LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL

DEBT IN THE MID-AMERICA REGION OF ACSI

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

John Robert Beck

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2020

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APPROVED BY:

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Dissertation Supervisor

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Second Reader

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to inductively explore and understand how school leadership's views on institutional debt impacted its use at Christian kindergarten-twelfth grade (K-12) schools in the Mid-America Region of the Association of Christian Schools International (MAR-ACSI). Institutional debt was generally defined as large and reoccurring expenses such as mortgages for school buildings. The qualitative research theory guiding this study was transcendental phenomenological reduction articulated by Clark Moustakas (1994) in his *Phenomenological Research Methods*. The Moustakas model provided an effective way to explore the gap in the literature found about how institutional debt impacted the planning and implementation processes of school principals.

This study utilized twenty-five interview questions based on five research questions. This researcher first field-tested and then interviewed ten participants purposively selected from the research population. These participants possessed wide ranging but consistent opinions about the use and misuse of institutional debt that revealed a sufficiency and saturation of data. Throughout the process this researcher sought to insure the trustworthiness of his research without necessarily mandating the transferability of his findings. Based on an inductive analysis of their data transcripts this researcher concluded that, theologically and theoretically, participants generally viewed the use of long-term institutional debt with a mixture of practical restraint and profound regret. Further research could include expanding the research population to the entire Association of Christian Schools International.

Keywords: Budgeting, Christian, debt, K-12, leadership, management, mortgage, phenomenology, schools

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to this researcher's wife, Laura Beck, who put up with his lifetime of learning with a quiet, kind, generous, and patient heart.

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Acknowledgments

Many people have helped this researcher along the way in researching and writing this dissertation. First, a foremost thank-you goes to the Dr. Gary Bredfeldt, Dr. John Cartwright, Dr. Brian Pinzer, and the faculty of the Christian Leadership in Education program at Liberty University who all guided this researcher's work and encouraged his faith journey. Second, a special thank-you goes to all the participants who graciously and voluntarily gave of their time to be interviewed. Third, a grateful thank you goes out to this researcher's employer who put up with him me, professionally, when he needed extra time to research and write over the past few years. Fourth, an editorial thank-you goes to Rebecca Straple-Sovers for the hours of copy editing. Fifth, a kind thank-you goes out to this researcher's family who put up with his long hours of absenteeism to work through this program. Finally, and most importantly, this researcher especially thanks his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who gave him everything. To God be the glory!

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List of Abbreviations

Mid-America Region of the Association of Christian Schools International (MAR-ACSI)

American Association of Christian Schools (AACS)

Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)

Christian Leadership in Education Program (CLED)

Christian Schools International (CSI)

Emotional Intensity Index Protocol (EIIP)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Kindergarten-Twelfth Grade School (K-12)

Liberty University (LU)

Long-Term Debt (LTD)

Michigan Non-Public School Accreditation Association (MNPSAA)

Research Question (RQ)

Virtual Professional Portfolio (VPP)

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

"The Preacher sought to find acceptable words..."
- Ecclesiastes 12:10-11, NKJV

Introduction

Over the past ten years, Christian kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12) brick and mortar schools have been losing enrollment at a rapid rate when compared to previous decades (Private School Enrollment, 2017). For example, when considering all private schools, regardless of religious affiliation, the number of students enrolled dropped from 6.3 million to 5.4 million in 2013-14 (Private School Enrollment, 2017). Dr. Jeff Mattner, the Regional Director for Mid-America Region of the Association of Christian Schools International, stated that "a Christian school closes every other day" in the United States (Mattner, personal communication, October 15, 2019). Many of the surviving educational institutions are at a crucial financial crossroads throughout contemporary American evangelical culture. Once the preferred educational option for many conservative evangelical households these institutions face increasingly successful, alternative educational options in the form of home schooling and online initiatives (Barna Group, 2017, p. 6).

This recent phenomenon was particularly evident in the Midwest region of the United States. A Mackinac Center for Public Policy study revealed that the largest drop in enrollment in Michigan occurred in Baptist-affiliated institutions, at 33%, with the second-largest drop occurring in "unaffiliated religious schools," at 21% (White & DeGrow, 2016, p. 4). But mere competition from alternative forms of delivering education, like homeschooling (Ewert, 2013, p. 3), did not fully explain the financial challenges faced by struggling Christian schools.

One possible financial factor in the budget of struggling K-12 Christian schools was their relative level of institutional debt. Across the entire United States, commercial mortgage debt

rose to approximately $2.1 trillion of the total $3.46 trillion dollars in debt owed as of June of 2019 (Commercial/Multifamily Mortgage Debt Reaches Nearly $3.5 Trillion in the First Quarter of 2019). Partially in response to this statistic this researcher conducted a phenomenological research study that explored the role that institutional debt possibly played in contributing to the long-term sustainability of K-12 Christian campus based schools.

This study examined the theological, sociological, educational, and leadership concerns that institutional debt presented to past, present, and future Christian leaders in the field of education. Chapter One presented the Background to the Problem, Statement of the Problem, Purpose Statement, Research Questions, Assumptions and Delimitations, Delimitations of the Research Design, Definition of Terms, Significance of the Study, and concluded with the Summary of the Design.

Background to the Problem

The topic of this dissertation was the impact of institutional debt on the long-term sustainability of K-12 Christian schools. Such schools sometimes take on a great deal of long-term debt in their pursuit of academic excellence. But is it wise to utilize debt? This phenomenological study sought to explore the role of institutional debt in the Mid-America Region of the Association of Christian Schools International (MAR-ACSI). Additionally, it sought to explore and understand how long-term institutional debt impacted these institutions both theologically and theoretically. Finally, this study explored how debt was professionally and personally viewed by MAR-ACSI member school principals.

Theology and Institutional Debt

For this research study, theology was understood to be the "rational expression," the study, of God (Ryrie, 1999, p.13). From a conservative, evangelical perspective the Holy Bible was the only primary source from which the study of God could properly develop. This study of

theology involved the examination of biblical doctrines (Erickson, 1991, p. 16). Erickson (1991) set out five "characteristics" of theology as follows: biblical, systematic, contextual, contemporary, and practical (p. 16). Theology was also organized thematically, sometimes labeled as "topically," with major and minor issues (Erickson, 1991, 16). Deciding what was a major or minor issue was largely outside the focus of this research and best reserved for scholars of theology. Suffice to say that for this dissertation, the theology of wealth and stewardship provided a broad thematic context. Within this theme was the topic of institutional debt.

Many theologians have studied how the Lord viewed stewardship through the lens of Holy Scripture. Erickson briefly addressed stewardship in the context of the creation of man (Erickson, 1991, p. 168). Yet, many theologians did not include a specific study of institutional debt within their thematic doctrines of God. For example, Erickson did not include a specific study of debt in his work on Christian doctrine (Erickson, 1991, p. 429). Noted theologian Wayne Grudem did not reference the word "debt" or "stewardship" in his classic treatise on systematic theology (Grudem, 2000, pp. 1276-1290). Theologian Charles Ryrie did not address institutional debt in his classic text entitled *Basic Theology* (Ryrie, 1999, p. 644). Yet there are 2,350 verses on the topic of all things related to money in the Bible (Crown, 2004, p. 7). For example, God called for the forgiveness of all financial debts every seven years in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 15:1, NASB). Therefore this study turned directly to the Bible for insight into God's standard on institutional debt. The New American Standard Bible used the word "debt" seven times in its translation of the following verses: 1 Samuel 22:2, 2 Kings 4:7, Nehemiah 10:31, Proverbs 13:13, Matthew 18:37, Matthew 18:32, and Colossians 2:14. When studying these verses a theological model of God's views on debt began to emerge.

This study addressed two primary theological issues relevant to this study of institutional debt. First, what guidance did the Bible actually give about debt? Was it a blessing or a curse?

Second, what financial guidance did the Bible provide to K-12 Christian school administrative leadership about the use of debt? In terms of the use of debt, scholars and popular researchers differed in their understanding of Scripture and its support or non-support for debt utilization. Some authors embraced a theology of debt-free financial operations. Examples included the popular writings of Larry Burkett and Dave Ramsey examples. Burkett and Ramsey both used Scripture to build a theology wherein debt of any kind was virtually akin to sinning (Burkett, 1985, p. 78; Ramsey, 2018).

Alternatively, other scholars believed that the Scriptures supported the wise use of debt as part of Christian stewardship. For example, Suders challenged Burkett's interpretation of Scripture and concluded that the use of debt was acceptable if managed biblically (Suders, 1996, p. 110). In a chapter from *Organizational Leadership* edited by Burns, Shoup, and Simmons (2014), Rodin took a centrist approach to debt. Rodin suggested that a leader's view of debt could change the mission of the school (Burns, Shoup, & Simmons, 2014, p. 242). Rodin suggested that Christian leaders must utilize both planning and prayer and preserve a balance between the two views of debt (2014, p. 247). While Rodin came down squarely in the middle of these two theological poles, his overriding concern was that leadership viewed themselves as stewards and not owners of the resources entrusted to them (2014, p. 251).

History and Institutional Debt

The Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) suggested that the Christian school movement was "maturing" and "aging" (Swaner and Mecham, 2017, para. 2 &3). The critical impact of institutional debt on long-term fiscal solvency was a relatively recent phenomenon in the K-12 Christian bricks and mortar school movement. Until the early 2000's the growing enrollment of Christian schools in North American enabled some institutions to construct buildings by acquiring long-term debt. However, within the last few years, this

enrollment growth trend reversed course, forcing Midwestern Christian schools to face a legacy of fixed expenses with shrinking revenue (Private School Enrollment, 2017). This phenomenological dissertation focused on the perceived impact of institutional debt on the long-term viability of the Christian bricks and mortar schools and the continued use of institutional debt.

Sociology and Institutional Debt

Sociology is, in part, the study of societal norms. As of this writing debt is a growing societal norm in the United States (Kus, 2015, p. 212). But has that societal norm spread to contemporary evangelical culture as a perceived means to accomplish the Lord's will? ACSI recognized the importance of addressing the role of debt in institutional stability and sustainability. At that accreditation agency there was recognition that debt can put institutions at risk. Another large K-12 Christian schools accrediting agency in the United States, the Christian Schools International (CSI), did not provide clear guidelines about debt in its policies and procedures beyond requiring an annual balanced budget (Christian Schools International, 2015). It should be said though that, as an institution, CSI was debt-free (Christian Schools International, 2018). The issue of debt was a leadership-driven topic that needed further exploration and examination at the K-12 level.

Theory and Institutional Debt

Theory is a conceptual framework that seeks to "explain a particular phenomenon" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, p. 21). Creswell (2014) discussed one possible theoretical framework lens (p. 64) called "critical theory" (p. 65). "Critical theory" offered the perspective of transcending sociological restraints (Creswell, 2014, p.65). This researcher used Creswell's construct to observe and analyze the phenomena of debt utilization in Christian schools. A second model employed in this study was called "inductive logic" (Creswell, 2014, p. 65). This

researcher utilized this model to build a theory about debt utilization based on phenomena observed in MAR-ACSI (Creswell, 2014, p. 65).

Researcher's Relationship to the Problem

This researcher had an admittedly personal stake in the phenomenological research contained herein (Creswell, 2007, p. 189). As of this writing he was employed at a K-12 Christian school that nearly became insolvent in 2018 largely due to long-term institutional debt. This debt was in the form of a mortgage acquired decades ago. This research revealed qualitative data on institutional debt that provided insights that may benefit the K-12 Christian bricks and mortar school movement in the future.

Potential Beneficiaries of this Research

Uncovering and understanding the phenomenological impact of institutional debt may help this researcher's school, and many others, survive and thrive in the near and far future. It may serve as a warning, or as a permission slip, to the leadership of such schools considering future expansion funded partially or wholly with debt. MAR-ACSI may also benefit from the research as they continue to evaluate their accreditation standards and professional development.

<div align="center">

Statement of the Problem

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Aside from anecdotal stories about the impact of institutional debt, like this researcher's informal conversations with various school administrators, there was a gap in the research about school governance as it relates to institutional debt management in MAR-ACSI. Dr. Swaner, the Director of Thought Leadership and Higher Education Initiatives for ACSI as of this writing, wrote to this researcher in an email as follows: "I believe there is a significant gap in the research related to Christian school boards" (Swaner, personal communication, October 5, 2017). CSI also indicated they had no existing study. D. Ritter, a CSI Leadership and Strategic Consultant, indicated there were plenty of general studies on school finances but no significant leadership

research regarding the specific impact of debt on long-term success (Ritter, personal communication, October 2, 2017). Indeed, Ritter provided anecdotal leadership stories about schools that have both succeeded and failed in terms of their debt management practices, regardless of their enrollment size (Ritter, personal communication, October 2, 2017). Until this dissertation, phenomenological-driven qualitative research did not exist that explored and sought to understand the impact of institutional debt on the leadership of K-12 Christian campus-based schools in the United States and of MAR-ACSI in particular.

