participant 09 expounded:

Like here you get to know people's families. You get to go to their church. You get to go to their youth group. And when I mean family, I don't just mean their mom and dad, I mean like their grandparents and great grandparents their 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> aunt and uncle. It's great.

The fellowship many of the participants experienced ran deep and the feeling of this participant was that they would remain friends for a lifetime.

I think one thing that struck me in the interview questions about the friends was the love and care these teenagers had for each other. Participant 10 said it well, “They are really loving and compassionate and they are really caring for me.” In contrast to this was Participant 11 who said, “The drama is stupid, always stupid.” This participant went on and said, “Things are pretty good most of the time.” Participant 11 seemed at odds about how she felt about teachers, peers, and life in general at HCA. In observations, she had two friends (Participants 09 and 10) that she was with throughout every day, and they always enjoyed each other’s company..

I observed a grade 12 math class with Participants 02, 03, 06, and 08 in attendance. This was a very easy-going class despite the difficulty of the subject. The participants really looked after each other. Participant 08, a grade 12 female, was concerned that Participant 02, a grade 12 male, may not have his work caught up and turned in to the teacher. Participant 08 was very careful to do everything she needed to do for the class. Typical of Participant 03, a grade 12 male, he was flipping through binders in the hallway looking for his homework. Participants 06 and 08 seemed to be very good math students. The students were spread out in the large classroom.

Participant 12 liked that the environment with the students was mostly Christian. He said you don’t usually hear foul language. The next participant echoed that, “A lot of us come from the same background of faith.” Participant 13 said because of coming from similar backgrounds there were understandings about things that that were right and wrong.

“If we see someone struggling than...some of the people in my friend group, like we have gone through some pretty tough times and so, when you’ve been through traumatic

situations its really hard for friends to know what to do.” Participant 14 felt the care and concern of her friends in a very traumatic time in her life that involved her family. When she spoke about her friends at HCA, it was evident that they meant the world to her. “Well the fact that we have been here together forever, so we know how each other works.” During her observations I could tell this young woman has deep affection for her friends.

Lunchtime at HCA was short and sweet. I had the opportunity to video three separate lunch breaks. The students had lunch in the famous common area. When the bell rang, the students were dismissed and headed to the common area, and they would set up tables and chairs. Students all went right to the business of eating and socializing. There was lots of noise, but students were not out of hand in any way. The students were allowed to use their technology, and many of the male students gathered around playing games on their phones. Participant 12 and his friends were all playing games while they ate lunch on the side. Many of the female students were texting and then showing their screens back and forth to each other. Participants 09, 10, and 12 were observed texting during my lunchtime observations.

Some participants were not available at lunch because they either had a car to leave campus or they went with a student who has a car. They acted quickly because the lunchtime was just 35 minutes. Participant 04 sat with different individuals each day. He did not sit with any of the other participants. Participants 02, 03, and 06 all sat together each day as old friends and were very comfortable with each other. It was difficult to track down Participants 01, 05, 08, 14, and 15. These participants were often using special permission to study upstairs in their classrooms. Most students were sitting with someone and participating in something social, but there were two or three students who sat off by themselves.

The last participant, Participant 15, talked about working through things together as friends. He said about his friends, “They are there for me.” It was interesting to hear this young man put into words how his group of friends operated. He was the leader of the youth worship team and led a number of the participants in worship during my observations. It is evident that he is well respected by his peers.

Participants 02, 03, and 06, three male students, were often seen together hanging out and enjoying each other’s company. Participant 02 played video games during his study halls, and Participant 03 worked a lot on homework during study hall times. Participant 06 was quiet, and it was rare to see him visible during a study hall. Participant 08 conversed with a number of students at the break times in the hallway. It was apparent that Participants 15, 08, 13, 14, 05, and 01 were all good friends, and they all played on the worship team together. Their friendships and interactions happened with ease.

The idea of being like family surfaced frequently during the interviews with the student participants. They were like family in their care and commitment to each other. Also the fact they were small in number, but rich in relationship surfaced during the interviews. Like siblings, they fight, have drama, and then most of the time make up and move on. Sometimes teachers get involved with their drama, and sometimes they work it out themselves. Several of the older participants said they help younger students work out their drama. Like a Christian family, the participants often talked about God and issues of faith with each other. The Scriptures talk about “iron sharpening iron;” this principle seemed to play out over and over again with these participants. They were like family in many ways.

. **Research question #3.** “What statements about the school environment help you understand the impact of spiritual nurture on faith and Faith Development Theory?” Christian

educators can often speculate what creates SN in their school. This study evaluated SN directly from the students. Confirmed to faith and building blocks of faith were both part of the student experience at HCA. The participant interviews revealed that the majority of student testimonies indicate a confirmation to faith as theorized by Bushnell (1861). “Bushnell was opposed to the individualism of the prevailing theology, and argued for the corporate side to human experience, recognizing the organic life of the family, the church, and even the society at large” (Stull, 2005, p. 51). The experiences of many of the participants lined up with this thinking.

The participants spoke freely about what helped to sharpen their faith at HCA. They spoke directly out of their experiences when they communicated: the teachers, the students, the chapel/retreat services, volunteering, and a Christian environment where they could see God at work. “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17, NIV). Many of the faith builders identified by the participants revolved around relationships they had at HCA.

***Confirmation of faith.*** Participant 01 spoke boldly and confidently about her journey of faith. “I am pretty serious about Jesus, who he is for me and so I think a lot of what defines someone as a Christian is based off of their choices.” As a senior at the school when interviewed, she spoke from her experience. “What I have learned is that Christianity is not so much about religion as it is about relationship.” She spoke of her experience at HCA and how her faith had grown during her years between junior high and high school. She saw the school as a guiding influence and also spoke fondly about her church family and the role they had played in her spiritual growth. She communicated that her faith was something that had grown over time. She was presented with a scholarship at the graduation/award ceremony for her academic standing and areas of service.

“At age seven I was baptized, and I have looked into the Bible and based on what it says,

I believe I am a Christian.” This was the testimony of Participant 02, a shy, quiet 12<sup>th</sup> grade student. He expressed his faith in terms of Biblical authority. There were other participants who expressed their faith in similar ways. It was interesting to observe Participant 02 receiving the Servant’s Heart Award at the graduation/award ceremony. It was given to a student who had clearly demonstrated a care for others through acts of kindness and compassion. Being chosen for this award spoke volumes for the Christian character that was part of Participant 02’s life.

Participant 03, also a senior, expressed his faith close to how Bushnell (1861) theorized. When asked how he knew he was a Christian he said, “I guess just because I’ve been going to church since I was a little kid and then I’ve been going to Christian schools most of my life, its not a just like a certain turning point—I’ve been a Christian all my life.” The participant certainly seemed genuine in his response and truly believed he was a Christian. His expression of that faith, however, is a little outside of the mainstream evangelical box.

The testimony of the next young man was moving. “Being a Christian is basically surrendering your life to Jesus; my life is not my life anymore, but God’s.” Participant 04 clarified as well, “I made the decision last March to surrender my life to Jesus.” I could tell he was passionate about following Christ in every area of his life. More than one of his teachers expressed to me that since last March he became a completely different student. His grades have really improved because of the additional attention he has given his academics. He expressed that confirming to faith in Christ was to allow Him to dominate every area of your life. This became apparent as he talked about choices with movies, media in general, and use of language. This participant finds his peers somewhat immature spiritually, but also said they were on their own journey figuring things out. I understood from the math teacher that Participant 04 has improved a great deal in math lately since a spiritual awakening (confirmation of faith) in his

life. It was obvious that he was fully engaged in his academics at HCA. His efforts were also acknowledged at the year-end graduation/award ceremony. An award was presented to Participant 04 to honour noteworthy growth in a number of areas of their life over the past year.

The testimony of Participant 05, a grade 11 female, looked like this:

I know God personally; I've fallen in love with Him I guess. Growing up in church and growing up in a Christian school it's a lot. You see things, like people falling away from the faith and not wanting it (faith) and rebelling against it (faith). I did go through a time when I questioned, 'Is it even real'? But I have stuck through it and I have lots of support from my church and my parents; it's really great. Now I am strong, and I want to help others.

I saw Fowler's (1981) stage four come in to view for this student as she began to make her faith her own and desired to reach out to others. She was a spiritually mature force in her homeroom. There were significant statements here that spoke to her making the Christian faith her own and really choosing to confirm to the faith she has been taught versus rejecting it as she has seen happen with others.

Another member of the senior class, Participant 06, also confirmed to faith in a personal way. "I grew up in church, my family went to church, that is one of those things that have always been there...A few summers starting when I was ten, I went to Bible camp and that is where I got my first taste at a more personal level." This participant said this year he has been growing closer to the Lord and experiencing a filling of the Holy Spirit. During his observations, I noticed him singing quietly during the worship and raising his hand as an act of worship. No other students were worshipping in this way. The fact that he did not mind being different from the rest of his peers spoke to me about his level of faith commitment.



To understand how the participants were processing their own faith, I asked them each the question, “How do you know you are a Christian?” Participant 07 answered this way, “Sometimes you can just feel if God is far or near, so you can just tell....A few years ago, you believed you’re a Christian because of your parents. I went to church my whole life. But I just kind of opened my mind like I am going to believe this, not just because my parents do, but because I do.” Here in her significant statements, Bushnell’s (1861) description of next generation faith is seen. This participant, a grade nine female, was confident in her faith walk and calling of God on her life, and her testimony reflected a confirmation to the faith of her childhood teachings.

“I am a Christian because I believe in Jesus, and I know He’s the only one to save me.” Participant 08’s testimony reflected her testimony knowledge of the Scriptures. This 12<sup>th</sup> grade female international student at HCA used her knowledge of choosing God’s salvation as her way of articulating her salvation experience. Participant 10 expressed her salvation this way, “I was raised in a Christian home but I never really developed a really good strong relationship with God until a year ago.” This 10<sup>th</sup> grade young woman said she has been attending HCA for a couple of years and then, “It just never really clicked, then I went to a youth rally...it was almost like here I am--take me.” This expression of salvation spoke to a confirming to a faith she had known and been taught. It took this experience of a youth rally and moving of the Spirit to bring her to that next level of faith. Participant 08 was given the Christian Character Award at the year-end graduation/ award ceremony. It was given to the student who best displays consistent Christian character in all areas of school and personal life for high school. This award indicated that Participant 08’s peers and teachers recognized life-changing faith in her life.

Participant 10 said she knew she was a Christian because she can feel God with her. “I feel God with me everyday, I can feel Him with me when I am walking down the street or when I am having a tough time in math class....I just have this peace because I know He was here and I know I can feel him with me and it was really comforting.” This 10<sup>th</sup> grade girl felt confirmed to a faith she has known for many years. In contrast to that Participant 11 said the question, “How do you know you are a Christian?” She said she prayed a prayer with her parents when she was four. However, she did not give any indication to what impact that prayer had on her life today.

A 9<sup>th</sup> grade boy, Participant 12, gave me his testimony, “I have given my life to the Lord and I would say I am born again. I just know. I just believe. This young man had wonderful expressions of faith in his class speech at the year-end graduation. He told his fellow students that it was very important to work, as unto the Lord—He believed that was part of being a Christian.

Participant 13 expressed confirmation of faith. “I think it is just one of those things I just know. If you like question it, then you may not be a Christian, but I don’t. I just believe. I don’t really know how else to put it to be honest.” Participant 13, a 10<sup>th</sup> grade male, spoke in tones of conviction when he mentioned his faith. He confirmed in his faith. Participant 14 went into detail about difficulty she had in her family in the last few years and how she really needed to rely on her relationship with the Lord during this time. When I asked her how she knew she was a Christian she said, “I just kind of grew up growing into it.” This was significant statement of confirming to faith.

Participant 15 also had an interesting testimony:

Well, I have been a Christian since I was born. Then when I was around six,, my parents were like, you're a Christian. And I was like okay. I didn't really know what that meant until I grew up, and then I was like...I don't know. I was just thinking, but I didn't say anything to my parents. I just sat there and thought, what does this mean? I was always going to church, but never really listening to the sermons until I matured at around 13 and 14. I started listening then and was like, wow I get it! So I am actually here for a reason. And I was like yeah okay, I get it.

His seventeen year old testimony was classic when it comes to Fowler's (1981) stages. He had made this faith his own and confirmed in his own heart that he believed what his parents, school, and church have been teaching him for the last several years.

Fourteen out of the 15 students interviewed coded in some way their confirmation of faith. Some said they have always known they were Christians. Others believed it was because of their choices based on Scripture. Most all testified that they felt God in their life and continued to walk deeper in a faith most have known for many years.