There has been much research on debt vis-à-vis student loans at the college level, but little to no research done at the K-12 Christian school level. For example, Rolfs (2019), from Zeigler Capital Investments, provided advice on debt load limits for K-12 religious schools (pp. 1-2), but Rolfs' research and recommendations were tailored toward public K-12 charter schools and not private K-12 Christian schools. Additional research examined voucher funding of K-12 Christian schools ("How Private Schools Adapt," 2014), but vouchers were not an option in every state that comprised MAR-ASCI ("Fifty State Comparison," 2017). In fact, according to the Education Commission in the States, only 14 states across the entire United States allowed vouchers at all ("Fifty State Comparison," 2017). In any event, none of the aforementioned research specifically examined long-term debt management in K-12 Christian schools that were members of MAR-ACSI.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand the views, values, and attitudes of K-12 Christian school principals. Essentially the purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand how school board and administration leadership's views on institutional debt impacted its use at Christian K-12 schools in MAR-ACSI. Institutional debt was defined as follows: "Long-term Debt (LTD) is any amount of

outstanding debt a company holds that has a maturity of 12 months or longer" (Long-term Debt, 2019). This definition included mortgages for school buildings. Debt acquired to meet annual operational budget deficits was also considered. The qualitative research theory guiding this study was transcendental phenomenological reduction, most recently fully articulated by Moustakas (1994) in his Phenomenological Research Methods. Moustakas' model and subsequent experts in the field like Creswell and others provided an effective way of inductively uncovering and understanding how institutional debt impacted the planning of school principals.

Research Questions

The following research questions were designed to facilitate an exploration of the problem and purpose of this qualitative research. There were five overall research questions.

RQ1. What were the views, values, and attitudes of MAR-ACSI school principals toward the use of long-term debt to fund school expansion projects?

RQ2. For those MAR-ACSI school leaders that supported debt acquisition for school expansion projects, how was this position biblically understood or supported?

RQ3. To what extent, if any, did MAR-ACSI oversight and accrediting requirements relating to fiscal policy influence debt-related decisions of MAR-ACSI member schools?

RQ4. To what extent, if any, did long-term institutional debt impact the decision-making process of MAR-ACSI school principals' long-term plans for their schools?

RQ5. To what extent, if any, did MAR-ACSI schools have institutional guidelines regarding the use of debt in their founding documents such as their charters and bylaws, and to what extent, if any, did they follow them?

Assumptions and Delimitations

In general, assumptions involved the potential biases of the researcher. In general, delimitations involved the size of the sample consistent with phenomenological research design.

Research Assumptions

This researcher inductively understood that he may have had five assumptions/biases present in his worldview. First he assumed, theoretically, an analysis of the use of debt was essential to understanding how K-12 Christian schools can survive today and thrive in the future. Second he assumed that addressing the use of debt in some form or fashion was necessary to accomplish God's purposes. Third he assumed debt was typically used while attempting to accomplish God's purposes. Fourth he assumed leadership chose to use debt because conventional wisdom suggests doing so rather than searching the Scriptures for justification. Fifth he assumed that these assumptions could have been authenticated or rejected based on his analysis of the phenomena. By stating his biases, this researcher gauged their impact on his analysis of the finding.

Delimitations of the Research Design

This research had several delimitations related to analyzing and answering the research questions. The research component of the study was conducted from late August to mid-November of 2019. It was therefore delimited to schools in operation during that timeframe. This study was further delimited to MAR-ACSI member schools and therefore did not include schools who were members of other accreditation associations or other private religious schools. The study included MAR-ACSI schools' then-current principals and did not include their school board members, faculty, or support staff. This particular position was selected as it comprised the most stable and accessible group. Christian school board members were initially considered but dismissed. They were viewed by this researcher as problematic in terms of discovering who they were for each school and then sustaining research connectivity with them as school board terms began and ended at varying points in the school/calendar year. Also delimited were Christian

schools from traditions outside of MAR-ACSI. This dissertation did not cover private schools that were avowedly secular in their mission and vision statements.

Definition of Terms

The following alphabetized terms were relevant to this study. They ranged from clarifying abbreviations to expanding on nomenclature relevant to the theoretical model of phenomenology.

1. *Accreditation/certification:* This term was used to describe how K-12 Christian schools authenticated their theological/financial/educational vitality and viability to parents.

2. *American Association of Christian Schools (AACS):* The second-largest Protestant, evangelical K-12 Christian school accreditation agency in the United States (Characteristics of Private Schools in the United States: Results From the 2015–16 Private School Universe Survey, 2017, p. 20).

3. *Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI):* The largest Protestant, evangelical K-12 Christian school accreditation agency in the United States (Characteristics of Private Schools in the United States: Results From the 2015–16 Private School Universe Survey, 2017, p. 20).

4. *Bracketing:* The practice that effectively addressed the role of potential bias of the researcher in phenomenological interviews (Sorsa, Kiikkala, & Åstedt -Kurki, 2015, p. 9).

5. *Christian Schools International (CSI):* The third-largest Protestant, evangelical K-12 Christian school accreditation agency in the United States (Characteristics of Private Schools in the United States: Results From the 2015–16 Private School Universe Survey, 2017, p. 20).

6. *Debt:* A philosophical and economic construct that compared "what was owed" to "what was owned," akin to a fiscal liability (Douglas, 2016, p. xi, 18).

7. *Epoche:* A term sometimes used interchangeably with bracketing (Van Manen, 2014, p. 27) that effectively addressed the role of bias in the researcher.

8. *Long-term Debt (LTD):* Any amount of outstanding debt a company held that had a maturity of 12 months or longer (Long-term Debt, 2019).

9. *Mid-America Region of the Association of Christian Schools International (MAR-ACSI):* A Midwestern accreditation agency within ACSI that focuses on K-12 Christian schools.

10. *Michigan Non-Public School Accreditation Association (MNPSAA):* The largest accreditation agency in Michigan (Mackinac Center for Public Policy, 2016, p. 16).

11. *Noema:* A concept in phenomenology that ascribed and described "meaning to what one sees, touches, thinks, or feels" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 69).

12. *Noesis:* A concept in phenomenology that ascribed and described "the act of perceiving, feeling, thinking, remembering, or judging" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 69).

13. *Phenomenology:* A method of inductive reasoning often used in qualitative research that required the researcher to subjectively investigate phenomena (Lester, 1999, p. 1).

14. *Principal:* The term used to refer to all the participants in this dissertation's sample population in lieu of their often synonymous formal titles such as administrator.

15. *This Researcher:* This third-person reference served to identify the writer of this dissertation and to differentiate his work from those of other authors he often described and cited (VandenBos, 2010, p. 69).

Significance of the Study

This study made a contribution to the field of K-12 Christian school leadership study as it provided an understanding of the long-term impact of K-12 institutional debt financing by Christian schools. The aforementioned correspondence with leadership at ACSI suggested the possibility that such research would be well received.

There was a practical significance to this study. A study by Calabrese & Grizzle (2012) suggested that large-scale donors did not donate as much money to institutions of higher learning if these schools had a great deal of debt (p. 221). This phenomenon could possibly have been applied to K-12 educational institutions as well. A study by Yan (2009) indicated that there was a gap in the research on nonprofit institutions and their debt structure (p. 48). But both of those studies dealt with debt at institutions of higher learning.

At the K-12 Christian school level, this researcher found very little written on the topic. After conducting this research, such institutions may now benefit from the relative transferability of the phenomenological findings found in this study. This researcher's study may impact their decision-making process as they consider acquiring debt. The study may now benefit MAR-ACSI by providing them additional organizational insight into their members' long-term institutional improvement plans. This research was offered to ACSI, consistent with Liberty University policies, by this researcher as a potentially integral component of their work to improve and enhance their member schools' long-term credibility and sustainability.

<div align="center">**Summary of the Design**</div>

In this section this researcher provided a summary of his design. This included summaries of his sampling techniques, methodological design, and his theoretical design in phenomenology. Additional details were described in chapter three and chapter four.

Sampling Technique

The sampling technique arose from the following: qualitative observations, qualitative interviews, qualitative documents, and audio files (Creswell, 2014, p. 190). This dissertation's "observations" occurred in natural settings (Creswell, 2014, p. 190). An example of a natural setting was the office of the principal, wherein most of the participants engaged this researcher in their telephone interviews. Examples of "qualitative documents" were such things as bylaws,

policies, and procedures for debt acquisition and management (Creswell, 2014, p. 190).

Examples of "audio files" included the recording of the interviews (Creswell, 2014, p. 190). This

researcher developed an "interview protocol" as well as took into account an "observational

protocol" as articulated by Creswell (2014, pp. 193-194). This allowed for a degree of

standardization while it also encouraged following open-ended questions to wherever they led.

Methodological Design

The methodological design of this dissertation first addressed the eight "characteristics of

qualitative research" as follows: natural setting, researcher as key instrument, multiple sources of

data, inductive/deductive data analysis, participant's meanings, emergent designs, reflexivity,

and holistic account (Creswell, 2014, pp. 185-186).

In terms of "natural setting" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 185-186), this researcher conducted

telephone interviews with principals at their offices. In terms of "researcher as key instrument"

(Creswell, 2014, pp. 185-186), this researcher personally collected data from the interview

process. In terms of "multiple sources of data" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 185-186), this researcher

collected written policies, procedures, and board minutes from principals pertaining to their

implementation of their philosophy of debt management. Data collected in this form was

developed into tables, as seen throughout this dissertation.

In terms of "inductive/deductive data analysis" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 185-186), this

researcher began by inductively researching each principal's preferred course of action and

developed themes from these interviews. In terms of "participants' meanings" this researcher

kept in mind that he examined the interviewees' points of view and not his own biases (Creswell,

2014, p. 186). In terms of "emergent designs," this researcher acknowledged that his dissertation

was the beginning of a means to an end and not an end unto itself (Creswell, 2014, p. 186). As

the pilot study was conducted, interviews were conducted, and his identifiable themes emerged, the research questions were slightly modified as the research directed. In terms of "reflexivity," this researcher engaged in self-reflection to determine how his background impacted his interpretation of participants' points of view (Creswell, 2014, p. 186). In terms of "holistic account," this researcher developed a big-picture view of the various principals' views on debt across the entire "random purposeful" sample (Creswell, 2007, p. 127) of MAR-ACSI.

With a research population of 370 member schools, MAR-ACSI was considered too large by this researcher to engage in its entirety, given the nature of phenomenological inquiry, time, and budget constraints. Therefore "random purposeful" was the type of sampling chosen because the research population was deemed "too large" to efficiently and effectively cover (Creswell, 2007, p. 127). This researcher was unsure as to what his expected return rate in terms of participation would be prior to the distribution of his recruitment information. In other words, he could not control who responded and who did not. His research design needed a sample population of between two and ten people (Groenewald, 2004, p. 46) and, the Lord be praised, this researcher interviewed ten participants.

Several software systems were available for qualitative research including MAXqda, Atlas.t, and NVivo (Creswell, 2014, p. 196). This researcher briefly examined them and concluded that NVivo-12 was the most cost-effective and user-friendly and therefore it was used initially. This researcher also examined "Tesch's Eight Steps in the Coding Process" and saw the methodological value of establishing a "qualitative codebook" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 198-199). Examples of this researcher's codes included the following: View, Values, Stewardship, Discernment, Oversight, Accreditation, Fiscal Impact, Spiritual Impact, Board Governance, and Bylaws Governance (See Appendix A).

Qualitative methodological design must include an examination of validity and reliability. Although these terms have different meanings in quantitative research, in this context they meant that the "researcher checks for accuracy" and "consistency" (Creswell, 2014, p. 201). Creswell also recommended addressing seven areas to assure this validity and reliability (2014, pp. 201-202). These areas were as follows: triangulate, member checking, rich descriptions, bias, discrepant information, prolonged time, and peer debriefing (Creswell, 2014, pp. 201-202).

In terms of "triangulate" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 201-202), this researcher developed multiple sources of information. Examples included MAR-ACSI agency personnel, member school principals, and artifacts such as bylaws. In terms of "member checking" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 201-202), this researcher's methodological design included brief follow-up interviews. In terms of "rich descriptions" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 201-202), this researcher worked to write an account that sought to transport the reader into the participant's experiences with debt as appropriate. In terms of addressing "bias" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 201-202), this researcher constructed a narrative fully reflecting on his background and preconceived notions about what the Bible says about debt. In terms of "discrepant information" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 201-202), the researcher addressed content from interviews that contradicted the emergent thematic essence of the narratives to ensure all issues are fully addressed.

All evidence and research was fully examined. In terms of "prolonged time" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 201-202), this researcher scheduled a reasonably long time to interview each interviewee. In terms of "peer debriefing" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 201-202), this researcher embraced critiques by his Liberty University dissertation committee.

Each of this researcher's steps was fully documented to seek to assure his readers of its reliability (Creswell, 2014, p. 203). Also, the emphasis of this researcher's methodology was to highlight the "particularity" of his phenomenological study rather than its "generalizability"

(Creswell, 2014, p. 204). But this researcher was also mindful that this dissertation potentially served as a call to action and to reform (Creswell, 2014, p. 200).