***Building blocks of faith.*** The first participant cited three important faith builders from HCA: teachers, Christian friends, and chapel services. Many of the significant statements focused on one or more of these three things when the participants were asked about what from the HCA environment helped to sharpen their faith. Participant 02 expounded, "The teachers are faithful, they help us when we fall down." Participant 01 said in the HCA environment the older students looked out for the younger students. The second participant said, "It is a homey environment. Like we all know each other and its like we are a big family."

I sat in on all four homeroom classes, and within them I was able to observe all of the participants. It was interesting to hear the students requesting prayer. Prayer was a major part of

the homeroom experience. The teachers share prayer requests with the students as well. The Christian students take turns praying over each request. The students give the impression they were eager to share requests. After prayer time the teachers lead the students in something fun, or devotional, or chatting about the events of the day to come. There was a spirit of congeniality in the homeroom classrooms.

Being taught the Bible and chapel services were two of the faith building blocks

Participant 03 spoke of how that helped his own faith. Participant 04 said:

If Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ and Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ weren't here I would be doing a lot of it on myself outside of school. I think what HCA has taught me that coming to a Christian school is not going to make you a real good Christian person. It is not going to make you have an interest in reading the Bible. You're going to have to ask God for that interest. You are going to have to ask Him to fill you with His Holy Spirit...coming to a Christian school gives you Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ and Mr. \_\_\_\_\_. A Christian education gives me a Christian foundation...it strengthens, but it doesn't deepen.

This participant talked about a number of things in his interview about HCA building faith into his life. He is a grade 10 male who is being raised by his grandparents, and his grandfather is a minister. His mindset reminded me of an old soul. I could tell his much older, experienced grandparents influenced him. He was overwhelmingly positive about certain teachers that took on a spiritual mentor role and how that encouragement has helped him to grow. He was also careful to discern that it was God's Holy Spirit that does the work.

Participant 06 felt that not being pressured to do things that were wrong was a building block of faith for him. He also said at HCA he expressed his Christian opinions more freely without being judged by teachers or peers. He believed these environmental factors of HCA were

helping his faith to grow. Participant 07 believed that the Christian teachers and Christian peers were environmental factors that helped build her faith at HCA.

Worship team and chapel services were cited as faith building blocks for Participant 008. “I am still learning that worship involves your whole life, not just singing wise. I am learning things like that and other experiences.” She felt that the opportunity to serve the student body gave her a chance to grow in her newfound faith. The Christian environment was the code of one of the significant statements of Participant 09. “Just being around people with the same morals and values as you because there is less drama, less gossip, fighting; it almost helps to build your self esteem.”

The services at the retreats were seen as a building block of faith for Participant 10. “Especially with the retreats—we go on retreats at the beginning of the year, and we have a special speaker....Just having that experience of fellowshiping with people that are your age and to talk to someone who is on the same level is really cool and it really helps.” Participant 11 had very little to say about building blocks of faith, but she did offer that the students who were Christians at HCA were different from the ones who were not, and by different she meant they acted in kinder ways.

Participant 12 said that the building blocks of his faith in conjunction with HCA were the friends that created the Christian environment. He perceived the environment to be very different in public school. There was a deepening of this concept of Christian peers and Christian teachers creating a Christian environment with the responses of Participant 13. “I think we are more of a family in the school. It’s kind of like even the teachers are included even though we don’t always agree with each other.” It was like the student body was living out Ephesians 4:32, “Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven

you” (New Living Translation). Within that theme, Participant 14 said, “Its amazing to having Christian friends. I do not think I would be as close to God in public school. I think it would have just drawn me away.”

The Christian environment theme continued with Participant 15. A grade 11 male, he believed that the teachers really help develop the environment and help the students build faith. “Well the teachers. The teachers encourage me when they feel I need it. Like our classes, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ the other day prayed with a buddy and I in his office, that was good.” This participant could clearly identify that his faith was sharpened by the vigilance of his teachers. He expressed how the teachers watch their character and correct them when they are out of line. He mentioned that they talk over these issues with staff and feel encouraged.

Fourteen out of 15 students interviewed could identify 1-4 key faith building blocks in their own spiritual journey because of attending HCA. These blocks came through in significant statements about Christian teachers, Christian peers, chapel and retreat services, volunteerism, and seeing God at work in a Christian environment.

I observed all of the participants during chapel. Chapels started out with the school worship band. Participants 14, 15, 01, 05, and 08 all led the junior and senior high school students in worship songs. In one particular chapel they led with “Revelation Song” and “Your Love Never Fails”. The heartfelt words of worship came from the front of the common area where chapel was held, and the other students received the worship band with openness.

During one chapel, it was announced that this was the second to last chapel. Participants 01, 02, 03, 08, and 06 would all be graduating in that school year, so these chapels were getting a little bit emotional for them. The following year Participant 01 will be at a local university taking psychology, Participant 02 will be at a local community college taking IT, Participant 03 will be

at a local university taking engineering, Participant 08 will be at a local university taking chemistry, and Participant 06 will also be studying engineering at a local university. All of their post-secondary choices were secular. There will not be any chapel services to attend next year. These special years of SN as part of the school day were coming to the end for these grade 12 participants.

**Research question 4.** “What are students themselves thinking and feeling about faith while they attend the Christian high school?” The significant statements were coded around the steeping in stage three. The things that were part of this Christian high school’s day that nurture faith: chapel services, prayer in their classes, and the memorization of Scripture. Fowler (1981) said faith at synthetic-conventional faith stage was when an adolescent begins to make faith his or her own. Part of the agenda at HCA was to prepare the students to do that while attending HCA. Near the end of their high school career, they begin to reach out beyond just making their faith their own, but getting ready to grab a hold of stage four in the next phase of life. At this stage, they will internalize faith in new developmental ways and begin to see the world through one’s personal worldview and not the prescribed model of their faith community.

In faith terms, it refers to the conscious or unconscious image of adult faith toward which the educational practices, religious celebrations and patterns of governance in a community all aim. The model level operates as a kind of magnet in religious communities. Patterns of nurture prepare children and youth to grow up to the model level—but not beyond it. Persons from outside the community are attracted to the community because of its model developmental level. The operation of the model level in a community sets an effective limit on the ongoing process of growth in faith. My observations lead me to judge that the model developmental level in most middle class

American churches and synagogues is best described in terms of Synthetic-Conventional faith, or perhaps just beyond it (Fowler, 1981, p. 294).

The fourth question uncovered the reinforcements of stage three in the lives of the participants.

***Steeping in stage three.*** Prayer was something that was part of a regular rhythm of the school day at HCA. Participant 01 said this about their complete freedom to pray:

I think that it's a really nice freedom to have because as soon as the grade 12s leave these four walls of HCA we're not really going to have that anymore. And if we think it is intimidating now to pray in front of everyone...we better be prepared because its going to be tougher when we go to university.

This graduating senior was beginning to see prayer as something that would not be part of her academic future in a secular university. The continued reliance on corporate prayer at her CHS would soon be a memory versus a reality. This pattern of prayer has helped to steep this student in stage three faith. It will take a new situation to see if as a young adult she keeps these patterns for herself.

Students at HCA memorized a different character trait each month along with a corresponding passage of Scripture. I asked all the participants if these portions of Scripture were helpful and if the Holy Spirit every brought them to mind a needed time. Participant 02 said he has used these character traits and corresponding Scriptures to guide his behaviour during his time at HCA. "There have been some passages and key verses in school that have shaped my views." These passages of Scripture and character traits reinforced the standards of Christian faith for HCA students. Participant 04 said he prayed over the traits and corresponding Scriptures so that God would use them in his life. Participant 03 said praying in school was great. "You know you can just go up to someone and receive prayer." Participant 06 said it was strange at



first to pray out loud in front of the class, but he has gotten used to it. He said he volunteered sometimes to pray.

Participant 03 felt chapel services were important and especially for those students who do not go to church on Sunday. He felt that the chapel service at school at least provided a time of fellowship and also hearing a sermon. Participant 04 thought chapel was very important, but he wished the sermons were centered more on the Bible and less about experiences had by the speaker. Chapel services were not always perfect, Participant 05 said, but the grade 11, female participant stated, "God still shows up somehow." She felt that chapel was a good time of outreach for the students on campus who are not Christians.

Participant 05 was played the guitar for the school worship band, and during observations it was obvious she enjoyed that role. Earlier one morning when I was approaching the school I saw Participant 05 walking to the school. She had on her plaid uniform skirt, a white blouse, and a jean jacket. Her long blonde hair flowed down her shoulders and she had her guitar strapped to her back. This image spoke volumes about the lives of these participants. They have a quiet experience in high school that was filled with opportunities to sing and play Christian music. The participants in the study who were part of the chapel worship team were a very close-knit group of friends; it was apparent that they have played music together for some time. Participant 06, a grade 12 male who was part of the chapel audience, was often engaged with the worship music, even lifting his hands in worship to the Lord.

Participant 07 thought that praying at school was very important. "I think praying is important because if you don't you're distant and caring about things and asking God, thanking Him was very important." Pausing to pray was recognition of putting dependence on God. At HCA prayer continued to help the students understand more about faith. Participant 08 said she

prayed often when she was on stage for worship team. She just wanted to do her best for God. This 12<sup>th</sup> grade participant said that chapels have been very important to her, especially since her church does not have a youth group. She felt that chapel helped her to focus on God through the week.

Participant 08, a grade 12 female, took the chapel service very seriously as she came prepared to take notes. She was the only student I noticed that was taking notes from the service. Like each one of the participants, she listened intently throughout the whole chapel time, even though it was lengthy (about 50 minutes from start to finish). Participants 04 and 06 seemed to be listening with interest. Each of the participants kept their attention on the speaker until chapel was finished. Their attraction was evident and they have obviously been conditioned to the length of the chapel. The level of respect for the speaker and even the chapel service was visibly apparent with the study participants as I see them sitting up in their seats and keeping their attention on the speaker.

“There is no better way then to start your morning off with prayer. Because you can get everything off your chest.” Participant 09 felt prayer was an important part of her HCA day. She said she always had the option to pray by herself, or with someone else, or with a teacher. Participant 09 was learning to pace the day by a rhythm of prayer and her teachers were helping to lead her in that direction. We feel free to share prayer requests said Participant 10. “I love homeroom where our teacher just asks us if we have prayer requests.”

Participant 10 also testified to having Scriptures come back to her mind that she had memorized coming through the ranks at HCA. This particular participant had been attending HCA since kindergarten, so she has spent a lot of time with the character traits and their corresponding Scriptures. She said not all of them come back, but when they do “its kinda cool.”

Participant 11 was the only participant who really did not indicate a stage of faith. She could not really articulate what impacted her personally about chapel, scripture memory, or prayer in her school. I really could not read her spirit towards the questions asked to her. In contrast to this participant, Participant 12 did indicate favorably towards all three. He indicated that he was pleased with the freedom to pray in school, the chapel services, and he said that he used the Scripture verses associated with the character traits in his own life. Participant 13 said it was not about memorizing the Scriptures word for word, but tuning in to what each Scripture means.

It was a pleasure to attend the 2015 graduation and award ceremony for the high school students of HCA. The school faculty chose the class speaker for the grade nine graduation class. The speaker for this year's class was Participant 12. In his speech, the participant thanked God for everything He had done in his life up until that point and everything that God had in store for him in the future. He also thanked his parents for enrolling him at HCA. Part way through his speech, he began to discuss the things that have contributed the most to his academic development. The participant cited teachers who worked patiently with the students who also serve as terrific Christian role models, a family environment, strong academic structures, and the monthly character traits. He mentioned that those character traits were based on the Word of God and gave him excellent advice of how to live his life. More importantly, he noted that those traits have made him the young man he was today. He quoted Colossians 3:23 "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters" as a verse to guide his life. He reflected that this past year he purposed in his heart to do every test, quiz, and paper to the best of his ability. He called it going the extra mile with his schoolwork—doing everything with excellence. Participant 12 presented his speech with confidence, and it was well received by

classmates and the audience.

Participants 14 and 15 both said they were happy with their freedom to pray in the school. Participant 14 said that it took awhile to get used to praying out loud, but now she thought of it as just, “talking to Jesus.” Participant 15 said it would not bother him to pray for a friend in class or outside of class. He said even though there were non-Christians at their school you have to not care about what they think and do what he believed was right. The fact that she was homeschooled previous to HCA had Participant 14 nervous about praying in front of peers. Participants 14 and 15 also led the school’s worship band vocally. Participant 15 seemed to provide the most direction. Participant 15, a grade 11 male, led the worship sets in prayer, and he thanked the Lord for helping them with their music. His prayer was especially powerful when the band played at the school’s graduation/award ceremony.

All but one of the participants interviewed were positive about faith training they were receiving through the praxis of faith within HCA. Steeping in the traditions and truths of the Christian faith with an adolescent population was key. Fowler (1981) said, “The dangers or deficiencies in this stage were twofold. The expectations and evaluations of others can be so compellingly internalized that later autonomy of judgment and action can be jeopardized (p.173).” This was significant because CHS worked to create consistent teaching and not create a deficiency in this important stage of adolescent development. Christian school education worked to continue coaching faith development and providing praxis of faith for students and to steep into their lives.