Theoretical Design in Phenomenology

Phenomenology as a distinct method began with the pioneering work of Husserl, then Heidegger, and more recently Moustakas (Pinzer, 2017, p. 7). Pinzer (2017) suggested that this phenomenological methodology should be understood to include "understanding the value of retroactive data from lived experience" (p. 7). Pinzer utilized phenomenological methodology while explicitly seeking to remain true to a Christian worldview (p. 8). In the field of transcendental phenomenology methodology, a recent dissertation successfully used Moustakas' model (Begich, 2017, p. 3) that was applicable to this study. Also, this researcher considered the work of Groenewald, who stressed the methodological distinction between research questions and interview questions (2004, p. 6). The field of phenomenology continued to debate the possible use of online survey instruments to facilitate research. Some researchers questioned if instruments like Survey Monkey could be used in multistage phenomenological studies (Banks, 2018). This researcher found such surveys unnecessary given his research paradigms. Another theoretical issue was the role of the researcher in the study. Bracketing, or what was sometimes called "epoche" (Van Manen, 2014, p. 27), was considered in order to determine how to properly interview participants (Sorsa et al., 2015, p. 9). This researcher used an interview protocol with open-ended questions to obtain the data from the participants.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

"...he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs."
- Ecclesiastes 12:9b, NKJV

The purpose of this literature review was to provide the reader with an in-depth overview of relevant studies related to this researcher's research. Developing a complete, coherent, and concise review was a challenging and all-consuming task. The works and studies highlighted below provided essential insight, understanding, and background for this dissertation's research.

Overview

The North American Christian community had a constituency deeply committed to K-12 Christian school education. This researcher focused his research on organizational leadership's use of debt in their long-term management of such bricks and mortar schools. The subject area of research was further fine-tuned to examine organizational leadership's use of debt financing in MAR-ACSI using a qualitative, phenomenological approach. This topic and its attendant research methodology provided the general framework for this literature review. This researcher divided this chapter into five parts as follows: 1) Theological Framework for the Study, 2) Theoretical Framework for the Study, 3) Related Literature, 4) Rationale for Study and the Gap in the Literature, and 5) Profile of the Current Study.

Theological Framework for the Study

Theology is the study of God. To be more specific, the word "theology" comes "from theos meaning God and logos meaning rational expression" (Ryrie, 1999, p.13). To understand God, a person must first understand what Holy Scripture says about God. Ryrie (1999) goes on to say that "Christian theology thus means the rational interpretation of the Christian faith" (p.13). A theological framework was essential to a proper analysis of a literature review. This theological section had of five subsections. The first subsection described a theology of Christian

School Financial Leadership. The second subsection examined Practical Theology. The third subsection described Christian Leadership in Education. The fourth subsection described a Theology of Debt. The fifth and final subsection explored a Theology of Stewardship. Each subsection contributed to the development of a theological model that formed and informed the topic of this qualitative, phenomenological dissertation: namely, the use of debt in K-12 Christian schools by members of MAR-ACSI.

A Theology of Christian School Financial Leadership

In this section this researcher explored who possessed the legitimate biblical authority to make decisions about the use of debt for and in a K-12 Christian school's budget. There was no verse, chapter, or book of the Bible that directly and unequivocally dealt with a Christian school principal's use of debt per se. But there was much counsel in the wisdom literature and other books of the Bible that provided an indirect indication of God's views on the use of debt.

Proverbs suggested that it was unwise for a person to co-sign for a loan (Proverbs 17:18, ESV). For another example, in the Book of Philemon, the Apostle Paul viewed debt as something that must be paid in full (Philemon 1:17-19, ESV). Paul's taking on of Onesimus' debt burden was a form of sacrificial love. King David did not borrow money to build the temple. Rather, he saved money for his son to build it (1 Chronicles 22:1-19, ESV).

Determining who had the legitimate biblical authority in a K-12 Christian school to decide to use, or not to use, debt came down to a systemic and social analysis of Holy Scripture. For the purposes of this literature review, a systemic analysis identified the people who had the formal authority to make decisions based on their positions within the school's organization. A social analysis identified the people who had the informal influence in a school's culture to make those decisions. Systemically, the formal and legal use of debt depended on the decisions of the school board and the school's principal, based on their job descriptions. However, a wealthy

donor or parent had, on occasion, the social influence to direct the actions of the school.

To illustrate this concept, consider the biblical narrative of the many servants of Naaman (2 Kings 5:1-27, NKJV). A nameless, Hebrew, household servant girl set in motion a series of events that quickly took on international political implications as kings and generals got involved (2 Kings 5:2-7, NKJV). Likewise, consider the nameless traveling servants of Naaman. Those servants who witnessed Elisha's instructions to Naaman, via another nameless messenger from Elisha, convinced the general to wash in the Jordan River (2 Kings 5:12, NKJV).

A systemic analysis of the narrative suggested that there were two positions of actual authority: the prophet Elisha and the general Naaman. Based on their job descriptions, each of them possessed the systemic power to make decisions. Naaman decided to travel to Israel for the cure; Elisha decided to send the message about the cure. Of the two, it appeared Elisha had the greater authority. For example, Naaman asked Elisha for permission to bow before a false god in the house of Rimmon, to which Elisha simply responded with a cryptic "go in peace" (2 Kings 5:18-19, ESV). But perhaps the most influential decision-makers in this narrative could have been the nameless servants (Cooper, 2016, p. 419). A social analysis revealed that the servants of Naaman possessed significant influence over him, at least in the area of his personal health.

Something beyond a mere systemic job description was at work here. People without formal authority made decisions, or at least influenced them, to an extraordinary degree. Sampson (2011) provided six general characteristics of leadership exhibited by people without the formal authority to do so (pp. 2-11). These characteristics were as follows: physicality, intellectuality, sociability, emotionality, personability, and moral ability (Sampson, 2011, pp. 2-11). The nameless servants and messengers exhibited what Sampson would call "emotionality" (p. 4). This meant that they were connected on an emotional level with Naaman when they

suggested that he go to Israel to be healed (2 Kings 5:3, NKJV). They also dared him to do a simple task by appealing to his emotional ego (2 Kings 5:13, NKJV).

It was this researcher's "implicative reasoning" (Machi & McEvoy, 2017, p. 108) based on the preceding systemic and social analysis of Scripture, that both types of people may legitimately make decisions about the use of debt in K-12 Christian schools. RQ1-4, RQ1-5, and RQ3-1 were inductively crafted to uncover and experientially understand who had the systemic/social authority within a particular school. Also, what was uncovered was how that dynamic affected decision making at the school. Sanders (2007) cautioned that most people lived more like an unstable Peter rather than a stable Nehemiah (p. 171). In other words, this researcher explored how the social authority influenced the systemic authority in making debt-related decisions in MAR-ACSI member schools.

Practical Theology

Practical theology, properly defined, is "a place where religious belief, tradition and practices meet contemporary experiences" (Pattison, 2007, p. 12). Essentially this suggested that for theology to be useful to a human being, the study of theology must produce results applicable to many situations of life. Thus a practical theology, in terms of this literature review, resulted in the researcher looking for ways to understand a theology that practically examined and applied principles about the use of debt in K-12 Christian schools. To that end, several authors were reviewed to develop this theological model of the qualifications of leadership to deal with debt.

T.E. Frank (2006) wrote a leading article on practical theology as it related to describing leadership and administration within the context of a church (p. 114). He lamented the lack of theological training in people who managed the finances of a church (Frank, 2006, p. 114). Frank also lamented that corporate success had become the model for congregational success (p. 118). The work of Estep, Anthony, and Allison provided a complementary foundational framework for

a theological model of leadership and debt (Estep, Anthony & Allison, 2008). Estep et al. (2008) suggested that Christian educators, boards, and administrators must first become Christian theologians before becoming anything else (p. 300). These scholars valued theology over economics in terms of subject matter expertise in leadership.

In terms of a practical theology, it could have been suggested that K-12 Christian school boards and their principals might have benefited more from the theologians on their boards than the capitalists. For an example of this from Scripture, one may look at the Book of Ezra. Jeshua was a priestly theologian, who led Israelites after their return from Babylonian captivity to restore worship and rebuild the temple (Ezra 3:1-13, NKJV). It was the leading local anti-Semitic business leaders of the day that were the problem in terms of contrarian leadership (Ezra 4:1-5, NKJV). One must be careful, though, with lifting one particular slice of biblical history out of its context. For example, in the book of Ezra it was clear that the priestly Jeshua worked with the political Zerubbabel to accomplish this work (Ezra 3:2, NKJV). This added nuance did nothing to undercut the need for practical theologians to have been involved in K-12 Christian schools.

This section sought to explore the theological qualifications of leadership in terms of dealing with debt in K-12 Christian schools. Before any decision on the use of debt could be made by a school board, it must first have evaluated its own theological expertise to prepare for just such an action. The aforementioned literature reviewed suggested that a strong knowledge of theology was crucial to making biblically based decisions on debt. Therefore this researcher inductively developed RQ2 to explore this possible phenomenon during his interviews.

This section of the literature review led logically to the next one, which developed a theological model for leadership in education. Any study should be practical and relevant to both the interviewer and interviewee in the phenomenological process.

Christian Leadership in Education

It was conceptually appropriate to examine Christian leadership in education in order to build a theology of leadership in education as a foundation for the literature review. Two authors stood out in the literature review on the subject: Bredfeldt and Riesen. These two authors dealt with leadership in Christian education in ways particularly relevant to this dissertation.

Bredfeldt (2006) offered a definition of leadership as "influence" (p. 19). He pulled that definition from a work by John Maxwell. Maxwell (1993) suggested that attaining a leadership position did not necessarily translate into leadership (p. 1). Something else was in play here. Expanding on Maxwell's thought, Bredfeldt contended that there were three sources of power that he labeled as "positional, personal, and persuasive" (p. 60). Using the above mentioned systemic/social analysis, the "positional" power came from the job description. The "personal" and "persuasive" power came from a more social influence.

Riesen (2006), when writing about the usefulness of mission statements at a Christian school, suggested that there was a difference between abstract guiding documents and grounded reality (p. 40). The applicable point here, as it related to a theology of leadership and debt, was that school leadership must possess keen insight into what was actually going on before they could make legitimate decisions about the use of debt. This researcher became more aware of this insight during the phenomenology-driven research process (See Research Conclusions in Chapter Five).

From the Old Testament, consider the negative example of Samson. Samson possessed and utilized two of the three power sources as Bredfeldt (2006) described them. Samson was in a position of power, as a consecrated judge over Israel (Judges 16:31, NKJV). He certainly possessed "personal" power, given his great physical strength (Judges 14:19, NKJV). But Samson did not possess "persuasive" power, as he was unable to convince even his own

countrymen to join his cause against the Philistines (Judges 15:11, NKJV). He clearly had no idea what was really happening on the ground either, as he surrendered the secret of his strength to Delilah (Judges 16:20, NKJV). In sum, to find a poor example of leadership, look to Samson, but then actually do the opposite.

Theologically, a leader who made decisions about debt should possess all three sources of power and utilize them in an efficacious manner, with a clear and accurate understanding of the circumstances leading up to the contemplation of debt. This theological construct equipped this researcher to accurately ask questions in his interviews that probed the core leadership's strength and style as it related to the use of debt in K-12 Christian school education with MAR-ACSI, as found in RQ1-4 and RQ3-1.

Theology of Debt

Constructing a theology of debt also required an examination of the culture wherein the qualitative interview questions were asked and the answers given. This was essential because the pursuit of truth—in fact, it's very definition—was affected at the very outset of an investigation. Veith (1994) suggested that the United States was a postmodern nation and as such Christians should not get too excited by the demise of Modernism (p. 210). While Modernism had its faults, the cultural replacement that was Postmodernism had even greater moral issues (Veith, 1994, p. 210). This researcher's theological model, and the qualitative research that flowed from it, came to terms with the de facto and de jure acceptance of postmodernism by the mainstream culture in the United States. Postmodernism found a home within certain Christian circles as well. Horan (2017) wrote that the millennial generation in particular was quite saturated by, and accepting of, Postmodernism (pp. 58). Millennials had a different perspective on education leadership, which included a "team approach" that had gradually changed the cultural landscape (Pampuch, 2019, p. 1). This cultural landscape, and the financial expectations of these Millennials, undoubtedly

influenced a theology of debt, as participant "A" of this researcher's sample population would later make mention of during the interviews (See raw data table for Research Question 1-4).

Generally there were two ways debt was theologically dealt with in Scripture: spiritually and financially. The first, spiritually, suggested that people were indebted to God due to sin and salvation (Phelps, 2016, p. 33). The second, financially, suggested that people could become indebted to each other in terms of economic promises and production (Phelps, 2016, p. 35). It was this second definition of debt, as a financial concept, that was the focus of this review.

This researcher's literature review of the theology of debt had two subsections: personal finance and professional finance. A Christian leader of a K-12 Christian school had two perspectives. The first was his personal financial life and the decisions he made thereunto regarding debt. The second was his professional life and the decisions he made for the school in terms of debt usage. These two subsections were addressed below.

Theology of personal finance. This researcher used this subsection of the theological framework for the literature review to examine a theology of personal finance, from which this researcher further developed RQ2-5. It was necessary for the literature review to explore this aspect of theology as it formed and informed the personal leadership of K-12 Christian schools. Secular ethicists Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) suggested that it was very difficult to separate a person's private and professional ethical behavior (p. 24). Just as a code of ethics was hard to separate into private and public views, so too were a leader's private/public views on a theology of debt. In other words, the personal views of a leader concerning debt profoundly impacted their professional views on the subject.

Scripture taught that there was no difference between a leader's personal and professional dealings (Galatians 6:7-8, NKJV). God is no respecter of persons. A person's words reflect their heart (Matthew 12:34, NKJV). As a leader led his own household, so too he led his school.