**Research question 5.** “How does this impact Faith Development Theory?” For this last research question, the aim was to see how the spiritual nurture prescribed as part of the CHS curriculum at HCA was impacting the faith development of the students. The SN at HCA was

aimed to move students into that stage four swiftly and wanted them to be prepared to work through the next paradigm as they graduate. It will take leaving one or more of the worlds their faith has been nurtured in: home, church, or Christian school. Even a Christian college or another church congregation will bring about new thoughts in regards to former teachings. The later years in a CHS appear to be about building a bridge to a young adult stage of faith.

*Walking to Fowler's stage four.* The participants who were involved in an aspect of leadership seemed to be walking on the bridge towards stage four even though they were still at the same home, school, and church. Several of the participants interviewed were part of the school's worship band. These participants seemed to have a spiritual maturity that indicated more self-reflection. Participant 01 revealed this insight when she said:

Worship is a huge thing and I'm on the worship team, so a lot of the time it is important that we bring the presence of God....And there are students who need that heart to heart connection with God and we can't help them with that if we are just concerned with how we sound and what we look like. I think that is always a struggle for a worship band. But that's really important to me, that we are solely focused on Jesus being the center of everything in order for a chapel to be remembered and important to someone.

That concern for the other students and making sure that her heart was aligned to lead them showed signs of truly thinking through her faith for herself, which indicated a walk towards stage four faith.

Having questions about faith could be intimidating in a school that was dedicated to teaching that faith. I asked all of the participants if they felt HCA was a safe place to ask questions about faith. It was asking questions and sorting out answers within the participant himself or herself that will lead them into the kind of self-awareness they need for stage four.

Participant 04 said he did not feel comfortable asking questions in front of his peers, but that there was a couple of teachers he could go to with any questions and he did that regularly.

Participant 05 said Comparative Religion Class was a very safe place to ask questions and that the class often debated issues that related to other ideologies and religions. This class was preparation for students to think for themselves and evaluate their Christian faith along side of other major world religions. Participant 07 said, “I would be free to ask anything to the teachers.”

Worship team leadership continued to be a theme that helped to build the faith of the participants who were in leadership. Participant 07 said, “It’s fun to hang out with your friends and actually sing these songs, and they aren’t just songs. The words you’ve got to realize that they mean something.” The process of helping lead others had an impact on this participant who was finishing grade nine at the time of the interview. Also on the worship team, Participant 08 said, “I just want to grow in how to bring them to God.” She was concerned about her fellow students and the responsibility the worship team has to guide the students to Christ through music.

Participant 08 sang a beautiful solo at the year-end graduation/award ceremony. The song, *Power to Redeem*, had a beautiful message: “With breath it brings the dead to life, With words that pierce the dark with light; Only by the blood are we set free; With mercy strong to carry shame; and nail it to a tree You alone; hold the power to redeem” (Daigle, 2014). This was a power testimony sung by Participant 08 who graduated that night at HCA and who came to know the Lord during her time at HCA. The song written and made popular by Daigle (2014) was a clear testimony to what happened spiritually for this student as part of the HCA community. Participants 14 and 15 sang back up to Participant 08 on this song. It seemed fitting

that two 11<sup>th</sup> graders would support this 12<sup>th</sup> grade solo in the school worship team. One was moving on from HCA and two coming up behind to finish next year.

Well-formed and well-asked questions helped participants at HCA become more acquainted with what they believe. Participant 09 said, “There are those teachers that are like, yeah definitely, come in for lunch sometime and we can talk about it.” Participant 10 said she knew teachers would answer any questions she had. All the participants had the sense that teachers wanted them to think for themselves, so they tend to provide guidance for answers, not just hard facts. The 13<sup>th</sup> participant interviewed said that they were encouraged to be balanced with their views at school. He said, especially in religion class, that there were Muslims studying along side of Christians in the school, and that everyone was respectful with their questions. Participant 13 felt that balance was important to maintain a healthy school environment. The balance would also be good training to walk the bridge to stage four.

Participants 14 and 15 were also on the school worship team. This experience seemed to impact both of them in positive ways regarding faith.

Well for me I pour my heart into chapels. It was one of the things that I love. I have always been on the worship team....I've always wanted to make chapels better....I really feel like a lot of the people in the Christian Academy are not Christian, but when we go on retreats and have chapels and things like that that's when it really touches people. I feel like you are up there and you're in the presence of God and you are leading into worship or you are preaching with the people kind of thing....We are all trying to build each other up (Participant 14).

She was passionate about the impact chapel was having on her non-Christian peers. In addition to that Participant 15 said, “Chapel is pretty good, we do worship....When the message is always

good, surprisingly. I just hope it touches people; because if we aren't doing that why bother doing it.

The participants did not all indicate that they were at a place to be walking towards Fowler's (1981) stage four. Those who led on the HCA worship team were moving the closest to that stage. Having already been given the responsibility to lead peers, they were comprehending their faith in new and exciting ways and what their direct impact could have on another. Having non-Christians as part of the student body does appear to aid the growth of faith development. "Readiness for transition may include: serious clashes or contradictions between valued authority source" (Fowler, 1981, p. 173). The non-Christians do provide a clash of a different point of view. Also by having opportunity to think critically about their faith in classes like Comparative Religions, the students were at least interacting with a set of ideologies that were different from their Christian faith.

### **Findings Not Anticipated**

There were many things I expected to find while I collected data and other points that I did not expect. For example, many of the students brought up life struggles during their interviews. I was surprised that they would be so open during our discussions; some of the participants were carrying heavy weights about family issues in their lives. Their life struggles gave me more insight into their answers and their observations. When evaluating a CS scholar like Shultz (1998), his observations about the family, the church, and the school needing to be on the same page philosophically to produce the best results for the young person are understood. I was not anticipating seeing this clearly in the lives of the participants interviewed. Most expressed their involvement in the church, their Christian family as well as the influence of school. Although many of the participants have been in CS or homeschool most of their lives,



they have very distinct opinions about public school. I did not anticipate that they would so readily make comparisons between their school and public school.

**Life struggles.** Being in CSE for many years, it was not a surprise to me that the participants in this study had life struggles. However, what was a surprise to me was how readily they shared those struggles during their interview time with me. It spoke to how close those struggles were to the surface. Participant 04 was first to identify details about his background. He was placed in the custody of his grandparents at 19 months old. His mother carried on with her life independently, and she gave custody of Participant 04 and his sister to her mom and dad. He said she walked away from her faith. His grandfather is a pastor and the participant talked at length at how he helped his grandfather with ministry projects. He talked about his grandparents not being able to afford HCA, but that the principal was finding scholarship money for him to attend. He said growing up he always resented the fact that they didn't have much money, but he was much better about it now. He said he wanted more of God and less of what the world had to offer these days. He talked about going back a grade when he came to HCA because his grades were so poor. "I went from like a 1.89 GPA to a GPA of 3.83. Everything changed drastically....I had over the summer to get closer to God." He talked about a spiritual experience he had where he felt totally compelled to surrender everything to Christ.

This spiritual awakening led him to receive a year-end award to help with financing his education next year at HCA. Participant 04 hopes to complete courses over the summer so he can get in the proper grade next year for his age, grade 12. Then he was excited to plan to train for full time Christian ministry. His difficulties seem to have made him grow up quickly and he was often impatient with his classmates. He believed they were immature. He did, however, seem very sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading in his life.

Another student expressed a different kind of personal struggle. Participant 08 is an international student from Africa. She has been at HCA three years. She spoke about the trials she had back in her country both at school and at home. She felt the selection for HCA was quite random on the part of her family; although now she can see it was all in God's design. Her homestay family was key to helping her with her struggles. Her homestay family treated her very kindly and acted as spiritual mentors and guidance for this grade 12 senior. She explained how she felt after her first day at HCA:

At the end of my first day, I was so surprised that this was school. And my first host home at the time, I just turned to them and was just like, "this is school?" No teachers hitting you; No one calling you dumb. You bring your own lunch. You get to play! I was just so surprised. I really liked it.

She also went into detail about some of the spiritual struggles she had at HCA. She has come to know the Lord and be a committed Christian since attending HCA. She struggled around the area of why she was born into a life that has produced so much trouble. Participant 08 did not discuss what the exact problems were in her family but indicated they were huge. She felt the staff at HCA helped her through some very difficult times. She said back home in Africa she could never have confided in her teachers. At HCA she said teachers kept her personal information private and gave her very good advice.

It was thrilling to observe this graduate receive a \$36,000 Presidential Scholarship to Mount St. Vincent University. I was also excited to realize that she will still have contact with the homestay family that has meant so much to her these last two years at HCA. Participant 08 shared her exciting scholarship story with me. She was upset because a family member was coming to visit that she really did not want to see. As she talked with the Lord, she asked him

Why, is this happening? So I told God if you don't show me where you are leading me and taking me, I am just going to stop, I will quit. I will just do whatever. That afternoon I get a letter from the President of Mount St. Vincent offering me the Presidential Scholarship.

She said a teacher said to her, "Did you notice that happened after you prayed." It was moving to hear this part of the participant's story.

When I asked Participant 14 to share her testimony she unpacked a personal struggle. She said that when contemplating her testimony in years past she wondered what to put down. She said she just kind of grew up in Christianity. When there was a huge tragedy in her family she found that she leaned on the Lord for guidance and grew much stronger in her faith. A situation broke her family apart and she said it totally rearranged her world:

Later on my family went through something horrible....That's when I personally stepped up. Like my mom said I was probably the glue that held everything in our family together. Of course my mom had to be really strong so we didn't end up in different foster homes and stuff like that. I stepped up and babysat for an entire summer....My family was in pieces.

Participant 14 said her teachers, the ones who knew of her family difficulty, saw her through that very dark time. She also mentioned her Christian friends at HCA; they were very helpful in seeing her through. The participants who shared personal stories seemed to commit themselves to a deeper level of faith.

**Home, church, and school relationships.** I was surprised how often the topic of church came up. I did not ask any questions directly related to church attendance, but frequently the students would bring it up to me in the course of their interview. Participant 01 said she attended

a small group at her church. “We have something at my church called, [small groups], it is a small group. We hang out sometimes and just play games and other times we have Bible study or something like that. Or just hang out at someone’s house.”

Halifax, NS has a reputation of being a city with many vibrant, evangelical churches. It was obvious that many of the participants were part of these larger, well-known works in the city. Other participants, like Participant 04, were part of a smaller work that does a lot of outreach in poor neighbourhoods in the city. “We’re basically downtown Dartmouth so we aren’t in the wealthy area; we have outreaches like we have a clothing bank....We give clothes away to people who can’t afford it and their living on welfare....We also have a food bank.” This participant talked about delivering furniture around the city to the needy. This ministry gave the impression to be impacting Participant 04. He talked about being called to full time ministry when he graduates from HCA. He mentioned that at one time he thought it would be awesome to be part of a more prestigious ministry, but he believed now that he will do whatever God calls him to do.

As part of her testimony, Participant 05 discussed the support she received from her church, her parents and school in faith encouragement. Service seemed to be key in the faith development of participants interviewed.

I helped out with the kids group we have at our church when I was younger and recently became one of the leaders in our youth group, which has been really great. I am in charge of worship band that we have there. Which has been really great to be a part of and that group of friends. We all kind of formed the band, so we will worship together and play music, which we love. It’s a lot of fun.

The support from church communities was key. Schultz's (1998) definition of kingdom education was the harmony between home, church, and school championed the agreement between all three entities. The participants who spoke of their support at home and through church as well as their CS were stepping in stage three and getting ready to walk the bridge to stage four.

**Public school comparison.** Many of the participants that were interviewed made reference to how they felt their experience at HCA was superior to that of their public school counterparts. This was not expected since so many of the participants have never actually been to public school. I was not expecting them to bring up these comparisons spontaneously. Participant 10 referenced the difference between how students act at HCA and those in public school. She referenced a day she visited public school with a friend:

The hallways are crazy loud and people are yelling and people are swearing everywhere. They are just like being crazy. I mean someone pushed my friend down to the ground and just sat on her and people were dragging her around and I was just like what are you doing? This is not what you are suppose to do...you are suppose to stand and talk, you aren't suppose to stuff like that. There was definitely a difference.

Participant 10 has been at HCA since kindergarten. She had spent very little time observing public school, but she had a sense of what she believed was different from HCA.

Participant 09 was one of the few participants who had actually been a student in public school. She relayed that her parents switched her out of public school because she was headed down the wrong path in grade 8. "I started getting involved in bad relationships and getting in with the wrong crowd. My mom was like, 'nope not going to happen. We need to keep you on the straight path so they brought me here and it's been amazing.'" This participant talked about

the difference between the teachers and peers between public school and CS. She felt the teachers were much more caring at HCA. She also felt the student body had a much closer connection. She said she knew her peers and their families and even their church families.