Indeed, elders and deacons were called to manage their personal affairs well before being entrusted with the church's business (Titus 1:5-9, NASB). A theology of personal finance suggested to this researcher that he ought to be aware of this point of view, and he saw how it was applied in the lives of the MAR-ACSI principals as he asked them to answer RQ2-5.

      Theology of professional finance. This researcher used this subsection of the theological framework in the literature review to examine a theology of professional finance. In other words, this researcher explored the connection between a K-12 Christian school leader's theology and decisions regarding the use of debt in this dissertation. As of this writing there exists in the United States, commonly accepted accounting policies and procedures concerning the legal use of debt. For example, an organization's fund balance was not a personal piggy bank for their leader. That was called theft in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:15, NKJV). So too, the use of debt followed legally prescribed rules for contractual obligations concerning financing.

      How a K-12 Christian school leader thought, theologically, about professional finances impacted the use of debt to accomplish board initiatives. Suders (1996) suggested that borrowing money for biblical-based projects was scripturally justifiable (p. 78). Suders also viewed all the financial aspects of the parables of the Lord as illustrating divinely approved and appropriate techniques of money management. For example, Suders believed that the Lord condoned the financial actions of the shrewd manager found in Luke 16:6 (p. 78). Suders also believed the Lord advocated banking, loaning, and borrowing by portraying the lazy servant as evil because he was not "putting his talent (loaned money) in a bank so, at minimum, it would draw interest" (p. 78). Williamson (2013), a professional blogger of sorts, also suggested that paying off debt may not be in the best interest of a particular congregation, but he recommended it without much biblically based justification.

      A theological framework for this literature review incorporated a theology of debt using

both a personal and professional paradigm. Both dimensions were necessary to this researcher to accomplish a fuller phenomenological understanding of the use of debt in MAR-ACSI, which led to the further development of RQ1 and RQ2.

Theology of Stewardship

This researcher used this section of the literature review to examine prior research in the area of stewardship within a theology of education for K-12 Christian school leadership. Spending other people's money, whether in the form of tuition payments or outright donations, carried with it an explicit and implicit obligation to ensure the funds were used in a manner pleasing to the Lord (Luke 16:10-13, NASB). It was important for this researcher to explore, within the phenomenological interview process, the interviewees' theological views on stewardship as it impacted their views on the use of debt in ministry. Therefore, a literature review of the theology of stewardship provided a foundation upon which to build a conversation.

It could easily be said that the Lord created the responsibility of stewardship from the earliest moments in human history. Man was supposed to care for the earth, cultivate it, and rule over the earth in a way that fostered greater growth (Genesis 1:26-28, NKJV). This responsibility for care and cultivation was commonly known as the Dominion Mandate. Howell (2003) said, "Servant-leaders are not visionaries who devise a brilliant plan...they are faithful stewards of the divine mandate" (p. 301). From Howell, then, it could be logically interpreted that the Dominion Mandate in Genesis, a divine mandate, extended to every area of a Christian's life. The Lord demands 100% of a believer. A believer was not entitled to reserve some portion of his life as his own; rather, he belonged entirely to God (Titus 2:14, NIV).

A theological framework was essential to the successful completion of this literature review in the dissertation. A clearly written logical theological framework provides a reference point for a reader to engage this researcher in wrestling through the insights drawn from prior

research in the field. This researcher developed just such a framework, described in the section below that also provided an indication as to how he approached the phenomenological, qualitative interview process with MAR-ACSI members.

Theology of Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the study of phenomena. This type of study inductively described "meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). It describes "what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). Scholars who had written extensively on the interconnectivity between theology and phenomenology acknowledged a deep and abiding tension between the two conceptual paradigms (Ciocan & Marion, 2009, p. 7). Ciocan and Marion (2009) wrote that "the conceptual boundaries between these two 'types of discourses' have been ceaselessly shifted" (p. 7). They go on to state that "until this day the subject remains highly controversial" (Ciocan & Marion, 2009, p. 7). O'Leary (2018), an apparent secular humanist, lamented that there had been a "theological turn" that overran phenomenology and led to a merger of the two fields in some disciplines like "religious philosophy" (p. 99). Turning this argument around, Louchakova-Schwartz (2018) wrote that phenomenology benefited from the theological turn in the sense that transcendental phenomenology showed "that God's participation in experience finds conditions of possibility in several phenomenological locales" (p. 642). This researcher suggested that one possible locale of the phenomenological approach was the central importance of the "interview" as a research tool (Creswell, 2007, p. 61).

Two Scripture passages provide insight into the possible theology of phenomenology. First, the Gospels gave an account of John the Baptist. He was locked away in prison (Matthew 11:2, NKJV) and, perhaps discouraged by his perilous circumstances, wondered if Jesus was the Messiah. He sent two of his disciples out into the field to conduct phenomenological research by

interviewing the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 11:3, NKJV). In response to questions from these disciples, the Lord pointed out in the disciple's lived phenomena "the things you have seen and heard" (Luke 7:22, NKJV) and asked them to analyze the data, such as the "blind see and the lame walk" (Matthew 11:4-5, NKJV), that authenticated His claims. John's disciples departed (Luke 7:24, NKJV) presumably to share their findings and conclusions with John the Baptist.

The second passage of Scripture, namely Luke 1:1-4, provided a theological structure for a biblically based model of phenomenology. These verses introduced the reader, Theophilus, to the gospel narrative found in the book of Luke. Luke stressed the need for interviewing "eyewitnesses" to better understand the earthly ministry—in other words, the phenomenon—of the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 1:2, NKJV). Also, Luke developed an "orderly account" (Luke 1:3, NKJV) that this researcher suggested could have been conceptually rationalized to justify the careful organization of this qualitative dissertation.

The point made by this researcher was not that a strict and straightforward exegesis of these passages required the reader to see them only in the light of justifying phenomenology. Rather, key structural constructs of aspects of phenomenological research design were not entirely incompatible with time-tested Scriptural principles of research and analysis. For theological/theoretical concerns related to an evangelical Christian's use of phenomenology, see the section entitled Challenges in Phenomenological Interviewing Theory below. The next section of this literature review examined theory relevant to the dissertation.

Theoretical Framework for the Study

In the previous section of this literature review, the researcher identified and described the theological model used to frame this dissertation's study of leadership in the use of debt. This researcher also had to consider and shape the dissertation's theoretical framework. An active and accurate theoretical base sought to provide a strong foundation for this dissertation's research.

This section was comprised of seven subsections. Subsection one addressed Debt Theory. Subsection two addressed Theoretical Parameters of Qualitative Methodologies. Subsection three addressed Historical Guideposts of Phenomenological Theory. Subsection four investigated Components of Phenomenological Theory. Subsection five featured an analysis of Techniques in Phenomenological Interviewing Theory. Subsection six explored Challenges in Phenomenological Interviewing Theory. Subsection seven wrapped up the theoretical section of this literature review with a selection of Conceptually Relevant Phenomenological Studies.

By way of an introduction to theory in this literature review, this researcher found that Prange suggested a robust organizational theory that served two purposes (as cited in Easterby-Smith, Araujo, & Burgoyne, 1999, p. 25). Prange's first purpose for theory was to provide a descriptive structure (Easterby-Smith et al., 1999, p. 25). This approach sought to describe phenomena. Prange's second purpose for theory was to provide a prescriptive foundational structure (Easterby-Smith et al., 1999, p. 25). This approach sought to offer potential solutions to problems that were applicable to the participants of this researcher's sample population. The choice of using one or the other, or aspects of both, depended on the nature of the research. However, there was a conceptual caution to be addressed first. Prange wrote that developing an overarching theory of leadership may actually "obstruct theory development" (as cited in Yukl, 2015, p. 35). Prange asserted that managers were not interested in the "why" something had happened but rather in "what" must be done (as cited in Yukl, 2015, p. 35). But addressing the "why" of something was crucial to developing a coherent theory (as cited in Yukl, 2015, p. 35).

Theory was a conceptual framework that sought to "explain a particular phenomenon" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, p. 21). Creswell (2014) suggested one possible theoretical framework lens called "critical theory" (p. 65). One way the researcher could use this construct was to observe and analyze the phenomena of debt in Christian schools with a goal of exploring a way

for schools to acquire, reduce, or eliminate it. A second model, described by Creswell, used "inductive logic" to build a theory about debt based on phenomena observed in MAR-ACSI.

Debt Theory

The theoretical literature that explained the concept of debt was diverse. Of the many scholars who had built theoretical descriptive models about debt, one in particular stood out. Douglas (2016) wrote a treatise called *The Philosophy of Debt*. While using the term "philosophy," he developed a theoretical model defining and describing what debt actually *is*. In one of his examples, Douglas differentiated between "owing and owning," which was applicable to this study (p. 18). Simplistically speaking, school boards could borrow money to build a campus, but the school would not then own the building—it would merely owe the money to the bank, which in turn would actually own the building. Why did these semantics matter? Because, biblically speaking, school boards were stewards of the resources entrusted to them. In a limited sense, the theory of debt as a legal construct involved surrendering stewardship over the school's financial resources to the bank, as opposed to the Lord per se. Bob Jones University Press, a Christian textbook publisher, had a website that gave advice for starting Christian schools. They suggested that new Christian schools avoid "early debt" (BJU Press, 2018). Another Christian textbook publishing company, Abeka Books, offered no advice on the issue of debt on their Christian school startup page (Abeka, 2018).

It should be noted at this point that there was theory indirectly related to this researcher's topic. Generally it dealt with higher institutions of learning. For example, Calabrese and Grizzle (2012) suggested that large-scale donors did not donate as much money to institutions of higher learning if these schools had a great deal of debt (p. 221). Gerrard and Roberts (2006) did a study on student parent debt. But the theory in this study focused on the parents of children attending college. Rodriguez and Rolle (2007) suggested a "school finance theory," but her entire model

was built almost exclusively on public funding of public schools (p. 2). Hill et al. (2005) wrote extensively about a theoretical approach in phenomenology called consensual qualitative research, but this theory required multiple researchers outside the scope of a dissertation (p. 196).

Another possible theoretical model involved public funding of private schools in the form of tax credits or tuition payments by the state (Thro, 2012, p. 1). This model suggested the theory that the government had some sort of a role in funding religious schools. See Chapter Five's Research Limitations and Further Research for additional discussion, p. 203, below.

This researcher referenced these studies to identify the fact that there was a great deal of research about debt at institutions of higher learning, but few that explicitly addressed K-12 Christian school institutional debt. Theories about college level student loan debt did not easily transfer to mortgage-related debt at K-12 Christian schools.

Theoretical Parameters of Qualitative Methodologies

In this section this researcher continued developing his theoretical parameters of his dissertation with a brief identification and description of qualitative research. Qualitative research is one of two dominant approaches to the study of the social science. The other approach, one the researcher considered and rejected, is a quantitative model. This researcher judged that a quantitative approach did not sufficiently address the human interest side of the problem. In other words, an interview, not an experiment, was thought to be the most useful and necessary way to explore the gap in the research on the use of debt in a "holistic" manner (Marshall & Rossman, 2015, p. 2). Shah and Corley (2006) suggested that qualitative research was more subjective, while quantitative research tended to be more objective (p. 1823). Therefore this researcher chose a qualitative methodology, as it seemed to be the best way to get to the heart of the research problem: the leadership and management of institutional debt in K-12 Christian schools.

Two overall themes of qualitative study, known as narrative research and phenomenological research, guided this researcher (Creswell, 2014, pp. 13-14). Within this frame there are generally four principle methods by which qualitative studies are conducted: phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies (Creswell, 2014, pp. 13-14). The following paragraphs outline five theoretical elements of qualitative methodology.

The first element required a definition of the theory of qualitative methodology at its most basic level. Aguinis (2009) wrote that, historically, qualitative researchers have most often used "interpretive research designs" in their various studies over the past decade (p. 69). Flick (2007) wrote that qualitative researchers do not always create a "formal research design," but that decision is actually a design choice (p. 2). Qualitative research, in this dissertation, is an inductive approach to discovering and uncovering the opinions of MAR-ACSI views on debt.

The second element suggested that inductive logic theory in a qualitative approach utilized five investigative steps (Creswell, 2014, p. 66). First, this researcher "gathers information about the research problem" (Creswell, 2014, p. 66). Second, this researcher interviewed participants using open-ended interviewing techniques (Creswell, 2014, p. 66). Third, this researcher analyzed the data from those responses to discern "categories" (Creswell, 2014, p. 66). Fourth, this researcher looked for "themes" that emerged from the data analysis (Creswell, 2014, p. 66). Fifth, and finally, this researcher posed "generalizations from past experiences and literature" (Creswell, 2014, p. 66). This scaffolding of research provided the necessary broad structure to the dissertation's methodology. The theory undergirding these investigative steps suggested that it was better to start with human interaction rather than to start with a pre-conceptualized thesis of behavior.

The third element suggested that the "interview" was one of the most "common" and important parts of a qualitative methodology (Cassell & Symon, 2004, p. 3). The general purpose

of an interview gathered "descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee" (Cassell & Symon, 2004, p. 3). King wrote that interviewing was the most often used form of data collection when developing that interpretation (as cited in Cassell & Symon, 2004, p. 2). What was unique to qualitative research was that the interviewer clearly acknowledged and intentionally became part of the research paradigm (Cassell & Symon, 2004, p. 3). Groenewald theorized that that it was practically and functionally impossible to remove the interviewer from the interview experience and thus the interviewer must be incorporated into the analysis (2004, p. 45). Indeed, some phenomenological researchers made it a point of entirely rejecting theory and any application thereof (Tomkins & Eatough, 2013, p. 266)—although, upon reflection, this researcher humbly suggests that the act of rejecting theory could be interpreted as a theory in itself.

The fourth element of qualitative methodology suggested that "inference" was an analytical tool that must be carefully considered and carefully applied, if it was relevant to the overall study. Inference was "learning about facts we do not know by using the facts we do know" (Thomann & Maggetti, 2017, p. 3). Some degree of inference was useful and indeed required for this researcher to discuss implications in Chapter Five, pp. 195-197. However, the use of inference was necessarily limited, given the experiential nature of the data observed.

The fifth element of qualitative methodology suggested that, far more important than the use of inference, was the use of description (Groenewald, 2004, p. 44). The theory undergirding phenomenological research suggested, indeed almost demanded, that the "aim of the researcher was to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts" (Groenewald, 2004, p. 44). This required this researcher to give careful attention to the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee.

Historical Guideposts of Phenomenological Theory

This researcher used this subsection of the literature review to examine the historical and

philosophical guideposts of qualitative phenomenological theory. The individuals discussed herein were the pioneers of the theory of phenomenology and the subsequent major contributors to the field. The theory's principle founder was Edmund Husserl, followed closely by his student and colleague, Martin Heidegger. These two men worked closely together to some degree on transcendental phenomenology until they found themselves in a disagreement that split the field of study (Crowell, 2001, p. 4). Husserl was credited with inventing the term "phenomenology." Its approach was drawn from the ideological ashes of World War One (Groenewald, 2004, p. 43). Groenewald (2004) wrote that the theory of phenomenology, as first envisioned, focused on the "contents of personal consciousness" and rejected notions of reality that may exist outside of it (p. 43). Pinzer (2017) wrote that Husserl's view was more descriptive, while Heidigger's view emphasized a more contextual approach (p. 7).

The field of phenomenology faded as a viable methodological approach until the 1970s (Groenewald, 2004, p. 44). The field's most consequential contributor thereafter was Clark Moustakas (1994), who credited Husserl with introducing the theoretical concepts of "intentionality, noesis and noema" (p. 2). These words were Husserl's terms, denoting how humans interact and experience reality as they know and perceive it. It should be noted that Moustakas showed up in almost all literature reviews and bibliographies related to phenomenological research. In fact, nearly all phenomenological studies of the past four decades have been influenced by Moustakas.

Components of Phenomenological Theory

In qualitative research, the phenomenological method was defined as the study of "people's perceptions and perspectives relative to a particular situation" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, pp. 255-256). The sample size should be "small" and "carefully selected" from people with "direct experience with the phenomenon being studied" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, pp. 255-

256). Creswell (2007) called this process "criterion sampling" (p. 128). This researcher was vigilant against internal bias during these interviews (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, pp. 255-256). Dukes (1984) suggested the optimal sample size for phenomenological research was between three and ten participants (p. 200). More recently, the optimal sample size remained nearly the same, at between two and ten people (Groenewald, 2004, p. 46). The theory behind such a sample was that it allowed researchers to fully explore and uncover the descriptive reality of the phenomena and interviewee.

Lester (1999) suggested that phenomenological research could be used to "support or challenge policy and action" (p. 1) and that theory could be the end result of phenomenological research, but not its beginning (p. 2). One component of Lester's approach established the findings after the interviews and then possibly constructed a theory from them (1999, p. 2). Groenewald (2004) wrote that phenomenological research must avoid using the word "analysis" and instead use his newly invented word "explicitation" (p. 49). Doing this was supposed to help the researcher and reader understand that this process must not lose sight of the whole picture (Groenewald, 2004, p. 49). But this researcher did not find that other experts in the field had subsequently embraced this particular term.

Techniques in Phenomenological Interviewing Theory

Likely the most important and most common instrument in phenomenological research was the ubiquitous interview. The interview got at the heart of what Van Manen (2014) called the "practices of everyday life" (p. 15). Pinzer (2017) suggested that phenomenological methodology should be understood to include "understanding the value of retroactive data from lived experience" (p. 7). Pinzer utilized phenomenological methodology while explicitly seeking to remain true to a Christian worldview (p. 8).

Giorgi, Giorgi, and Morley (2017) provided a checklist of the theoretical techniques used

in the interview process (p. 4). Their first step was to be sure that the initial phenomenon was "carefully described" (Giorgi, Giorgi, & Morley, 2017, p. 4). Their second step was for the researcher to be essentially bracketed in preparation for an interview—a critical technique in phenomenological interviewing. Bracketing required this researcher to set aside his preconceived notions about the use of debt and "non-judgmentally" engage in the interview (Sorsa et al., 2015, p. 8). Sorsa, Kiikkala, and Åstedt -Kurki (2015) suggested that this researcher must decide what kind of theoretical role he would have in the interview—for example, the researcher could merely be a "listener" or a "co-creator of data" (p. 9). Yet Sorsa et al. (2015) indicated that even in making that decision, it was impossible for researchers to completely set aside their "previous presuppositions" (p. 9). The point of engaging in bracketing was to ensure that this researcher did not unduly "influence the participant's understanding of the phenomenon" (Sorsa et al., 2015, p.10). This difficulty brought this researcher to his next section; Challenges.

Challenges in Phenomenological Interviewing Theory

There were many challenges that this researcher faced in using phenomenological interviewing theory. For example, Lester (1999) wrote that commercial entities frequently misunderstood the point and purpose of this theory and expected it to work the same way as quantitative research often did (p.3).

A second challenge was the apparently small sample size as compared to other, much larger quantitative and even other qualitative methodologies (Lester, 1999, p. 3). People outside of the field were skeptical of its applicability beyond the immediate study (Lester, 1999, p. 3). A study may or may not be applicable beyond its sample population but not just because of its size.

A third challenge to phenomenological interviewing was that this approach was "good at surfacing deep issues and making voices heard" that were not always "comfortable" for participants and future readers (Lester, 1999, p. 4). A reader's reaction to such research was out

of the researcher's control, in any event.

A fourth challenge to phenomenological interviewing was the internal wrestling by this researcher with what Sorsa et al. (2015) called "reflective bracketing" (p. 12). Sorsa et al. cautioned that if this researcher did not consciously bracket he would "unconsciously affect data" (p. 12). This was a very real challenge in the course of using open-ended interview questions and with open-ended responses.

A fifth challenge to phenomenological interviewing was the accessibility of the interviewee. While internet surveys were a tempting way for the interviewer to engage the interviewee, it was quite discouraged as a violation of the most basic theory of phenomenological research; the importance of personal and experiential interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee (Banks, 2012). Therefore this researcher discarded the technique.

A sixth challenge to phenomenological interviewing was the noesis of "response bias" on the part of the participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, p. 170). When this researcher conducted the interviews, he needed to be aware of the biases that the participants may have had toward his topic and his interview questions. He also needed to be aware of the participants' motivation and possible agenda for agreeing to participate in the research in the first place. Leedy and Ormrod (2016) also addressed the "social desirability effect," wherein participants might tell this researcher what they thought that he wanted to hear rather than what they believed (p. 170).

A seventh challenge to phenomenological interviewing was the inherent tension between the methodology itself and evangelical Christianity. One of the theoretical assumptions of phenomenology was that the "only certain knowledge that humans can have about anything is the knowledge obtained through the processes of first-person consciousness" (Tompkins, 2013, p. 260). However, Scripture is quite clear that the only "certainty" in life is the Word of God (Luke 1:1-4, NIV; Matthew 24:35, KJV). Therefore this researcher continually wrestled with this

theological objection aimed right at the heart of phenomenology's philosophical core. One initial response to this objection was for this researcher to live out the mantra to be in the world, but not of the world (Romans 12:2, KJV).

Conceptually Relevant Phenomenological Studies

The following section was a brief overview of a selection of conceptually relevant phenomenological studies. These studies were selected because they were either examples of theoretically similar frames to the approach taken by this researcher for this dissertation or similar in their content scope and sequence.

The first selection was a dissertation by Dr. Pinzer (2017). He conducted "a phenomenological study of executive level leadership development in peer mentoring cohort models" (Pinzer, 2017). It served as an example to this researcher of a phenomenological study rooted in a biblical perspective. Of particular relevance were the first and third chapters on methodology. From a theoretical perspective, Pinzer discussed use of theory as influenced by Moustakas (Pinzer, 2017, p. 125).

The second selection was a dissertation by Dr. Begich (2017), from Liberty University. She conducted a 'transcendental phenomenological study of financial literacy and student loan debt of female graduate students" (Begich, 2017). This dissertation served as a structural model for this researcher. While the study had nothing to do with this researcher's interest in the use of debt in MAR-ACSI, it was thematically similar enough to warrant a fuller investigation of her research design and theoretical foundations. It dealt with the conceptually similar topic of debt albeit student loans, used a qualitative phenomenological methodology, had somewhat similar research questions, in a generalized debt-related way, and utilized the "four-step approach of Moustakas" for her "data analysis" (Begich, 2017).

The third selection was a dissertation by Dr. Sroufe (2013), from Liberty University

entitled "A phenomenology of teacher and parent perceptions of the characteristics of effective schools: Working toward a shared vision." This dissertation served as an effective example of a strong methodology as found in chapter three (Sroufe, 2013, pp. 44-56). Sroufe used an interactive online blog with his participants (p. 44). His strategy also alleviated some of the theoretical concerns and challenges found in phenomenology mentioned above. For example, Sroufe composed a clear theoretical framework based on what he called the "five-factor theory" (p. 20). It was not so much his theory as the way he was able to structure it within his dissertation that made it relevant and applicable to this researcher.

These aforementioned studies represented a kaleidoscope of theory, method, and structure relevant to this researcher's dissertation. All of them utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach to their research. Elements of each study's methodology were incorporated into this researcher's dissertation. This section of the literature review examined the theory undergirding six facets of phenomenological research. It sought to demonstrate how such theory guided this researcher as he developed his dissertation research methodology. Essentially theory provided the structure that united the various chapters of the dissertation.

<p style="text-align:center">Related Literature</p>

The purpose of this portion of the literature review was to provide the reader with a critical review of the various subtopics directly related and relevant to the subject matter of this researcher's research. The organization of this part involves this researcher's in-depth survey of relevant aspects of the study that framed and informed the research. This part of the literature review was divided into four sections, as follows: 1) Leadership and Organizational Literature, 2) K-12 Christian School Management Literature, 3) K-12 Christian School Marketing Literature, and 4) MAR-ACSI Literature.

Leadership and Organizational Literature

In this section this researcher examined scholars in the field that contributed to the current and contemporary understanding of the field of K-12 Christian school administration. This section was divided into five subsections, as follows: 1) Foundations of K-12 Christian school leadership, 2) Church oversight of K-12 Christian school financing, 3) Organizational best practices of K-12 Christian schools, 4) Trends in K-12 Christian school leadership and education, and 5) Leadership in K-12 Christian school accreditation agencies.

Foundations of K-12 Christian school leadership. In this section this researcher examined prior research about how leadership and organization form one of the most important foundations of successful K-12 Christian school financing. Two representative selections were reviewed here as follows: 1) Luckcock and 2) Burns, Shoup, and Simmons. Luckcock (2006) addressed church-school management. Written in England, Luckcock suggested that a "countercultural model of contextual theology" (p. 261) was the best option. The church school must fight to stay relevant to the culture. He warned that excessive "managerialism" could reflect poorly on the church as the state sought greater and greater control and that the church school must counteract that tendency (Lockcock, 2006, pp. 267-268).

Burns et al. (2014) edited a book that provided insight into the current state of the field. Burns contribution to the book began with a quote from Proverbs 21:1 describing how God directs the leadership of a K-12 Christian school in the direction He chooses (2014, p. 91). Burns began with his opinion about the common approach that leadership theory should focus on "how Jesus conducted leadership" (p. 92). Burns rejected that approach as simpleminded and cited Rodin's rationale that the Savior's purpose was to be the "Lord of our life, not an example of good leadership" (as cited in Burns et al., 2014, p. 92). While such an insight was initially jarring to this researcher, Burns' subsequent reasoning provided a clearer rationale and greater insight.

Burns et al. (2014) suggested that the Industrial Revolution was a watershed event that completely and forever shifted leadership theory from ancient, divine-right royalty arguments into a hired scientific management (pp. 99-101). The ascendency of the task-driven "scientific management" gave way to the consideration-driven "human relations" theory (Burns et al., 2014, p. 104). MacGregor, a pioneer of that field, tried to merge the two competing theories into one unified approach to leadership (Burns et al., 2014, p. 104). That effort eventually produced a "transactional v. transformation" dichotomy that redefined the relationship between managers and the managed (Burns et al., 2014, p. 110). Burns believed that managers and the managed often worked cooperatively with each other to meet their own particular goals (p. 110).

Burns et al. (2014) used a rapid historical overview to get to the point that Christian leadership today was heavily influenced by its history, particularly "ideas about transforming leadership" (p. 122). In essence, leaders ought to transform their followers. This was consistent with the theological doctrine of sanctification. Such leadership permeated every level in a Christian organization (Burns et al., 2014, p. 140).