One 9<sup>th</sup> grade participant who has never been to public school talked about the teasing and bullying that was part of her CS experience. “Everyone thinks that doesn’t go to a Christian school that everyone is just like family.” Participant 07 wanted to help students who were being teased or bullied at HCA. When she reflected on having brought the subject of bullying she said, “But I don’t think it is as bad as some people would think in public school, because I have heard a lot of stories.”

Participant 14 said she did not feel she would be as close to God if she had gone to public school. These examples of public school comparisons surprised me in my findings. The students of HCA have a sense of how they believe their school experience would be different if they attended local public schools. Every participant made a comparison with public school or alluded to a comparison as they answered interview questions.

### **Summary**

Chapter Four presented the phenomenological field data on spiritual nurture participants receive attending a Christian high school. I had 15 participants who agreed to be part of my study identified as Christian, had been at HCA at least two years, and were between grades 9-12. The first method of data collection was observations. The observations helped to consider the structural descriptions for the study. The second form was detailed interviews, which yielded a great deal of textual description of SN at HCA. The last form of data collection was online journals; the journal entries helped with the textual description. There were findings not anticipated in this study, and they were how readily the students were willing to talk about life

struggles, and also the participants were quick to discern that they had superior experiences with teachers than their public school contemporaries.

Christian high school is a unique experience for adolescents in the culture but even unique in 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian culture. The students who attend enjoyed the fellowship of Christian peers who become like family. They also gain the academic advantage of competent teachers and the spiritual advantage of those same teachers being spiritual mentors. The CHS experience provided a place to grow in faith and confirm to Christian faith as an adolescent. The SN that was part of the experience in a CHS helps the students to steep in the development of stage three faith. It was interesting to observe that SN was also helping lead some to the furthest end of stage three and has prepared them to begin their journey over the bridge that leads to stage four.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Overview**

Chapter Five provides a summary of the discussion of SN in Christian high schools. This chapter provides a synthesis of the literature from Chapter Two and the field research findings. Theoretical and practical implications from the study were reviewed. Chapter Five reflects my own personal evaluation of the research and data results. Discussion was offered about prayer, holistic correction, purpose, development of faith, emerging spirituality, stories of faith, identity, teacher's example, equilibrium, spirituality, extra spiritual nurturing, teacher-student relationships, Bible study, confidence, faith development, and Christian peers. Recommendations were made for Christian teachers, Christian administration, CS board members, and CS students. Endorsements were made for future research and studies regarding adolescent faith development and Christian education.

### **Summary of Findings**

The purpose of this study was to demonstrate the SN, and that it was an integral part of the CHS experience. The study evaluated a sample of 15 CHS students of ACSI Eastern Canada. Moustakas (1994) provided the primary structure for the method used. The purpose of transcendental phenomenological was to capture the essence from each individual perspective to form the collective perspective. The participants were between 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades and had all been students for two years or more at Halifax Christian Academy. The school was the largest of its kind in Atlantic Canada. The school was a well-established part of the evangelical culture in Halifax, and a well-established part of the Christian School Movement in the Eastern part of Canada. Christian educators often makes the assumption that their students are spiritually



nurtured. I wanted this study to reflect the voice of the students. I wanted to capture the phenomenon of the spiritual nurture that was making an impact on the students as they navigate their high school career. I wanted to hear their lived experiences and how attending a CHS builds their faith.

**Central Question, “How does SN impact the development of faith of adolescents who attend a CHS?”**

Spiritual nurture impacted the faith development of the participants in a number of ways. The first line and most impactful part of SN came from the relationships the participants had with their teachers. The second most important point of SN were times or renewal like a spiritual retreats and chapel services. The participants mentioned prayer as a constant example of faith before them each day and throughout the day. Some grade 12 participants mentioned that they specifically would miss this when they moved on to University. The example of teachers demonstrating their faith to the students was key to reinforcing the faith of the participants. The participants who served on the school worship were having their faith built because of their opportunity to serve the student body and nurture others.

**Research Question 1 “What themes arise in relationships with teachers to help adolescents build faith in a CHS that help with Faith Development Theory?”**

The participants continued to make significant statements about the competency of their teachers. They believed their teachers have many academic strengths including knowing their subject matter very well. Thirteen out of 15 participants has significant praise for their teachers going the extra mile. The students see the teachers as individuals who want to see them succeed academically. They believe their teachers work harder and fight more for their success than

teachers in public school. Participants said they were positive with them nearly all the time and exhibit character traits like honesty, faithfulness, self-control, love, and compassion.

The second theme that was concluded with the teachers was the fact that the teachers were not just vessels of academic knowledge, but also beacons of spiritual truth. Twelve of the 15 participants said they could go to their teachers with almost any problem. Some students said they went to specific teachers on a regular basis. Fourteen of the 15 students said they knew the teachers wanted them to do well spiritually and were often coaching them in that direction. They also brought up the fact that they pray in their classes, and that this positive reinforcement impacted their own faith.

### **Research Question 2“What themes arise in the relationships between peers that help with Faith Development Theory?”**

It was interesting to hear the students talk about their peers at HCA. The main theme was that their HCA peers become “like family.” In saying that, they did not mean it was always perfect. What it boiled down to was that they go the distance for each other. I observed many friendships during my observation periods. The students were very comfortable with each other. There was only one participant who was uncertain of peer relationships. The participants said as peers they work through their ups and downs. They said they had to push through and make relationships work because they were such a small student body. Many of the students expressed that life would not be nearly as rich without their HCA peers. Many of the friendships among the participants ran deep, especially those students who served on the worship team together; these students were a very close group. Serving the student body together appears to improve their faith and have them on the road walking towards stage four. As Participant 14 said, “I don’t know where I would be without my friends at HCA.” Participant 09 said she could picture

becoming young a adult with these friends and being close even after they had grown up. “We are like one big happy family,” were the words of Participants 13. His significant statement almost sounded like a cliché; however, I could tell it was sincere.

**Research Question 3 “What statements about the school environment help us to understand the impact of spiritual nurture on faith and Faith Development Theory?”**

Bushnell (1861) is considered the father of Christian education. He took the SN of Christian youth seriously. He believed that when a child was born into a Christian home, they should consider themselves Christian. He believed those children would confirm to faith when they came of age. Hearing the testimonies of the participants aligned in many ways with Bushnell’s (1861) theory. I anticipated the participants to express their testimony in a more evangelical way. However, many used terms like: “I grew into faith,” “I’ve always been Christian,” “I just believe,” “I feel Him with me,” and “I realized I needed to make faith my own.” Confirmation of faith became a theme of the school environment and made an impact on the personal faith of the students.

There were obvious building blocks of faith that came out for the participants. Attending chapel, praying in school, memorizing Scripture, and playing on the worship team were all points of building into personal faith for the students. The greatest faith builder came from those students who took a leadership role in the chapel worship band. It became apparent that those students who stepped into a role to lead others were growing deeper in faith with Christ. The chapel services were cited as important times of growth for almost all of the participants. Ten of the 15 mentioned the retreat that was held at the beginning of each school year. It was mentioned in a very positive way, and the participants cited this school event a main event by way of building faith. The topics of Christian peers and Christian teachers continued to surface when

discussing forces that impacted students' faith.

**Research Question 4 “What are the students’ thoughts and feelings about building faith while attending a CHS?”**

The adolescent participants were steeping in Fowler’s stage three while attending their CHS. Based on Fowler’s (1981) theory, this was a time in life when adolescents are finding an identity outside of themselves, which includes a faith identity. Attending a CHS gives families an additional venue of faith building outside of the family and their organized church. Many of the participants agreed that HCA was a safe place to ask questions they may have about faith. This was also a stage where students are learning about the faith they were making their own.

Thirteen out of 15 participants mentioned prayer as an important part of the day. Many of the students expressed that they were not used to being limited in their freedoms, so they often took praying in school for granted. However, upon sincere reflections in our interviews, they expressed that prayer was an important part of their school day. Some of the seniors expressed how different it would be for them next year when they were in secular schools. They were starting to grasp the importance of corporate prayer at school as foundational to building their faith. A few participants said the character traits they memorized were helpful to them when they brought them to mind. One student said he tried to live to these character traits out in his life. These faith parts of the school stay to help reinforce the stage three developmental phase and the continued courting of the Holy Spirit.

**Research Question 5 “How does this impact Faith Development Theory?”**

Many of the participants in the study were heading towards stage four faith, but it was off in the future. There were early indicators though that many of the participants in the study were

grounded enough in their faith, and have made it their own that with their hand in the Lord's hand they will weather the storms and make their way to the next level of faith. Those participants who were leading with the worship team seemed most positioned for stage four. It seemed the responsibility of leadership, personal reflection, and guiding others in their spiritual journey caused these students to be more introspective about their own faith journey.

The experiences of stage four suggested that it was important for youth to be removed both physically and emotionally from familiar environments (Fowler, 1981). From this I concluded that my study evaluated how prepared these students were to reach for stage four if they were indeed already functioning at a stage three level. "For a genuine move to Stage 4 to occur there must be an interruption of reliance on external sources of authority" (Fowler, 1981, p. 179). Students must be at a place where they were searching for the answers of faith inside of their own hearts with the help of the Holy Spirit; that they were responsible for what they believe not parents, peers, or teachers. The answers to the journal questions by the students deeply reflected stage three faith. The students were a homogenous part of the whole of their school, their families and their churches and youth groups. It was evident that they were growing in areas of faith and with the environments the school was creating to invite the Holy Spirit, there was ample opportunity for their hearts and minds to move towards Fowler's stage four as young adults.

### **Discussion**

The findings in my study, both theoretical and empirical, synthesized Chapters Two and Four. The opening discussion in the Chapter Two Literature Review examined the CHS environment. "Christian schools should be known as communities of grace—places where visitors clearly see God at work in the way relationships are conducted" (Drexler, 2007, p. 5).

The idea was that parents, visitors, staff, and students should notice the difference in a CHS; the atmosphere exposes spiritual attitudes, and character qualities. The empirical evidence to this was overwhelmingly positive. All 15 participants agreed that the atmosphere was different at HCA because it was a Christian school. It was believed students were kinder, they looked out for each other, shared what they had, visited each other's youth groups, and respected each other in the hallways.

His attitude about his peers at the school really stood out as different from the others. It was important to note that before coming to HCA, he was homeschooled. It could be that he was uncertain of what classmates would be like, or had very high expectations of students in a Christian school. His answer diverted from the other 14 participants when it came to the environment created by the students. I would agree that the small environment could create an environment where students were in each other's business more than in a larger setting.

### **Purpose**

Purpose was an important part of any CHS. Previously I examined that Christian high schools were in the business of producing spiritual pilgrims for the journey (Gaebelein, 1968; Graham, 2009; Hamrick, 2005; Schultz, 1998). It proffered that schools produce pilgrims by including SN as part of the school environment. When answering the journal questions, the students wrote with clarity about the fact that purpose was wrapped up in their relationship with God. Nine out of 15 participants said one of their main goals and ambitions in life was to live out the will of God. Twelve out of 15 said they were devoted to God in their life, and 12 out of 15 said they relied on the power of God to help them through life. During their interviews, the participants shared their hopes for the future: university, college, and professions were on the tip of everyone's tongue. They were young people full of hope for the future and they know where

they were going. This was a byproduct of being a pilgrim versus a nomad. These students were the evidence of Psalm 1:3, “They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do” (New Living Translation). The participants in this study were like the trees mentioned here in Psalm 1. The analogy here was of the water the trees by the riverbank can soak into their roots. I think the water represents pictures of the SN that adolescents receive at a CHS. I do believe that the position of the heart to respond to the Holy Spirit was key in the amount of nurture the students soak up. Some students (non-participants) did not have their hearts focused on spiritual matters, and as a result they were not being nurtured.

### **Development of Faith**

Fowler (1981) said faith forms a personal identity in a person. “It [faith] shapes the ways we invest our deepest loves and our most costly loyalties” (Fowler, 1981, p. 5). I could see how the participants were investing their time and money. For the most part, I could also discern their loyalties. For example, Participants 09 and 10 were raising funds to go on a mission trip the summer that followed our interview. Their faith was building watching the money come in for that trip. Participant 04 was certain God was calling him to full time ministry, and he wanted to answer the call at whatever the cost. In fact, he was using his own money to take summer courses so he can get to his choice ministry school sooner. Participant 15 would like to take training in how to lead worship formally. Participant 07, who was only in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, feels a strong calling to be a missionary in Nepal. I could tell the loyalties of many of the participants lied in God’s calling on their life.

Fowler (1981) wrote, “We become part of what we love and trust” (p. 18). Fowler and Dell (2006) described the time of adolescence as a time when the whole framework for faith

begins to gain clarity. The participants from HCA were observed working through their framework. They also mentioned chapel services, worship music, specific speakers, retreats, Christian peers, and Christian teachers that were all part of what they loved and trusted. These students have developed a network of people and practices from CS that were a big part of their framework of faith.

“Whatever the source, the conveying of images in narrative, in art, in symbol and ritual, can awaken and nurture what we may call the spiritual imagination” (Fowler, 2004, p. 415). I observed many spiritual nurture symbols while at HCA. There was the ritual of morning prayers that students identified as very meaningful. The ritual of chapel services and singing praise and worship music awakened the students’ spiritual senses. Students relayed that they were inspired when the teachers told their faith story and how God was helping them. I had many discussions with the art teacher who believed all students were born creative and she wanted them all to reflect God’s creativity. The awakening of the spiritual imagination was core to what I observed happening at HCA.

Some participants shared more than others with their journal questions. However, all of the participants’ replies uncovered a number of things about their faith stages. They were concerned about pleasing God with their life and one of their greatest fears was disappointing Him by yielding to temptation. There were a number of things to consider when evaluating faith stages. Dykstra (1984) concluded, “I do not think that experience and education are the same thing” (p. 63). Dykstra (1984) wrote a reflection to Fowler’s (1981) work in *Mystery and manners: The task of religious education*. He also reflected on Bushnell’s (1861) *Spiritual Nurture* and his agreement with the importance of nurturing a child in the bonds of family. Outside the bond of family leaves us examining other venues of education. He spoke of the gulf



that existed between stages three and four. The students can be educated to understand the depths of Christianity, but it was the work of the Holy Spirit that has humans pushing forward to experience more faith

### **Equilibrium**

The concept of equilibrium was an important one for faith stages. As previously mentioned in Chapter Two, Fortosis and Garland (1990) make a valid point about what was necessary to move from one reality to another.

The adolescent having just entered the formal operations stage is creating a reality against which he or she will later test every incoming piece of information or data. How one handles the new information in light of one's created reality or how one changes one's reality to handle new information, is crucial to the whole process of equilibrium.

(Fortosis & Garland, 1990, p. 633)

There were just three students interviewed that I could discern had been through major equilibrium shifts, participants 03, 08, and 15. Participants 03 and 08 were both international Students at HCA. They were an ocean apart from family and past friends. It was a major reality shift moving to a new culture. I understood from Participant 08 she had a difficult family situation in addition to moving a continent away from home. Participant 14 has had major upheaval in her family in the last two or three years. Otherwise, I did not perceive that other participants have a lot of experience with equilibrium shifts. This shift will come automatically for the seniors when they begin their university and college classes. This will be the segway to stage four, provided their faith was grounded.

Creating disequilibrium was an important part of SN. It seemed almost counterintuitive to interrupt equilibrium to nurture, however, it is part of the molding process. The participants in the study who were in a state of flex were

### **Extra Nurturing**

When Fowler and Dell (2006) observed that youth with extra nurturing could be in a more favorable position for the next faith stage, I asked what could those examples of nurturing be. Perhaps if they were from a Christian home, how long they have been a part of their Christian school and if they attend worship and other church activities? During the interviews I could see those students more aptly headed for stage four who were involved in a local church, volunteering, or serving in some way, connected to a Christian home, and who were articulate with their testimonies.

Fowler (1981) confirmed that Erikson was the primary developmental psychologist upon which FDT was based. Beyond psychosocial development, Erikson wrote quite extensively about religion in his written work examining both Luther and Gandhi (Steele, 1995). These were important works that considered the role of religion in the life cycle (Steele, 1995). Humans will naturally progress through loops in life that bring them to points of crisis to work through. “The study of identity crisis and resolution, through the reshaping of images of faith by young Luther, opened ways to understanding the interplay of faith and culture as well as many other rich issues” (Fowler, 1981, p. 109). Fortosis and Garland’s (1990) work about equilibrium was in line with Erikson’s role of religion in the life cycle. Participants 04, 08, and 14 who had more trials seemed more serious about their faith. With the security of their world threatened, their dependence on faith began to deepen. The other participants’ dependence on faith will happen through life cycles at a more natural rate. Their cycle transitions may be moving out of their

parent's home or going to university. The identity crisis will cause them to go into deeper identity with faith or cause them to walk from their faith for a time.

### **Spirituality**

The definition for spirituality in my study comes from a Judeo-Christian worldview and the definition of nurture was to train, educate, and encourage. Training, encouraging, and educating towards a faith in a Judeo-Christian worldview are the goals of a CHS. Knowing Christ is the whole purpose of nurturing faith for the Christian. Encouragement, training, and education in spiritual things begin at home (Bushnell, 1861); it was reinforced in the heart (Willard, 2002) and should be at the center of all education of youth (Schultz, 1998). This definition for spiritual nurture was visibly apparent at HCA. The focus in the morning was the ritual of prayer; a dedication of the school, its staff, and students gave it a sanctified beginning. The encouragement and training of the Christian home is reinforced in the reflections of the Christian teachers, biblically integrated classes, and Christian friendships.

For example, friendship is considered to be an important model of faith demonstrated from one human to another (Conner, 2010). Conner described that friendship actually reflects the character of God in our lives. Friendship brings love, acceptance, and encouragement. The friendships of the participants displayed the love, acceptance, and encouragement I hoped would be present with Christian students. Fourteen out of 15 participants felt the love and acceptance of friendship at their CHS. There was a kinship at a CHS with so many available Christian peers. True friendship and kindness embodies the love of Christ and displays the piety of Christlikeness (Bushnell, 1861). The friendships the participants formed helped form an identity in Christian faith.

## **Identity**

As adolescents form identity outside of their parents, the work of Bibby (2009), a Canadian sociologist, becomes significant. He had done extensive research on youth within Canada, and he concluded Canadian teens value friendship with peers higher than any other relationship in their lives. This makes the relationships with Christian peers an essential part of building faith. Teens are finding their identity, and a heavier mix of Christian peers will help reinforce their faith identity.

## **Teacher – Student Relationships**

In a CS setting, teachers must demonstrate a genuine faith for their students. “Before they (students) begin to love God, they must see their mentors loving Him” (Hamrick, 2005, p. 32). The interactions the students had with their teachers at HCA were very important to my study. Bushnell’s (1861) work was careful to stress the importance of sincerity in the interaction between adults and children or young people. “Everything they do you can tell that they have reason for doing it because they are doing their best for God” (Participant 04). The student-teacher relationships demonstrated Proverbs 4:23 “Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life” (New Living Translation). The heart can be seen as the place our motives emerge. The training of this heart becomes so important considering all decisions made by a young person will come from that sacred place in them. With the Christian teacher guiding and challenging the thoughts in the classroom, it is the heart that will ground them in their faith. This is another avenue reinforcement of identity outside the home. “My best teachers have always become my friends to me. I am not sure whether they were my best teachers because they were friends or that they became friends because I thought them my best teachers; probably both” (Dykstra, 1984, p. 62). The participants did demonstrate

positive impacting relationships with their teachers at HCA. I believe that was the most important part of the SN process.

### **Bible Study**

“It is all too easy to teach the Bible as an academic book or as a book on behavior and miss the whole point of the Bible” (Hamrick, 2005, p. 31). My participants did not exhibit this Christian school flaw. Each one understood the Bible as a means by which God spoke to them. Participant 04 said he prayed for the Holy Spirit to give him the desire to read his Bible more. Participant 09 said Scripture guided her thinking. Fourteen out of 15 participants expressed how the chapel services, homeroom times, and Bible classes gave them food for thought about how to live their lives. The Bible was not used as a textbook for all disciplines but used as a framework and a lens to see all subjects (Cunningham & Fortosis, 1987; Schultz, 1998; Van Brummelen, 2002). Students who attend HCA are nurtured in their faith daily in their academic course work. The participants were encouraged intentionally from God’s Word (Van Brummelen, 2002).

### **Teacher’s Example**

Halifax Christian Academy, as an ACSI school, aligned with the core values of a member school. “ACSI exists to strengthen Christian schools and equip Christian educators worldwide as they prepare students academically and inspire them to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ” (Association of Christian Schools International, 2012). The participants were encouraged daily to go deeper with their Christian faith. Teachers gave them the breathing room needed to figure it out for themselves without being forceful with the dogma. Rumer (1966) had keen insights to the spiritual nurture that was passed on from the teacher to the student. He believed direct instruction was not the best format to pass on nurture of a spiritual nature:

The conclusion to which I jump was that the crucial factor in every phase of Christian Education is the relationship among the persons involved in the teaching-learning process. That relationship is spiritual in as so far as any of the persons involved in the situation respond to the Spirit presence of God, as he is known through Jesus Christ, with love for any of the others involved; listening to them, trusting and being trustworthy, taking the risk of sharing one's self with them. It is the relationship among teachers and learners that makes Christian Education spiritual nurture. It is the divine Spirit who communicates the reality of faith and love through the personal relations among teachers and learners. (Rumer, 1966, p. 443)

Although his insight is dated, I believe Rumer's (1966) evaluation of spiritual nurture from teacher to student is timeless. I witnessed a lot of encouragement between teachers and students at HCA. Research has reinforced the importance of adults who live a consistent example through good times and bad times in front of adolescents (i.e. Christian teachers in a CHS) (Abel, 2011; Benton, 2008). However, I also believe the fact that the student could respect what the teacher knew about the subject matter began the journey of respect between teacher and student. The spiritual impact was a secondary byproduct in the CHS.

### **Confidence**

Abel (2011) outlined building confidence through acts of faith. He opined acts of faith come from dependable sources and come from individuals they hold in high regard, consistent, enduring, and repeated frequently. The significance of this study in a CHS setting is that there were more people involved in the building up process. The teachers, who were all Christ followers, can help build confidence in one's faith in high school which leads to confidence in less protected institutions like college, university, or the workplace. In essence, Abel's (2011)

study helped us see this confidence building as part of the bridge between stage three and stage four. Upon reflection of first century church history, Rumer (1966) said, “First century Christians seem to have been aware of their dependence upon the Holy Spirit for both the sound teaching and the sincere love which together constituted a thorough process of spiritual nurturer” (p. 446). I believe confidence was a key factor in the faith building process. Confidence is contagious and building it in across the curriculum is key.

### **Stories of Faith**

Participants spoke about the faith stories from their teachers was part of their own faith building. Abel Van Doren (2007) believed these stories helped young people understand the context for the faith they were being taught. She concluded that youth want adults to be authentic. She believed that adolescents would be more open to hear God if their hearts were open to the spirit of the speaker.

Participant 12 helped confirm this when she was asked how she knew her teachers were concerned about her spiritual growth. “Well like during chapels, if a teacher is talking and you can like tell and also the Bible teachers like how they just teach. Like at different times they will say why it is really important to be a Christian and how it helped them in their life and all that”.

“Many young adolescents are just on the edge of developing abstract reasoning skills” (Fleming & Cannister, 2010, p. 60). This study concluded that when youth are pulled away from the daily routine, those are times when teens grow the closest to God and feel spiritually nurtured. This concept was confirmed over and over again when talking to the participants. Halifax Christian Academy provides a retreat for high school students at the beginning of each school year. When I asked Participant 01 how she knew the teachers were concerned for her spiritual growth she said:

Well, I think because, well one of the huge reasons would be, at the beginning of the year we have a big retreat, and we go away the second week of school for three days....Basically we all come together grades 7 to 12 as students. And generally bring in special music, and like a special speaker, and so like we have worship and different services and stuff. And I think that if they didn't care how we started off the year and if they didn't care how our personal relationship with the Lord is, then they wouldn't do that.

The retreat came up many times with participants when I asked them about things that were part of their school life that helped to build faith.

### **Emerging Spirituality**

Spirituality without a source makes faith unnecessary. Kessler's (2000) book addressed the need to have SN in public schools and that educators often shy away from anything that seems remotely religious. Kessler's (2000) book was full of animated stories of different activities she walked students through to connect to that deeper part of themselves. Kessler's (2000) book and its stories of students that participated in activities that build trust and allow them to be vulnerable with their peers is proof that spiritual nurture was important for all types of education. In CHS, the spiritual nurturing leads to faith in Christ, growing stronger in Christian faith, and Christian faith appreciation. Kessler's (2000) definition of SN for education is to compel students to share what inspired and encouraged them. When listening to the testimonies of the participants, it was interesting to hear them talk about their faith in Christ and that helped them to lead a better life. "I believe in Jesus and I care. I know I am not perfect, not even close. I have so many mistakes but because I feel that way, that's why I believe in Jesus" (Participant 08). It was important as well that students understand it was the world of the Holy Spirit and not



just a belief in the principles of a faith filled life. Kessler's (2000) work could lead students to believe that they can live a spiritual life without Christ.