Luckcock, and to a greater extant Burns et al., represented a cross section of scholars who have built an historical case for why and how leadership exercised their power in North America in today's culture. Autocratic leadership, once popular in scholarly circles and in some Christian schools, had largely given way to models of servant leadership or a "team approach" (Pampuch, 2019, p. 1). Christian school boards and their principals reflected this history as they continued to interact with and lead their faculty and staff.

Church oversight of K-12 Christian school financing. Transformative efforts are the contemporary hallmark of leadership. In this subsection this researcher examined this impact through prior research on the leadership and organization of churches and their Christian schools. Alston (2017) wrote a dissertation on the corporatization of churches that represented current

trends in this field of research. Alston lamented the increasingly businesslike nature of church governance (2017, p. 1). He suggested that churches should make "disciples" and not focus on the "dollars" (Alston, 2017, p. 1). He further asserted that a business mindset in the place of a ministry mindset reduced its effectiveness and threatened its survival (Alston, 2017, p. 15). The point of his article, in terms of this dissertation, was the growing trend to see the church not as a ministry but as a balance sheet. This mindset altered the church's approach to its oversight of Christian schools that sometimes lost money.

Young (n.d.), from the Association of Christian Schools, wrote that church schools were in a crisis for reasons quite similar to Alston's theory about church business (The Marriage of the Church and the Christian School: Why Do They Struggle?). In his research Young found that most new pastors of churches with schools would close their schools if they could (The Marriage of the Church and the Christian School: Why Do They Struggle?). Young suggested that in many cases the leadership of both ministries clashed over budgets and philosophical differences (The Marriage of the Church and the Christian School: Why Do They Struggle?). Young's solution to this crisis was for the leadership of both ministries to come together in prayer to seek out the Lord's will (The Marriage of the Church and the Christian School: Why Do They Struggle?). In his article Young described how his church built a new school building and then a church facility (The Marriage of the Church and the Christian School: Why Do They Struggle?).

This researcher found Alston's and Young's articles to be representative of the state of the field. The growing trend to treat the church like just another business was coupled with the growing tension between entrenched school leadership and second-generation pastors with weak commitment to Christian schools. The tensions between a congregation and their school ministries were often caused by debt-related budget issues. This important insight formed part of the cultural backdrop framing the interview questions for RQ3.

Organizational best practices of K-12 Christian schools. This researcher contemplated how Christian schools, whether directly associated with a church or not, best handled the organization and leadership of their institutions. In this subsection this researcher examined prior research on best practices exercised by leadership as they organized K-12 Christian schools. This researcher found two authors that best represented the current state of the field: Ledbetter, Banks, and Greenhalgh (2016) and Coley (2015).

Ledbetter et al. (2016) provided a review of current paradigms in Christian leadership. In Christian circles he distinguished between leaders and managers. Leaders created needed change (Ledbetter et al., 2016, p. 21). Managers sought to sustain the change by organizing and budgeting for the new goals (Ledbetter et al., 2016, p. 21). Leaders looked to the future, while managers maintained the present (Ledbetter et al., 2016, p. 22). Ledbetter et al. looked to the Apostle Paul as a role model in both leadership and management who handled finances in a biblical manner (p. 66).

Coley (2015) developed a dissertation for Liberty University that examined the best practices of Christian school governance. In this report Coley (2015) found that only 56% of school boards held annual training (p. 17) and most did not engage in any form of self-evaluation (p. 20). He found that 20% of schools surveyed had board members who inappropriately interfered with the administration's day-to-day operation of the school (Coley, 2015, p. 15). Coley also revealed that "76%" of schools surveyed had their finances reviewed annually by a certified outside source (2015, p. 15). These statistics from Coley's quantitative analysis reflected emergent norms in the literature.

When this researcher prepared for phenomenological interviewing, he thought it was important to more fully understand the state of the field in terms of conceptualizing the leader/manager dynamic and the board/principal dynamic. The research mentioned above helped

this researcher gain insight into the development of a framework for understanding the interviewees' views of their roles within their Christian schools' organizations. It was important to know if a principal felt as if they were a leader or a manager, and how their approach impacted how they viewed the use of debt to accomplish their organizational objectives.

Trends in K-12 Christian school leadership and education. The past was important to develop an understanding of the production of current trends in leadership and education. In this section this researcher applied his research from the past and present to field research that focused on the future. In this subsection this researcher reviewed prior research in the latest future-focused trends in K-12 Christian school leadership and education. To that end a representative selection of such research was best made manifest in the latest theoretical work of Swaner, Wiens, Frost, and Capone.

As of this writing Dr. Swaner was the Chief Strategy and Innovation Officer for the Association of Christian Schools International. Swaner (2017) wrote about the proper roles and responsibilities of school boards. In this descriptive blog she highlighted the role of the board as the primary fiduciary agent (Swaner, 2017, para. 5). She downplayed the board's financial oversight responsibility and focused instead on the visioning process (Swaner, 2017, para. 5). She assumed that K-12 Christian schools should have a "stable enrollment and a balanced budget" and once that was stabilized it should focus on curriculum and strategic planning (Swaner, 2017, para. 8). She stressed the importance that spending on the "buildings and budget" were a means to an end rather than the end-goal itself (Swaner, 2017, para .14).

Swaner (2019) also described the latest research agendas and directions for the Association of Christian Schools International. In this article Swaner outlined ACSI's newest approach to improving operational integrity and efficiency of Christian schools. While little was mentioned about financial sustainability, she referenced the importance of board leadership's

responsibility to govern through developing leadership plans (Swaner, 2019, para. 1-15).

Wiens (2014) lamented the closure of 25% of all Christian schools across North America in the last ten years of his research window (pp. 1-2). He discussed, in particular, the Reformed Dutch commitment to Christian education in Michigan (Wiens, 2014, pp. 1-2). He predicted that many more would close in the coming decade (Wiens, 2014, pp. 1-2). Wiens presented an overriding reason for these closures. Schools closed due to a collapse in finances brought about by the disintegration of a God-centered education (Wiens, 2014, pp. 1-2).

Frost (2015) asked his readers if they were "time tellers" or "clock builders" (pp. 6-8). He used this rhetorical foil to discuss the difference between "managers" and "leaders" (Frost, 2015, pp. 6-8). He suggested that managers preserved the past while leaders sought the future (Frost, 2015, pp. 6-8). Miles, Snow, Meyer, and Coleman (1978) made a similar claim, wherein such managers were "defenders" while such leaders were "prospectors" (p. 556). Combining both approaches was called an "analyzer" which, when both types of leadership were combined, led to greater long-term stability and profitability (Miles, Snow, Meyer, & Coleman, 1978, p. 556).

Capone's (2016) dissertation for St. John Fisher College was conceptually similar to this researcher's overall research interests. Capone (2016) discussed leadership in a transformational sense (p. 29). His research explored principals who led thriving schools as identified by ACSI standards (Capone, 2016, p. 13). He cited the study by Fellers that seemed to indicate thriving schools had a reduced dependence on debt (Fellers, as cited in Capone, 2016, p. 40).

Swaner, Wiens, Frost, and Capone collectively established a paradigm of sorts that was relevant to this researcher's phenomenological interviewing. All three of them dealt with debt in an indirect way, yet all three suggested troubling consequences for failing to manage school finances well. Reviewing these authors caused this researcher to pause and reflect on the nature of the questions asked of the interviewees. Most of the initial interview questions were designed

to assess the impact of past practices on present and future operations. These authors caused this researcher to also develop interview questions related to the interviewee's point of view on the overall role of MAR-ACSI in Christian education particularly as it related to RQ3.

Leadership in K-12 Christian school accreditation agencies. After reviewing literature that sought to predict the future, this researcher turned to prior research from accrediting agencies like ACSI to see how they reflected their future goals in present oversight practices. Therefore in this subsection this researcher examined prior research in leadership within ACSI. The following documents had no author credited, but were agency-approved frameworks for certification that guided member schools toward a better future from the perspective of ACSI.

This researcher surveyed two documents in particular that represented the central policies of ACSI. The first document was a "Christian Leadership Framework" (ACSI, 2014; see excerpt in Appendix K). This document consisted of a circle diagram with "strategic competencies" as an outer ring, "relational competencies" as a middle ring, and "biblical thought and action" in the bullseye (ACSI, 2014 p. i). While the two inner rings were theologically and theoretically important it was at the outer ring that this researcher found the most contextual relevance. Two selections merited a review: 1) Advancement Leadership and 2) Operational Leadership (ACSI, 2014, p. i). In the fourth component of Advancement Leadership there was a category called "Fund Development" (ACSI, 2014, p. i). It emphasized the need for leadership to cultivate relationships with major donors and develop an overall strategy to sustain the school (ACSI, 2014, p. i). There was no mention of debt in this section. The entire category for "Operational Leadership" was dedicated to school finances (ACSI, 2014, p. i). While debt itself was not specifically mentioned, a need was recorded for leadership to engage in "Strategic Financial Planning" wherein the leader developed long-range plans to sustain viability (ACSI, 2014, p. i).

The second document reviewed in this section was a modified spreadsheet that set a

range of school performance metrics, from the lowest, "Formative," to the highest level, called "Flourishing" (ACSI, 2015; see excerpt in Appendix L). In this chart ACSI set a four-stage debt reduction plan wherein the least functioning schools were unable to meet payroll and debt payments (ACSI, 2015). The most functioning schools had a budget wherein less than 5% of the spending went to debt service payments of any kind (ACSI, 2015).

What the two aforementioned documents suggested was that ACSI found that overall debt was a drawback to the long-term vitality of its member schools. This led this researcher to ask his interviewees about their perceptions of ACSI and its level of oversight and support for debt counseling in RQ3.

K-12 Christian School Management Literature

Examining the literature of accrediting agencies naturally led this researcher to probing the impact of their guidelines on the day-to-day financial management practices of Christian schools. This researcher thought it necessary to engage the literature to learn, discern, and process the life cycle of the typical Christian school. For example, some principals he interviewed founded their schools, others were two and three generations removed from the passion of their schools' founders, and still others were possibly the last principals of their schools. Therefore this section was divided into three subsections as follows: 1) Start-up best practices for K-12 Christian schools, 2) Management practices of K-12 Christian school finances, and 3) K-12 Christian school closures.

Start-up best practices for K-12 Christian schools. In this subsection this researcher examined prior research in best practices of K-12 Christian school start-ups. Two Christian book publishers offered their advice honed by decades of involvement in Christian schooling. The first was Abeka Books, the publishing arm of Pensacola Christian College. The second was BJU Press, the publishing arm of Bob Jones University. Speaking only anecdotally for the Midwest

United States, this researcher found that most evangelically orientated Christian schools used one or both of these publishers for much but not all of their curriculum.

Abeka Books had much to offer in terms of advice for evangelical Christian schools hoping to open (2018). They suggested that potential founders pray, pick a philosophy of education, and hire their first administrator (Abeka, 2018). They found it important to consider an open or closed enrollment strategy to populate the school with unsaved or saved students respectively (Abeka, 2018). Abeka suggested that budgeting wait until about halfway through the planning process and just before the school was about ready to open. In this way the new board would at least have an estimate of needed tuition based on interested parents. They did not give an annual, or month-to-month, or any other timeline to accomplish the various tasks.

BJU Press (2018) suggested a one-year plan for starting a school. They suggested that early on stakeholders ought to decide if the school would be church-affiliated or run independently by a board (BJU Press, 2018). Their budgeting process recommended developing a budget in the first stages of planning to include tuition rates, staffing, and beginning expenses.

Abeka Books and BJU Press had relatively obvious financial reasons for producing a start-up guide, like selling curriculum and offering their college-certified teachers for hire. Perhaps for that reason the two publishers' advice came across as rather simplistic and vague. One was tempted to think that opening a Christian school was akin to a walk in the park. Of the two plans, the BJU Press (2018) plan offered the most advice pertaining to financing, but neither offered insight into debt management. Reviewing this literature conceptually influenced the content of the interview questions.

Management practices of K-12 Christian school finances. Given that there was little substantive financial advice given by two of the largest producers of Christian curriculum in North America, this researcher turned to scholarship to further his qualitative preparation for

research. In this subsection this researcher examines prior research in K-12 Christian schools' general financial management practices. This field was bursting with literature. This researcher found six authors representative of current management practices: 1) Light; 2) Yan, Denison, and Butler; 3) Herman; 4) Stephenson; 5) Brown; and 6) Lippman. Given the number of relevant studies each one was reviewed in brief with most applicable advice stated. It should be noted that many studies of this nature focused on for-profit corporations rather than non-profits, as explained in the following paragraphs.