Teachers at HCA were creating an environment that teaches students how to live, as God would have them live. Ackerman (2007) wrote about how to continue to work with the behaviour of the students in that classroom to manage their behavior in a God-honouring way. Teachers at HCA were engaged in the process making their classrooms places where the participants could understand boundaries in loving and caring ways. "Interaction between theory and practice was complex" (Van Brummelen, 2008, p. 223). Fourteen out of 15 participants were overwhelmingly positive about the care and concern they received from their teachers even when they were being corrected. Participant 13 expressed it this way, "I got into a little bit of a fight in \_\_\_\_\_, and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ took me aside and talked to me about it and stuff. She seemed like she really cared."

Teachers care about their students. That means that they not only create a warm and supportive tone in their classrooms, but they also provide an environment in which students will develop their talents to make positive contribution to the classroom and to their future life contexts. (Van Brummelen, 2009, p. 3759)

After the data was evaluated, I began to see a trend with the HCA participants that they did feel encouraged to do their best in everything school, and this was related in part to the encouragement from teachers. The participants were profoundly filled with God-designed purpose.

At first Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ said she didn't see me taking it (school) seriously, and she wasn't even my teacher then. She has seen my grade (math) go from 30 percent to 89 percent. Teachers have really been there to help me. (Participant 04)

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we do witness some changes with students that provides some challenges to spiritual formation. Detweiler's (2013) concern looked like this, "Our traditional sources of authority are shifting, from people to programs, from God to Google" (p. 390). Christian high school is even more important this millennium with so much lobbying for authority in the lives of teens. As Detweiler's research unfolded in his book, *iGods*, it was important to grasp the correlation between digital technology and authority. Any of the participants in this study could go to a device that connected to the Internet to get knowledge on every imaginable topic. However, their CHS experience helped them to further balance opinions and information they find online. The Christian parents of the HCA students can rest in the fact that during the school day teachers were instructing students to look beyond the patterns of this world like author of the New Testament Letter to the Romans enforces. "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which was good and pleasing and perfect" (Romans 12:2, New Living Translation).

### **Evangelism and Discipleship**

Evangelism and discipleship (i.e. spiritual nurture) were the two pillars on which a Kingdom-focused CS rests according to Schultz (1998). Students at HCA were brought together in retreats, chapel services, Bible classes, and homeroom times to focus on both of these pillars. At times the lessons focus on those who do not know Christ (evangelism) and other times the lessons were for the students who do know Christ (discipleship). The participants all identified as Christian, and many of them reflected that they wanted to see their classmates that were not saved to come to know Christ. However, I could sense the divide between those who were being evangelized and those who received discipleship. One participant commented about chapel, "We

know God still shows up somehow. Someone says something profound and it just clicks with everyone....And just giving those kids, even the non-Christian ones like an hour a week, like it could be the only time they could even be shown God, so I think that's pretty cool" (Participant 05). The atmosphere between these two groups has an unnatural flow. It was a caring divide, but a divide none-the-less. It caused me to question the concept of an open enrollment school.

### **Prayer**

It was evident that the prayers of the teachers impacted the participants at HCA. "The routine ritual of praying together not only expresses the faith of the group, but also reinforces values of Catholic school culture" (Mayotte, 2010, p. 343). The routine of praying in homeroom was something the students came to depend on in their school life. The corporate prayer of the classroom sets pace spiritually for the students and gives them a spiritual focus point each morning. Mayotte (2010) researched the importance of prayer in the life of Catholic schools in the act of building faith, and this principle transferred to the culture at HCA. "In the morning, they (the teachers) will take time to pray and ask for prayer requests" (Participant 06). Participant 05 said, "Prayer is really encouraged here....in homeroom there is always prayer. The teacher will ask and encourage people who want to pray to step out and pray. They do and it is comfortable." Mayotte (2010) further opined, "The praying community may indeed experience 'Christ in their midst'; and be strengthened for Catholic school ministry" (p. 348). The strength of prayer, as a daily expression of faith, is an important discipline of HCA as a CHS.

### **Holistic Correction**

The participants expressed that their teachers were long-suffering with their behaviour. Some admitted that they were not always easy to handle as a group. "The purpose of discipline is

to disciple students in the Lord's way. Discipline is an opportunity to redirect students. Discipline opposes sin...It nurtures commitment to uprightness and reconciliation" (Van Brummelen, 2009, p. 3834). The redirection of students at HCA was evident. Teachers and administrators encouraged students daily to keep their behaviour in bounds. During the observations, I saw a teacher with a student outside of the classroom talking in hushed tones about changing behaviour to act more like Christ. Another observation revealed two teachers correcting a number of students who had copied their homework from the Internet. These teachers appealed to the students' sense of right and wrong—the way they have been taught at HCA from God's Word.

### **Christian Peers**

There was a great deal of synthesis between the reviewed literature and field research. Participants spoke about the deep relationships that they had with their peers. The relationships mirror the type Heckman (2007) talked about when he wrote about the Christian school being a community of grace. Purpose is a byproduct of CHS. The students at HCA exhibited a great deal of purpose knowing that their future plans were in God's hands. The participant's deep sense of purpose was tied to the daily formation of their school life (Gaebelein, 1968; Graham, 2009; Hamrick, 2005; Schultz, 1998). Fowler (1981) theorized that individuals become part of what they love and trust. I saw the students at HCA in a formed environment. They loved and trusted the staff and peers, and they felt very comfortable in their CHS world. Fortosis and Garland (1990) wrote about Christian teenagers needing to have their equilibrium challenged in order to grow in faith. This corresponded with Erikson's (1963, 1968, 1975) life cycle theory. The teens at HCA had their equilibrium intentionally challenged through their comparative religions class. Prayer, chapel, and camp retreats were all mentioned numerous times by the participants as

tangible building blocks of faith (Fleming & Cannister, 2010; Mayotte, 2010; Van Brummelen, 2009). The data collection with the students brought the literature review to life. Students were forming their identity outside of their family unit, and the CHS gives them additional outlets for faith identity formation.

## **Implications**

### **Theoretical Implications**

Fowler's (1981) FDT was the theoretical lens for my study. According to Fowler (1981), "Faith is awakened and nurtured by elements from the tradition. As these elements come to be expressive of the faith of new adherents, the tradition is extended and modified, thus gaining fresh vitality" (p.10). The students at HCA were being nurtured by the elements of the Christian tradition. Each day at school they were nurtured in aspects of faith: prayer, Bible reading, devotionals, chapel, encouragement, and respect for the principles in God's Word.

Fowler's (1981) theory was based on six stages of faith. Stages three and four were of the most significant interest in regards to the age range for my study (stage three synthetic-conventional faith and stage four individuative-reflective faith). The participants for my study range in age from 14-18. Adolescents were typically considered by Fowler (1981) to be at the stage three level of faith, as they are at a time in life when teens are figuring out who they are and what they believe. The participants of this study answered a range of questions about faith. They were interviewed individually and also answered journal questions about faith online. I also observed the participants in several settings. I could easily identify that most of the participants were at a stage three level. Many of the participants were expressing their faith beyond the realm of their family, they identified their churches as their own, and faith was part of their identity.

Participants were part of a homogenous group of believers in their churches/youth

groups, school, and homes. Fourteen of the 15 participants expressed faith clearly as something that belonged to them and was important to their whole being. Participant 05 expressed it this way, “For lack of a better way to put it I have fallen in love with Him.”

Fowler (1991) indicated a paradigm shift that needs to happen in the life of a young person to move to stage four. It was interesting that the older participants sense this shift coming. “As I’ve gotten older I’ve realized it’s a privilege to be able to pray openly without having anyone...tell you that’s not okay. I think that it was a really nice freedom to have because as soon as the grade 12s leave these four walls of HCA we were not going to have that anymore” (Participant 01). It will be how the students handle these changes in secular environments that will establish whether or not they move on to the next level of faith.

Faith was an alignment of the will (Fowler, 1981). “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10, New International Version). There was a sense of urgency on the part of the participants to follow in the will of God. The journal questions that they answered privately indicated this over and over. When asked what they were basing future plans and purposes on, most indicated aligning to God’s will. With Matthew 6:10 as a core principle in their hearts, the participants made decisions based on their understanding of what God wants them to do.

Tillich (2011) said that faith indicates that we belong to something bigger than ourselves—A divine presence. Fowler (1981) based his framework of faith based on Tillich’s research on faith.

Not being a Christian I think is crazy for me. Because if you sit there like oh yeah I know who made the world. Well you can’t make anything out of nothing, but God did and it’s material you can touch. God’s there and He saves and he died for you; saved your sins.

Yeah I just find it mind blowing. (Participant 07)

The HCA participants indicated faith in something that was outside of them; they expressed faith in Christ in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Prayer at school was a call to align with this faith each day at school. Chapel and retreat services were times to introduce faith and reinforce it. Biblical integration was a way to normalize the Word of God into the world around the participants. The Christian environment was encouraged through relationships between Christian teachers and Christian peers. Fowler's (1981) FDT shone through the participants at HCA. His theory was true in their lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

There were a number of recommendations for theoretical implications. Because Fowler (1981) identified the need for a paradigm shift to grow faith, it is important that a school implements paradigm shifts within their culture. For example, choosing to play sports in a public school league versus a Christian school league could give the students an opportunity to let their light shine before others. Also taking the students of a CHS to lectures and content that was not presented from a Christian worldview gives them an opportunity to experience a paradigm shift. A school body should want the students to be able to discern how to sort through worldviews different than their own. From reading the participant journal entries, I detected many of the 15 were eager to go deeper with their relationship with Christ. The CHS can be a place where that flame can be fanned. Tillich (2011) suggested that faith points us outside of ourselves, so any opportunity a CHS can take to incorporate prayer, both planned and spontaneous, is an important part of the school day and should be observed by the staff of the CHS. The students also gained a lot by being together with peers who are like-minded in faith. The admissions department of a CHS should be careful to guard an open enrollment policy. While it is important to both disciple and evangelize in a CHS, it is difficult to disciple students if they do not have peers to grow in

faith with them. The CHS board and administration should carefully consider the ratio of Christian versus non-Christian students.

### **Practical Implications**

**Parents.** Christian parents may want to examine the need for Christian education at the high school level. Parents often have the view that by high school, the student is ready to stand on their own and not be influenced by teachings and practices from an entirely secular system. The students at HCA are developing a whole spiritual identity during their adolescence that comes from home, church, and being reinforced and/or introduced daily at school. The students at HCA were encouraged by teachers to do their best as God intended them to do. They were tutored, coached, and instructed through a strong academic rigor. The participants were well aware that they were created for a purpose and it was imperative that they sought the will of God to know what that purpose means for them. The participants had an overwhelming sense of purpose in their lives. The practical implications were being played out here as Erikson (1963, 1968, 1975) suggested in the theoretical realm. Finding an identity outside of their parents is an important part of adolescence; however, if the teenager was not placed in an environment of faith for education, the faith identity may not be developed the way a Christian parent hopes.

The student participants expressed their faith in terms of confirmation to a faith most had known about all of their lives. There was one student, however, who expressed coming to faith while being a new high school student at HCA. Considering Bushnell's (1861) work on spiritual nurture, he theorized that the child who was born into a Christian home should never know themselves as anything but Christian. Many of the participants expressed their faith in these terms. Bushnell's (1861) research was a reaction to the stanch Calvinism of his day. A modern day Calvinist, described it this way:



The developmental dimensions of Calvin's thoughts are best understood if they are located within two languages he uses to describe the Christian life. Status language and process language. Status language refers to our standing relationship with God. It was used to point to the restoration of a right relationship with God. Which has been given to us in Jesus Christ. This was typically dealt with under the doctrines of justification. Process language refers to the actualization of our status as forgiven sinners. (Osmer, 1990, p. 59)

The process language refers more to sanctification. This was where the students camped on their relationship with God. I felt they would consider it trite to have discussed their process any differently. I believe it spoke to the depth of their faith.

While I observed, interviewed, and reviewed participants' journals, I began to get a sense of the key building blocks students believed were core to their faith. "A strong school effect is also found for reinforcing orthodox beliefs for Christian School and rely on as shown by their much higher levels of agreement in comparison with government school graduates with the statement that--there is no other way to salvation" (Pennings et al., 2012). The participants responded with between one to four building blocks of faith present at their CHS: chapel and retreat services, Christian friends, Christian teachers, and seeing God at work in a Christian environment. I think it was interesting that the students could identify for themselves the things that were already having an impact on their spiritual lives. These four different aspects of their school life reinforce their Christian faith. The Pennings et al. (2012) evaluated Christian school graduates and recognized that they were more likely to hold to orthodox beliefs than their government school counterparts.