Light (2011) recommended that a budget be no more than one or two pages in length (p. 133) and conform to "IRS Form 990" (p. 136). It should answer four questions, summarized as follows: 1) money spent, 2) approved budget, 3) fiscal year end projection, and 4) difference between actual and projected (Light, 2011, p. 133). It should have clearly indicated budget surpluses and deficits (Light, 2011, p. 133). Yan, Denison, and Butler (2009) did not write from a Biblical perspective per se as they provided a quantitative framework for borrowing. They suggested the field of study was ripe for further research as little actual scholarship existed on the subfield of "capital structure of nonprofits" (Yan et al., 2009, p. 48). Yan et al. suggested that non-profits ought to rigorously pursue multiple funding sources in order to cope with debt servicing (2009, p. 64). Herman's (2004) study researched "risk management" for nonprofits (p. 3). Her take on the issue of debt was that non-profits work too hard to avoid risk, to the detriment of their financial health (Herman, 2004, p. 4). Stephenson's dissertation (2006) became a handbook for Christian administrators. In this guide he suggested the most important organizational leadership principle for administrators was not finance-related but rather was to stay focused on a Christ-centered curriculum (Stephenson, 2006, p. 21). Brown's (2018) D.Min. project developed a set of principles of biblical stewardship. Brown found that "debt" could "possibly detract" from the non-profit's mission and ministry (2018, p. 9). Overall, Brown found

that debt inhibited effective Christian service. Lippman (2008) wrote about Biblical guidelines for borrowing and lending money. She suggested borrowing could be a "win-win" scenario for lenders and borrowers if managed biblically (Lippman, 2008, p. 109). But she warned that typically, lending harmed the lender (Lippman, 2008, p. 109). Lippman (2008) suggested that, when biblically loaning money, lenders should provide interest-free loans (p. 117) and provide full disclosure of all associated fees (p. 118). She also suggested that biblical lending and borrowing should not occur between close associates, friends, or between people of a similar religious background (Lippman, 2008, p. 119).

K-12 Christian school closures. Research on starting or sustaining a Christian school was filled with hope. Research on ending a Christian school took on a much more somber tone. In this subsection this researcher provided a survey of prior research on organizational leadership's failure to sustain their Christian schools. The authors reviewed here were as follows: 1) Fellers, 2) Nichols, and 3) Adhanom.

Fellers (2013) wrote a quantitative study on the "statistically significant warning signs of K-12 Christian school distress" using ASCI member schools (p. iii). In his Research Question 4 about finances he presented several conclusions (Fellers, 2013, pp. 100-101). Fellers' warning signs of potential closure were as follows: 1) use of loans to finance current obligations at the end of the school year (p. 100), 2) use of tuition discounts higher than comparable schools (p. 100), and 3) growing debt with shrinking development funding (p. 101). This researcher should note that he was unable to access the members' only, relevant statistical report by the Independent School Management company that was heavily referenced by Fellers. Another significant study cited by Feller, by Fitzpatrick (2002), was not been successfully located after much searching by this researcher.

Nichols (2016) wrote a qualitative study on evangelical schools at risk (p. 1). He

suggested that 2006 was a "tipping point" year wherein the gradual closure rate of schools began to accelerate and became the new norm (Nichols, 2016, p. 110). Nichols ranked the top 21 "causal" factors for a school closure, and "fiscal stress" ranked the highest, at about 60% among participants in the study (pp. 110-111). Nichols's observation about stress was further investigated by this researcher in RQ4-5. Nichols (2016) noted that the rise of homeschooling and online K1-2 schools also contributed to the current closure trend (pp. 42-43).

Adhanom (2016) wrote a grounded theory study on organizational failure at Christian schools (p. iv.). He suggested that failure could be avoided if the organization effectively engaged in "transformational" and "transactional" leadership (Adhanom, 2016, p. 180). He also introduced a theoretical platform that he called "CONCORD" (p. 183). This model had seven components that worked toward improving "organizational effectiveness" (Adhanom, 2016, p. 178). The role of "debt" in the organizational failure was not specifically mentioned.

Fellers, Nichols, and Adhanom represented the latest comprehensive, accessible, and often cited research on why K-12 Christian schools closed. These dissertations described various reasons why organizational failure occurred, but none of them emphasized the specific role of debt management in the closures they studied. They did suggest that ineffective marketing played a role (Fellers, 2013, p. 49; Nichols, 2016, p. 172; Adhanom, 2016, p. 157). This led this researcher to the next section.

K-12 Christian School Marketing Literature

This next section of the literature review came about because this researcher wanted to uncover what current marketing experts and scholars in the field said about how to properly advertise Christian schools. It became clear that there were phenomenological connections between Christian school marketing, enrollment, and debt management. This researcher developed following three subsections as follows: 1) General marketing of K-12 Christian

schools, 2) Enrollment strategies of K-12 Christian schools, and 3) Donor development strategies of K-12 Christian schools.

General marketing of K-12 Christian schools. In this subsection this researcher examined prior research in general marketing of K-12 Christian schools. Many people had much to say about the marketing of K-12 Christian schools. This researcher made three selections that represented the general thought of Christian marketing at the time of this writing: 1) Horner's descriptive study (2006), 2) Cawley's article on speaking like a Christian (2017), and 3) Barna's descriptive report on parental choice (2017).

Horner's (2006) descriptive study on Christian School marketing was a dissertation written for Liberty University. In this qualitative study he outlined eight principles of marketing: "product, price, place, promotion, partnering, processes, possibilities, and pleasing God" (Horner 2006, p. 83). Horner called these eight principles his "Octopus Plan" (p. 82). Of all the strategies, "word of mouth advertising" was found to be the most effective (Horner, 2006, p. ix). He also found that many schools sought to cover all of their expenses by tuition (Horner, 2006, p. 43). Many of the schools Horner sampled warned against hiring marketing firms, as their benefits did not outweigh their costs (p. 65). Horner's research did not cover debt-related expenses.

Cawley's (2017) article on how to communicate without getting lost in Christian jargon was an amusing look at a serious issue. He compared the English language of England and North America, with lighthearted results (Cawley, 2017). His fundamental point, though, was a reminder that what an interviewee said was not necessarily what the interviewer might think was said (Cawley, 2017). Familiar jargon used in Christian circles like "sin" and "salvation" may not be understood the same way outside of the context of a Christian community of faith (Cawley, 2017). He recommended avoiding or eliminating jargon as much as possible.

At the time of this writing, Barna Group is a leading Christian research company utilized

by many Christian organizations across the country. ACSI hired them to find out "how parents sort education options in a changing market" (2017). A few of their applicable conclusions merit review here. Barna (2017) suggested that the millennial generation was not as committed to Christian education as their parents' generation (p. 52) and the commitment that did exist was reevaluated on an annual basis (p. 55). Millennial income was lower than previous generations and thus Christian school marketing should "emphasize affordability" (Barna, 2017, p. 55).

Taken together, Horner, Cawley, and the Barna report seemed to suggest to this researcher that marketing was a mixed bag in terms of a cost-benefit analysis. In sum, word of mouth worked best, in a way that avoided jargon, as long as tuition was kept low. The principle interest of this subsection to this researcher was to provide insight into how interviewees viewed not only their marketing budget, but more importantly their annual budget, to manage their debt service plans.

Enrollment strategies of K-12 Christian schools. Whether marketing money was spent or not, the success of a Christian school ultimately depended on putting students in the seats or having them enroll in online courses. In this subsection this researcher examined prior research in K-12 Christian school enrollment strategies by Ostapchuk (2017) and Baworowsky (2013).

Many companies claimed to have the secret to success when it came to enrollment. Ostapchuk (2017) wrote a blog that represented the typical approach from such companies to grow a Christian enrollment. In this article he suggested that schools advertise what was "unique" about their school (Ostapchuk, 2017, pp. 1-4). Then he offered the advice that "word of mouth," the "school website," a "social media" presence, and involvement in "notable competitions" all served to maximize visibility (Ostapchuk, 2017, pp. 1-4).

Baworowsky (2013) explained that administrations should work with their faculty when developing enrollment strategies (pp. 1-4). His basic premise was that when faculty created new

academic programs they should work with their administration to publicize them (Baworowsky, 2013, pp. 1-4). While Baworowsky wrote from a college-level experience, the conceptual idea of faculty involvement in student recruitment was operationally possible at the K-12 level as well.

There was nothing particularly new or noteworthy about Ostapchuk's and Baworowsky's advice. The point here, for this researcher, was to note that sometimes a Christian school just needed to be really good at the basics and did not need to reinvent the wheel to grow enrollment. The list of Ostapchuk's topics provided this researcher with insight into the state of the field familiar to most interviewees. This researcher's demographic-related interview questions were largely based on aspects of this section in the literature review (see Appendix H).

Donor development strategies of K-12 Christian schools. Enrollment often only paid a portion of a Christian school's operating costs. Other sources were often sought to bridge the resulting gap between revenue and expenses. Thus this researcher now examines prior research in the field of K-12 Christian school donor cultivation. Two studies represented the views of the most widespread scholarship on the topic, as follows: 1) Ferguson and 2) Calabrese and Grizzle.

Ferguson (2018) wrote that the typical approach to donor cultivation was to seek out "high cash-capacity donors" or seek "100% participation levels" in current fundraising (pp. 1-5). But he suggested an alternative approach that he labeled "the third lever" (Ferguson, 2018, pp. 1-5). This approach suggested that organizational leadership seek out unconventional income streams like patent-driven revenue streams and income derived from donated "real estate holdings" (Ferguson, 2018, pp. 1-5). Ferguson (2018) warned that these "third lever" pursuits required a great deal of professional expertise but that this could be found in the families of existing students (pp. 1-5).

Calabrese and Grizzle (2012) studied the subjective interests of donors in donating to non-profit organizations. Their research suggested that donors did not give as readily to

organizations already possessing a mortgage (p. 2-3). They strongly encouraged that non-profit organizations should not use restricted funds in ways not originally approved of by the original donors (Calabrese & Grizzle, 2012, p. 3). Also, they suggested that pursuing and securing public funding from governmental sources tended to dramatically reduce private donor interest in the non-profit organization (Calabrese & Grizzle, 2012, p. 9).

The studies of Ferguson and Calabrese and Grizzle framed this researcher's approach to developing points of interest for his phenomenological interviewing. This researcher was interested in exploring how MAR-ACSI principals felt about, and approached, unorthodox fundraising for their schools and the pursuit of public funding. Public funding was available in some states but not others in the ACSI Mid-America region. For example, Michigan had a constitutional provision in Article VIII, Section 2 barring direct funding of private schools in the form of tuition-related payments. From this researcher's professional experience, the State of Michigan provided funding for faculty professional development and indirect student costs like limited access to a local school district's school bus system. The State of Michigan also provided funding for private school students who dual-enrolled in community colleges. But those funds went straight from the state to the community college. Another state, Ohio for example, provided tuition assistance to MAR-ACSI schools. This researcher was tangentially interested in examining how public funding affected the K-12 Christian school budget. For further discussion of this topic, see this researcher's discussion of his Research Limitations and Further Research below, in Chapter Five (pp. 199-205).

Mid-America Region of ACSI Literature

In this subsection this researcher examined prior research in leadership and financial accountability metrics of the Mid-America region of ACSI. The Mid-America region was comprised of approximately 370 schools. The organizational leadership of MAR-ACSI was led

by a regional director. This association was a loose confederation of independent Christian schools existing throughout the Midwest of the United States, which included the following states: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. While very little research was produced by MAR-ACSI, at the national/international level ACSI offered financial best practices, briefly surveyed below as follows: 1) Leadership Practices of ACSI and 2) Financial Practices of ACSI.

Leadership practices of ACSI. Leadership practices of ACSI were a category so large it almost defied refinement. ACSI has presented and published volume upon volume of best leadership practices. But a succinct summary of their most recent trends was found in a blog post by Swaner (2017b) entitled *The Missing Piece of Board Governance: Understanding Education Trends and Responses*. In this article Swaner (2017b) suggested that school leadership must move beyond a mere fiduciary role, not into a role that micromanaged its administration, but rather one focused on strategic planning (pp. 1-4).

As of the writing of this dissertation, ACSI operated an extensive online professional development portal called the "Virtual Professional Portfolio." This VPP portal, part of www.acsi.org, and located at http://your.acsi.org, was accessible to administration and faculty who maintained current, paid, memberships with ACSI. Their online professional development component was called "ACSIconNEXUS" and consisted of 41 channels. None of those channels had any webinar series that produced results using the following search terms: 1) debt, 2) mortgage, and 3) institutional debt. Two of those channels produced limited results when this researcher searched for conceptual and concrete content related to his research questions. The channels with content were as follows: 1) Governance/Board Leadership (ACSI, 2019a) and 2) Research (ACSI, 2019b). These channels produced two webinar series that referenced institutional long-term debt: 1) Weather Turbulent Times and 2) Tuition is About Mission, Not

Money: What Every Head/Board Member Needs to Know About School Finance (ACSI, 2019a, 2019b). Neither of these webinar series dealt exclusively or substantially with institutional debt.

Financial practices of ACSI. To find a relevant source of financial practices, this researcher turned to the accreditation and reaccreditation standards of ACSI. At its core, ACSI developed a continuum of school improvement. The aforementioned *Formative to Flourishing* framework suggested that the most successful schools devoted no more than 5% of their annual budget to debt servicing (see Appendix L, Christian School Leadership Framework, Version 1.0, 2015). Its weakest ranking for schools, called "Formative," indicated that schools had "debt concerns" (Christian School Leadership Framework, Version 1.0, 2015).

<div align="center">

Rationale for the Study and Gap in the Literature

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The paragraphs have piled up in this literature review and their purpose was to provide the reader with this researcher's insights into the current field of K-12 Christian school debt management. This researcher's rationale for the study and the gap in the literature are further developed in the two subsections below.

Rationale for the Study

The heyday of Christian school administration publishing was from the 1980s to the mid-1990s. Prolific researchers such as Elve (1984), Deuink (1988), and Gaebelein (1995) flooded the K-12 Christian school community with "how-to" books. The National Association of Independent Schools celebrated the growth in Christian schools until 2001 or so (Capital Financing for Independent Schools, 2006). But those books and advice were written at the height of the boom in Christian schools for an administrative audience sometimes wondering what to do with so many new students. Today, that paradigm has shifted, and research that was once extraordinarily relevant has become valuable in an historical sense but limited in its contemporary qualitative usefulness.