***Recommendations for parents.*** I recommend from this study that Christian parents

consider CHS as a high priority for their adolescents. Because they are forming identity apart from their families, the CHS becomes a place they can bond with Christian staff members and make friends with Christian peers. The CHS that challenges critical thinking and challenges the disequilibrium in a cautious way makes faith stronger for students. Christian parents are responsible for the education of their children, which means evaluating the amount of SN they will receive during their time at school. The CHS is the only place outside of Christian home schooling that makes prayer, Biblical integration, worship, Christian peers, relationships with Christian teachers, and study of the Scriptures priorities.

**Students.** The dedication of oneself for the cause of growing in faith takes on many aspects in our Christian culture. For adolescents seeking to deepen their faith walk with Christ, a CHS can perhaps give them this experience as part of their school day.

Small class sizes and like-mindedness had the participants of the study circling around the idea that their CHS peers were like family. It was obvious during the observations that the participants all had peers that they were happy to be around. They expressed how important their friends at HCA were in their lives. This was consistent with Erikson's (1963, 1968, 1975) life cycle and where adolescents begin to listen to their peers and be influenced by them over their family. At HCA I could see the groups that had formed, and even with those who were not close friends they were congenial. "We all care about each other as individuals and we all try to recognize that everyone has feelings and no one wants to be left out and not one wants to feel like they are alone and so even if someone looks upset there was someone to be like hey are you okay? Even if you are not close with that person" (Participant 01). The participants had a tremendous level of comfort with their peers. Participant 13 said he liked how they can "all relate." Other participants talked about not knowing what to do without their friends at HCA,

especially after they helped her through some difficult times.

Finding common ground with peers is a concept explored in great detail in Erikson's (1963, 1968, 1975) work on developmental stages. These Christian peers were a valuable part of their schooling experience. There was a closeness that has developed that has the participants resting in confidence that they were accepted. Everything was not perfect, and as Participant 11 said, "there can be drama", but the participants believe their social life was much easier than if they attended public school.

The participants' responses to the journal questions revealed some checkpoints of where they may fall in regards to personal faith. The participants were all adolescents who would be assumed to be in stage three of Fowler's (1981) process given their age. The participants identified as Christian when they volunteered to be part of the study. Student responses revealed the nurture, Fowler and Dell (2006) suggested:

Persons may reach chronological and biological adulthood while remaining best described by a structural stage of faith that would most commonly be associated with early or middle childhood, or adolescence. By the same token, contexts of spiritual nurture and practice coupled with a person's spiritual aptitude and discipline, may lead some children to a deeper and more rapid development in faith. (Fowler & Dell, 2006, p. 36)

Fowler's (1981) stage three, synthetic-conventional faith, was described as a stage where the adolescent begins to look outside of the family structure for their meaning for faith. The adolescent begins to form an identity with their peers, their school, their work, and their individual religious communities (Fowler, 1981). Regarding faith, adolescents in stage three accept the religious teachings around them and begin to synthesis these teachings as part of their

life. However, the teachings remain tactic (Fowler, 1981) until stage four. It is considered following with the basic surface beliefs of the system as followed by others within that system. Fowler (1981) examined what may or may not be present in an individual's stage three paradigm breaking down and moving on to stage four:

Serious clashes or contradictions between valued authority sources; marked changes, by officially sanctioned leaders, or policies or practices previously deemed sacred and unreachable...Frequently the experience of leaving home—emotionally or physical, or both – precipitate the kind of examination of self, background, and life guiding values that give rise to stage transition at this point. (Fowler, 1981, pg. 173).

The questions I asked the students to reflect on privately revealed many things about their faith. I stressed their need to answer the questions honestly and not to produce answers they thought might be “right”. Their answers were faith revealing. “Faith is a person’s way of seeing himself or herself in relation to others against a background of shared meaning and purpose” (Fowler, 1981, p. 4). Fourteen of the 15 participants answered the journal questions.

***Recommendations for students.*** The recommendations for students from this study were that the Christian high school should be considered as a valid option for secondary education. For the young people who desire to grow spiritually and make close Christian friends, the CHS is a place for them. If they struggle or excel academically, the Christian high school is a place for them to be both challenged and encouraged. The additional encouragement gives them the confidence to do their very best because they have been placed on earth for a specific purpose.

**Teachers.** The students responded so well to the members of the staff. They really felt confident that their teachers cared for them. The participants believed this through the act of prayer each day and taking of requests and then following up these requests later in

conversations. Teachers who took the time to help students who were struggling also were noticed by the students at HCA. The participants saw the teachers as people in their lives “who would go the extra mile.” The spiritual influence ran deep with the teachers. ACSI’s recommendation to hire Christian teachers only is clearly seen as important to the work of spiritual nurture; teachers were on the front lines. The field research data clearly demonstrated the impact relationships between students and teachers had on the students.

The teachers at HCA were cited again and again by the participants as wonderful teachers.

They are so helpful. Coming from a public school, I never had that experience with teachers that are actually out there to help you. They are like, my job is to teach you and then you are going home. But these teachers here, will actually stay with you after school and they will help you and they will spend as much time as they can to make sure you understand. They always like to help and if you forget to do a part of a test they will let you retake it. They are just so compassionate. (Participant 09)

The participants believe their teachers go the extra mile in giving them additional help. They spoke of photocopying notes when they were sick, emailing them with assignments, and asking them how they were doing academically. The participants believed the teachers at HCA are very good at what they do and are dedicated professionals. The participants believed their teachers know their subject matter very well. Participant 05 spoke about the teacher who worked through her lunch break to help her with physics.

I think it is fundamental to student success for students to have such confidence in the teachers. Sometimes the perception of CS is that they provide substandard education. It is interesting from the student interviews that none of them believed that their teachers were in any

way substandard. They believed their teachers were the best, the most dedicated, and the most informed. The participants understood the sincerity of their teachers on a very deep level.

The students have unique relationships with their teachers at HCA. Christian education provides the opportunity for students to gain a number of spiritual mentors outside of their family and church family. In Erikson's (1963, 1968, 1975) study of identity formation and Fowler's (1981) study of faith stages, it can be seen that this is clearly something that helps to build faith. Some of the participants said their teachers were like their friends. Many of the participants said their teachers cared about them deeply. They know this because they ask them how they were, they pray about the issues in their lives, and then later ask them how things were going.

Having role models to look up to is an important part of identity formation.

The specific strength emerging in adolescence—namely fidelity—maintains a strong relation both to infantile trust and to mature faith. As it transfers the need for guidance from parental figures to mentors and leaders, fidelity eagerly accepts their ideological mediatorship. (Erikson, 1997, p.1057)

The parents who were interested in their children moving forward in Christian faith identity can see the benefits here with Christian teachers becoming mentors. Participants mentioned over and over how their teachers exemplify the Fruit of the Spirit. They say they were honest, compassionate, humble, good, and caring. They also mention how often they express faith in the classroom. Participant 04 talked about two teachers who gave him one to one attention as mentors. They asked him questions about how he was progressing in his spiritual life. These two were his physical education and English teachers. This demonstrates how far-reaching the influence of these teachers was. They reach out of subject area and right into the lives of their

students.

***Recommendations for teachers.*** A CHS is an excellent choice for a Christian teacher to have a fulfilling career. The CS is a place for the Christian teacher to have a ministry, impacting teaching from a place of faith and truth. Christian teachers have an opportunity to mentor students in a spiritual realm, not just with academics, but things of a spiritual nature as well. Although it was true that Christian teachers can have a great deal of influence in a public school setting, I believe it was important that they contribute in CE circles when circumstances allow.

***Administrators.*** There is much to be gleaned for the administrator in this study. First, the CHS becomes a place where faith identity can be safely developed. This is important when discussing matters of CHS with parents. The hiring practices of administrators can be noted here as well. It is essential that not just those teachers who identify as Christians get hired, but that the teachers are in a place to give back spiritually to the students. Spiritual nurture gets passed on largely from teacher to student in the CHS setting. Principals, administrators, and the board of directors in a Christian school should make hiring a thing of prayer and spiritual discernment. Teachers need to have the training and depth of knowledge in the subject matter and also a keen sense of the Holy Spirit calling them to the cause of CE.

***Recommendations for administrators.*** Because SN primarily comes from teachers in CHS, hiring practices are extremely important for administrators. Teachers looking to be hired should be able to talk at length about their spiritual formation practices. References should be able to back up their testimony. The board needs to see the balance between staff members who are proficient in their subject matter as well as having the ability to biblically integrate the material. It is also essential that teachers can relate to the students and speak into their lives.

Fowler and Dell (2006) believed with extra nurturing, adolescents maybe more readily

positioned to advance to the next stage of faith. However, Streib (2005) explained his believed intent behind this thought:

Fowler's article is explicit about this. He highlights the tremendous impact of the structuring power of the contents of faith on faith formation, especially for children, and regards development in faith to be a byproduct and not a primary goal in religious education. It must be emphasized that this requires a great deal of patience on the part of the religious educator who, if trained in the faith development perspective to identify the faith stage of the participants, should nevertheless, provide a nurturing and stable environment. (Streib, 1999, p. 431)

It would seem the byproduct of CHS was being steeped in stage three. Participants found their identity outside of their own home and family and at HCA as they are given the opportunity to find faith at school in those contexts.

Students at a CHS have the extra nurturing that Fowler and Dell (2006) alluded to advance to the next stage. There were a number of participants who seemed to be very self-aware and found their faith to be completely between them and God. The marks of the bridge towards stage four where they are finding faith truly for oneself, not just in a tactic way like being part of a community of faith as in stage three. Fowler (1981) said stage three typically comes when one's world changes enough to know if one's faith will withstand the change. This could be going off to college or university, moving away from home, or going to work after high school. Fowler (1981) theorized that stage four might not be possible until one of these changes takes place. Five of the 15 participants were in grade 12. All five of those participants had a plan for college or university for the next year. These participants seemed ready for their next step based on the way they answered their journal questions, observations, and interviews. They appeared



rooted and grounded in their corporate Christian identity, with signs pointing towards them embracing an introspection faith.

### **Study Limitations**

Christian school education has been part of my life since I was five years old, between attending CS for 12 years, training to be a CS teacher, and now working in CS education. These facts made bracketing out my own investment in Christian education a challenge in this study. I wanted to see that the SN was present in the lives of the students. The key to good research for a transcendental-phenomenological study was to bracket out my own voice even though my life was invested in CE. I did work very hard to keep neutral with the students and staff members at HCA.

All of my participants were from one CHS. I believe this was a limitation to the study. The students I interviewed all had the same teachers, peers, and programming. Basically, their experiences at school were extremely similar. I think the range of ages and grades in the HCA high school helped to broaden the study to some degree.

Another limitation was my position as a principal at another Christian school. I tried my best to keep a low profile about that with the students. None of the participants knew me in that capacity, but some of the teachers at the school knew me from CS circles. I was concerned that if the students understood my position, they would gauge their answers to more what I wanted to hear versus truthful responses. The students did not seem inhibited when they sat down to talk with me. They seemed completely removed from my position and they were responsive to me as a person.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The purpose of this study was to capture the phenomenon of spiritual nurture in the lives of adolescents who attend a CHS. I wanted to encapsulate the collective voice of the participants as they shared the tapestry of their faith stories intertwined with their CHS experience. I used Fowler's (1981) faith development theory as the lens to examine this research. Fowler's (1981) research provided an excellent source to evaluate adolescent faith development because his theory relies heavily on three developmental psychologists that were highly respected in the world of education: Erikson, Piaget, and Kohlberg.

There are many qualitative studies that could be carried out with this topic. The phenomenon of teachers, the spiritual nurturers, could be captured to understand their intricate role in the process of SN. The study could also be broadened to have more participants from more than one site. This study could involve participants from several Christian schools. The participants for my study were from a fairly homogenous group of teens (with the exception of two international students). There could be more diversity among the participants in future studies. My study examined the collective voice of students who attended a relatively small, evangelical CS. There could be a variety of qualitative studies done in different types of faith-based schools: Lutheran, Catholic, Anglican, etc.

Quantitative research could also be helpful. A comparative study between Christian teens being raised in public school versus Christian teens being raised in CHS could be very informative. In my study, there was only an assumption about Christian students in public high school, but it would be informative to see an actual study. A comparative study would be important in school decision-making for Christian parents.

It was recommended that board members (policy makers) become aware of the SN that

exists uniquely in a CHS. The information in this study informs hiring practices of teachers, the school's philosophical approaches, and everything from curriculum choices to dress code.

Perhaps administrators could ask references if an applying teacher demonstrates knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, balanced with the Fruits of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 6. I believe this was in addition to their innovative approach to teaching. It was very important to the students that they viewed their teachers as competent professionals. The competent professional statements came before the spiritual mentor statements. I believe this was significant, and the two go hand and hand. If the students viewed teachers as incompetent, perhaps that would cloud their view of them as spiritual mentors.

The act of SN in a CHS is an important part of adolescent development. I agree with the sentiments of Willard (2002) that it comes as a result of the heart.

### **Summary**

Spiritual nurture is definitely a part of the Christian high school experience. Spiritual nurture translates to growth in the lives of the students. Although heart persuasion towards faith growth is the work of the Holy Spirit, CHS helps to nurture the heart along with the Christian home and the church. The 15 participants in this study demonstrated clearly that spiritual nurture was part of their schooling experience. This becomes so important as they were reaching out for an identity beyond home and family. A CHS gives the participants an opportunity to have additional mentors and Christian peers around them for a significant number of hours each week.

My experience with Halifax Christian Academy and the students I met there was a deeply moving experience. The participants became like the students I attended CS with, the students I have taught in CHS, and the students I administrate in my CS. They were strong and confident. They could articulate their faith walk with clarity and express purpose in their lives

because of faith. Their CHS experience sharpened their mind academically towards a rigorous and biblically integrated academic regime. Through prayer, chapel services, holistic correction, and Scripture memorization, their hearts were courted towards the things of Christ. Christian teachers and Christian peers present daily opportunities for spiritual mentorship and Christian fellowship. This environment accounts for a huge percentage of their adolescence. Christian high school for the Christian parent is an opportunity to further nurture their child(ren) to follow Christ and to form their identity in Christian faith. I am more convinced than ever that the heart-sensitive, academically rigorous, individualistic Christian high school is the best option for educating Christian teens.

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## APPENDIX A

### Participants Letter

I am excited for us to work together on researching adolescent faith development in Christian high schools. Your participation could prove invaluable and will make this study possible. This letter reviews the things discussed when I spoke at your school assembly. If you would like to join the project you and your parents will need to sign the participation sign.

I will need you to answer a series of questions about how Christian high school has shaped your faith experience. There is a central question to be answered in the study: “How does SN impact the development of faith with adolescents who attend a CHS”? In the interview and journal portion of the study I will be hoping to mine deep into your experiences of classes, worship services, Scripture memory, relationships and biblically integrated lessons. I will be interested to know how these spiritually nurturing experiences have connected you to Christian faith.

This is a commitment of time and energy and your effort is highly valued. If you have further questions contact me 506 567 9538 or by email at [marshaboydmitchell@gmail.com](mailto:marshaboydmitchell@gmail.com).

Respectfully,

Marsha Boyd Mitchell

Researcher



## APPENDIX B

### CONSENT/ASSENT FORM

Spiritual nurture in developing faith in Christian high school students: A phenomenological study

Liberty University  
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of the phenomenology of faith that is developed in **high school students who attend a Christian high school**. You were selected as a possible participant because **you are currently a high school student enrolled in Christian school**. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

**Marsha Boyd Mitchell** a doctoral candidate in the **School of Education** at Liberty University is conducting this study.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is “How does spiritual nurture impact the development of faith with adolescents who attend a Christian high school”? I anticipate capturing the themes of faith that are present in the lives of teenagers who attend a Christian school.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things: Be available during the school day for an interview to answer some important questions relating to faith. You would need to be available for a second meeting to go over the notes from our interview. I will be audio taping our interview and then transcribing it word for word. You will also be asked to participate in an online journal and reflect on some questions regarding faith. I will also be in your school conducting observations of students in general.

#### **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

The study has minimal risk: Being part of this study you will need to open up to the researcher about areas that pertain to the Christian walk and questions of Christian faith. The types of questions asked may feel of a personal nature.

The benefits of participation are **to help Christian school educators understand what components of school help build faith for students**.

#### **Compensation:**

You will not be compensated financially for this study.

#### **Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

**Procedures of coding will be used to protect your privacy in this setting. Data will be stored in a locked file cabinet and in a computer under confidential file heading that uses a password. The recordings will be used to contribute to the research and then destroyed after the dissertation has passed to its final completion.**

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Halifax Christian Academy. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

### **Contacts and Questions**

The researcher conducting this study is **Marsha Boyd Mitchell**. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact **Marsha Boyd Mitchell at 506 433 4005**.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

### **Statement of Consent:**

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

The researcher has my permission to audio-record, video-record, and/or photograph me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of parent or guardian: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Questions

#### *The Christian high school student*

Central Question: How does spiritual nurture impact the development of faith with adolescents attending a Christian high school?

- A. What themes arise from the relationships you have with your teachers and how does that impact Faith Development Theory?
  - a. How do your teachers respond to you in academic situations?
  - b. Describe the ways your teachers express personal faith in the classroom.
  - c. How do you know that your teachers love God?
  - d. What types of problems would your teacher approach about?
  - e. What character traits make your teacher a good role model?
  - f. How do you know your teachers are concerned about your spiritual growth?
- B. What themes arise with relationships between peers to help with Faith Development Theory?
  - a. Describe your friends at your CHS?
  - b. Describe your friends outside of your school?
  - c. How do the relationships differ? How are your relationships the same?
  - d. What do you like most about the relationship with your peers at this CHS?
  - e. How do you talk about your own faith with your peers from your school?
  - f. How do you talk about your faith with peers who do not attend your CHS?
- C. What statements about the school environment help you understand the impact of spiritual nurture on faith and impact Faith Development Theory?

- a. How do you know that you are a Christian?
  - b. What about your CHS makes your faith stronger?
  - c. How does your CHS experience reflect the love and care Christ commands?
- D. What are students themselves thinking and feeling about faith while they attend the Christian high school?
- a. How do you feel about the freedom to pray in your school?
  - b. What is important to you about your chapel services?
  - c. At what times do you recall the Scripture you have memorized at school?
  - d. What Scriptures that you have studied or memorized have you used the most in your own life?
  - e. How is your school a safe place to sort out your questions about the Christian faith?
- E. How does it impact Faith Development Theory?

## APPENDIX D

### Journaling Questions:

1. What are you devoted to in your life?
2. What are your causes, dreams, or goals?
3. As you live your life, what power or powers do you fear or dread?
4. What power or powers do you rely on and trust?
5. To what or whom are you most committed to in life? In death?
6. With whom do you share your future plans, dreams and daily life?
7. What are those most sacred (God-focused) hopes, those most compelling goals and purposes in your life

## APPENDIX E

*Questions of Faith*

Questions	Responses
1. What are you devoted to in your life?	God (12) Friends (6) Character (6) Specific Goals (5) Education (4) Work (1) Happiness (1)
2. What are your causes, dreams, or goals?	Profession (12) God's Will (9) Marriage & Family (6) Specific Goals (6)  University (3) Life Quality (2)
3. As you live your life, what powers do you fear?	Devil/Temptation (5) Greed (1) University Acceptance (1) None (2) Death (3) God (1) Parents (1) Being Silenced (2) Fear Itself (1)
4. What powers do you rely on and trust?	God (12) Parents (8) Friends (5) Resist Temptation (1) Pastors (1)
5. To what or whom are you most committed to in life? In death?	God's Plan (13) Character (1) Children (1) Family (7) Friends (4) Church (1)

- Future Spouse (2)  
Career (1)
6. With whom do you share future plans? Dreams? Daily Life?  
Friends (11)  
Family (9)  
Boyfriend/Girlfriend (2)  
Teachers (3)  
Jesus (5)  
Diary (1)
7. What are those most sacred hopes, those most compelling goals, and purpose in your life?  
God's Call (9)  
Pleasing God (5)  
Being a Blessing (4)  
Marriage (2)  
Overcoming Sin (2)  
School (1)  
Forgiveness (1)









<p>➤ <b>At what times do you recall the Scripture you have memorized at school?</b></p> <p>➤ <b>What Scriptures that you have studied or memorized have you used the most in your own life?</b></p> <p>➤ <b>How is your school a safe place to sort out your questions about the Christian faith?</b></p>	<p>2b 2a 2a 2a 2a 2a 2a 2a 2a 2a 2a</p>														
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Research Question #1

Competent Professionals [Theme]

Codes

- 1a Christian Teachers Versus Public Teachers
- 2a High Level of Professionalism
- 3a Make Me Want to do Better/Inspiration
- 4a Academically Flexible /Go the Extra Mile

Spiritual Mentors [Theme]

Codes

- 1b Fruit of the Spirit
- 2b Prayer with Students/for Students
- 3b Direct Spiritual Conversations / We Can Go to Them
- 4b Sharing in Chapel/Testimony / Retreats
- 5b Biblical Integration in Class
- 6b Teachers are like Friends / They Truly Care About Us
- 7b They Keep Things Private

Research Question #2

Like Family [Theme]

Codes

- 1a Know Each Other Well/ Small Classes
- 2a We Are There For Each Other
- 3a We Talk About God With Our HCA Peers
- 4a Close Quarters Creates Drama
- 5a We Love Each Other / Enjoy Each Others Company

Research Question #3

Confirmed to Faith [Theme]

Codes

- 1a Always a Christian
- 2a Made Christian Faith My Own
- 3a I Just Know / Feel the Holy Spirit
- 4a Know from Scripture
- 5a Choices / Knowing God

Faith Builders [Theme]

Codes

- 1b Teachers
- 2b Christian Friends
- 3b Chapel / Retreat Services
- 4b Service / Volunteering
- 5b Christian Environment and Seeing God at Work

Research Question #4

Steeping in Stage 3 [Theme]

Codes

- 1a Chapels Help to Provide Spiritual Growth and Encouragement
- 2a Prayer in School and Being Taught to Pray Out Loud Are Blessings
- 3a Memorized Scripture Comes Back to Help Me Live My Life God's Way

Walking to Stage 4 [Theme]

Codes

- 1b Learning to Lead in Chapel
- 2b Asking Questions About Faith

## Appendix G

Significant Statement Codes	P 01	P 02	P 03	P 04	P 05	P 06	P 07	P 08	P 09	P 10	P 11	P 12	P 13	P 14	P 15
1. Christian Vs. Public Teachers	2	1	1	1	1	0	0	3	3	0	1	0	0	0	0
2. High Level of Professionalism	1	2	1	3	2	1	0	3	2	3	0	1	0	0	3
3. They make me want to be better (inspiration)	4	1	0	1	2	0	0	1	3	1	0	0	0	0	0
4. Academically flexible and they go the extra mile	2	0	0	6	4	0	1	1	3	0	0	1	1	2	0
5. Fruit of the Spirit	6	2	3	5	3	2	2	3	3	5	2	0	4	0	2
6. Prayer with students/for students	2	1	1	1	0	1	1	2	3	0	0	0	0	1	0
7. Direct spiritual conversations	6	2	2	3	2	2	3	7	2	3	2	0	0	1	3
8. Sharing in chapel/testimony/retreat	2	0	1	3	2	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	1	0	0
9. Biblical integration in class	2	1	1	2	5	1	1	3	0	3	2	0	1	0	1
10. Teachers are like friends	2	1	1	3	1	0	1	2	1	1	0	1	1	0	0
11. Teachers keep things private	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
12. Students know each other well	7	2	2	1	6	3	5	0	4	0	2	1	1	3	1
13. Friends are there for each other	5	0	0	0	4	0	2	3	1	2	1	1	0	4	2
14. We talk about God with our HCA peers	7	0	0	3	3	0	0	5	5	3	1	1	2	6	2
15. Small school creates drama	2	0	0	20	2	0	3	2	1	1	2	1	0	0	0
16. We love each other/enjoy each other	4	1	2	2	6	0	2	1	4	3	0	1	3	3	2
17. I always felt like a Christian	0	0	3	0	2	4	2	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
18. I have made my Christian faith my own	1	0	0	0	1	3	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	2
19. I just know I am a Christian / I feel the Holy Spirit	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	0	0	4	0	1	3	0	1
20. I know I am a Christian because	1	2	0	0	0	2	2	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	0

of the Bible															
21. I have chosen a relationship with God	3	2	0	6	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
22. Teachers help to build my faith	1	2	1	3	0	0	4	2	3	0	0	0	2	0	3
23. Christian friends help to build my faith	9	0	1	0	0	0	3	1	6	2	1	1	2	4	2
24. Chapel services and retreats help to build my faith	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
25. Volunteering and serving helps to build my faith	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	4	0
26. Seeing God at work in my environment helps to build my faith.	0	2	0	1	0	2	0	0	4	0	0	2	1	0	0
27. Chapel helps to provide spiritual growth and encouragement	8	6	3	1	5	0	1	3	10	5	0	2	0	4	4
28. Prayer in school and being taught to pray out loud are blessings	10	0	2	1	3	3	5	1	0	6	1	2	0	5	3
29. Previously memorized scripture comes back to me and helps me to live God's way	2	2	0	3	3	0	0	2	0	2	0	1	3	3	4
30. Learning to lead in chapel helps me to focus more on God	9	0	0	0	0	6	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	4
31. Asking questions about faith and getting answers helps me to focus on God	11	1	1	1	3	1	2	2	2	4	1	1	5	2	0