Faith in Christ was in the head and the heart—in essence, a learned and lived quantitative and qualitative experience. This researcher thought it was appropriate to revisit the issue of K-12 Christian school debt management, not from the statistics of a quantitative approach in this instance, but rather through a qualitative phenomenological methodology that explored the heart and soul of Christian practice.

Quantitative research certainly had its well-deserved place but this researcher was more interested in qualitatively examining questions about the day-to-day personal walk of faith found in the organizational leadership of K-12 Christian school principals. After exploring this phenomenon this researcher was able to contribute sound research that was systemically and socially constructive to the larger field of K-12 Christian school sustainability.

Gap in the Literature

This literature review found occasional sources about the advisability and impact of debt on K-12 Christian sustainability. For example, Rolfs (2019) worked for Ziegler Capital and provided a two-page document that outlined the advisability of taking on debt by religious schools (pp. 1-2). But this study assumed a steady enrollment within a charter school operation (Rolfs, 2019, pp. 1-2). Authors like Brown and Nichols were few in number. Journalists like Jennings (2013) and Marcus (2015) reported on the national decline of students enrolled in private schools writ large. Marketing experts like Newberry (2016) and the Barna Group (2017) also explored such trends. But none of the above scholars qualitatively explored the specific impact of debt management on school sustainability.

A review of available qualitative research left open the overall question of the impact of long-term debt on the sustainability of a K-12 Christian school. One might have intuitively thought that debt surely could not be a positive element of budgeting. But the data did not exist

to unequivocally justify that opinion in a qualitative sense. The apparent and available research was simply scant, especially as it related to the attitudes and efforts of principals in MAR-ACSI.

ACSI had a research department that assisted with dissertation-level research. As such, ACSI was the frequent object of much study. However, a research design study such as this researcher's dissertation had not yet been done as of several years ago (Swaner, personal communication, October 5, 2017), nor as recently as the fall of 2019 (Tesar, personal communication, October 25, 2019). Consequently a gap existed in the field of research related to this subject matter. This gap was more fully defined and described in the two sections below: 1) Missing research from K-12 Christian school debt management and 2) Missing research from K-12 Christian school financial practices.

Missing research from K-12 Christian school debt management. In this subsection this researcher examined prior research on current trends of K-12 Christian schools and identified what was missing from the field debt management. Certainly the subjects of this researcher's phenomenological study, MAR-ACSI principals, had no clearly delineated research associated with it. For example, the secular National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) cited debt service in the secular Association of Independent Michigan Schools (AIMS-MI) as $1,037 for every $22,422 spent (Facts at a Glance, 2018). That was a jump from $375 per $17,343 spent in 2012 (Facts at a Glance, 2007). But there was no comparative quantitative analysis of MAR-ACSI schools. Neither AIMS-MI nor MAR-ACSI provided anything remotely like qualitative phenomenological research on any debt-related topic that this researcher could find.

Missing research from K-12 Christian school financial practices. In this subsection this researcher explored prior research in the area of school administration with an emphasis on missing financial competency standards. It was accurate to claim that accrediting agencies like

ACSI had standards on budgeting and financing as reviewed above (pp. 65-66). What they did not possess was a qualitative phenomenological study on long-term debt management, including the impact of debt on the daily life of principals.

Nichols (2016), referenced in the K-12 Christian school closures section (above, p. 66), had done the most comprehensive qualitative research on the phenomenon of K-12 Christian school closings. In his literature review Nichols (2016) lamented the lack of scholarship (p. 87).

White and DeGrow (2016) recently completed a "Survey of Michigan's Private Education Sector" (p. 1) for the secular Mackinac Center for Public Policy. This study indicated that enrollment in private schools dropped by "9% from 2010 to 2015" (White & DeGrow, 2016, p. iii). While the report incorporated ACSI certified schools it makes no mention of MAR-ASCI specifically. There was a finance section in the report, but it only covered tuition levels (White & DeGrow, 2016, pp. 10-12). This was yet another indication of a gap in the research.

Profile of the Current Study

Chapter One and Two of this dissertation outlined this researcher's research concern and provided a literature review of relevant sources in the field. Chapter Three examined the research methodology utilized by this researcher. Chapter Four presented an analysis of this researcher's findings. Finally, Chapter Five presented the researcher's conclusions. In sum, this dissertation examined the theological and theoretical phenomena found in the use of institutional debt by principals of K-12 Christian schools in MAR-ACSI. Doing this study began to contribute toward filling the gap in the research about K-12 Christian school financial governance.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

"The Preacher sought to find acceptable words..."
- Ecclesiastes 12:10a, NKJV

The contents of this chapter included a description of the qualitative research design used by this researcher to examine the use of debt in the Mid-America Region of the Association of Christian Schools International. It focused on his research using a phenomenological approach.

Research Design Synopsis

In this section this researcher described the research problem, purpose statement, research questions, and his research design and methodology.

The Problem

Compared to roughly 500 Bible verses written on the practice of prayer and another 500 or so on faith, the over 2,350 verses written about money indicated that the Lord was quite concerned about believers' financial management practices (Crown Financial Ministries, 2003). A biblical view of money, including the Lord's wisdom literature on debt, covered more than just the Christian leader's personal wealth management. It also covered the Christian leadership and management of their Christian schools as well. The focus of this research problem was the leadership and management of long-term institutional debt in Christian schools.

According to the federal government, the Christian school movement peaked in 1995 and was projected that by 2025 many Christian schools will be gone, as those enrolled in them drop to just 9% of the total school-aged population (Private School Enrollment, 2017). Such data was limited historically, as it only measured recent demographic trends. Nor did it take into account the Christian origin of most public school systems across the United States (Newcombe, 2017). One could even historically argue that the Christian school movement, as measured by the

percentage of the total U.S. population, peaked in the late 1800s. Nonetheless, the current trend of declining enrollment was real and did not seem to be changing.

Walker (2007) asked an important rhetorical question regarding ethics in phenomenology: "Toward what goal and for what end" (p. 37). By this she seemed to suggest, in the context of this research, that this researcher needed to be sure there was ample justification for doing his dissertation. When viewed in this light, the justification of this dissertation was to not only benefit, in some conceptual and concrete way, the best practices and policies of the MAR-ACSI, but also to provide a small degree of transferability to other like-minded associations all across the United States (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 122). In this way other schools and associations may benefit from the findings and conclusions made in this dissertation.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand the views, values, and attitudes of K-12 Christian school principals. Essentially the purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand how school board and administration leadership's views on institutional debt impacted its use at Christian K-12 schools in MAR-ACSI. Institutional debt was defined as follows: "Long-term Debt (LTD) is any amount of outstanding debt a company holds that has a maturity of 12 months or longer" (Long-term Debt, 2019). This definition included mortgages for school buildings. Debt acquired to meet annual operational budget deficits was also considered. The qualitative research theory guiding this study was transcendental phenomenological reduction, most recently fully articulated by Moustakas (1994) in his Phenomenological Research Methods. Moustakas' model and subsequent experts in the field like Creswell and others provided an effective way of inductively uncovering and understanding how institutional debt impacted the planning of school principals.

Research Questions

The following research questions were designed to facilitate an exploration of the problem and purpose of this qualitative research. There were five overall research questions:

RQ1. What were the views, values, and attitudes of MAR-ACSI school principals toward the use of long-term debt to fund school expansion projects?

RQ2. For those MAR-ACSI school leaders that supported debt acquisition for school expansion projects, how was this position biblically understood or supported?

RQ3. To what extent, if any, did MAR-ACSI oversight and accrediting requirements relating to fiscal policy influence debt-related decisions of MAR-ACSI member schools?

RQ4. To what extent, if any, did long-term institutional debt impact the decision-making process of MAR-ACSI school principals' long-term plans for their schools?

RQ5. To what extent, if any, did MAR-ACSI schools have institutional guidelines regarding the use of debt in their founding documents such as their charters and bylaws, and to what extent did they follow them?

Research Design and Methodology

The research design for this dissertation utilized a phenomenological methodology in qualitative research. The qualitative research theory guiding this study was transcendental phenomenological reduction. In the field, the most well-known study using this model was one by Moustakas (1994) in his *Phenomenological Research Methods*. Moustakas' model provided an effective way of investigating and understanding how phenomena, like institutional debt, impacted the planning processes of school boards and their principals.

The phenomenological method was more specifically defined as the study of "people's perceptions and perspectives relative to a particular situation" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, pp. 255-256). The sample size should have been "small" and "carefully selected" from people with

"direct experience with the phenomenon being studied" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, pp. 255-256). The researcher had to be aware of internal bias during these extended interviews (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, pp. 255-256). There were two broad schools of thought on the method of phenomenology: descriptive and interpretive. As the name seemed to imply, descriptive phenomenology sought to simply present the story, sometimes in a first-person narrative format (Luft & Overgaard, 2013, p. 10), to the reader with little attempt to analyze it. On the other hand, interpretive phenomenology presented the story and sought to provide the reader with relevant contextualization in the pursuit of meaning (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 1). This study adopted and adapted the second broad approach.

Phenomenology had historically been rooted in philosophy and had become a "core component" of studying education (Van Manen, 2014, p. 22). Van Manen suggested that phenomenology was not so much interested in crafting a controlling theory about the world, but rather in finding a way to have "more direct contact with the world" (as cited in Vagle, 2014, p. 11). Vagle (2014) posited that phenomenology must grapple with the following conceptually driven terms: "1) phenomenon, 2) intentionality, and 3) prepositions" (p. 18). By studying "phenomenon," Vagle asserted that this method sought to understand "how we find ourselves being in relation with others," which was not something that was constructed solely in the human mind (2014, p. 20). By studying "intentionality," Vagle asserted that this method emphasized the "interconnectedness" (2014, p. 28) of everyone, everywhere, which impacted the understanding of the research in experiential and possibly existential ways. By studying "propositions," Vagle (2014) asserted that this method was more interested in the "of" rather than in studying the "nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs" of that research (p. 35). The optimal sample size for this type of research was between two and ten people (Groenewald, 2004, p. 46). The theory behind such a sample was that it allowed researchers to fully explore and uncover the descriptive reality

of the phenomena and interviewee.

The methodological design of this dissertation addressed the eight "characteristics of qualitative research" as follows: "natural setting, researcher as key instrument, multiple sources of data, inductive/deductive data analysis, participants' meanings, emergent designs, reflexivity, and holistic account" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 185-186). In terms of "natural setting" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 185-186), this researcher conducted telephone interviews with principals in their offices across MAR-ACSI. In terms of "researcher as key instrument" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 185-186), this researcher personally collected data from the interview process. In terms of "multiple sources of data" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 185-186), this researcher collected the bylaws from principals pertaining to their implementation of their philosophy of debt management. In terms of "inductive/deductive data analysis" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 185-186), this researcher inductively researched each principal's experiences and developed sub-codes, codes, and themes from these interviews. In terms of "participants' meanings," this researcher kept in mind that he was examining his interviewees' points of view and not his own biases (Creswell, 2014, p. 186). In terms of "emergent designs," this researcher acknowledged that his research was a means to an end and not an end unto itself (Creswell, 2014, p. 186). As interviews were conducted and themes emerged, the research questions were tweaked, but not substantially altered. In terms of "reflexivity," this researcher engaged in self-reflection and determined how his background impacted his interpretation of participants' points of view (Creswell, 2014, p. 186). In terms of "holistic account" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 185-186), this researcher developed a broad view of the various principals' views on debt across the available MAR-ASCI member school population.

This study included an examination of validity and reliability. These terms were typically used quite frequently in quantitative research. But in the context of phenomenological research, these terms meant that the "researcher checks for accuracy" and "consistency" (Creswell, 2014,

p. 201). See below for the discussion of trustworthiness (p. 102). This researcher employed eight means to assure validity and reliability (Creswell, 2014, pp. 201-202). These areas were as follows: "triangulate, member checking, rich descriptions, bias, discrepant information, prolonged time, peer debriefing, and external auditor" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 201-202).

In terms of "triangulate," this researcher explored multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2014, pp. 201-202). Examples included MAR-ACSI agency personnel, member school principals, and artifacts such as bylaws. In terms of "member checking" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 201-202), this researcher's methodological design included follow-up interviews via email. In terms of "rich descriptions" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 201-202), this researcher wrote an account that sought to transport the reader into the participants' experiences as appropriate. In terms of addressing "bias" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 201-202), this researcher acknowledged his background and preconceived notions about what the Holy Bible said about debt. In terms of "discrepant information" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 201-202), the researcher addressed content from interviews that contradicted the emergent thematic narratives to ensure all issues were fully addressed. For example, a theme developed wherein most schools had manageable mortgages and yet a couple did not. In terms of "prolonged time" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 201-202), this researcher scheduled an hour with each interviewee in their school building or location of their choice via the telephone with lengthy follow-up as needed. In terms of "peer debriefing" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 201-202), this researcher embraced critiques by his Liberty University dissertation chair and committee. In terms of "external auditor" (Creswell, 2014, pp. 201-202), this researcher deferred to his dissertation chair and found an objective copy editor, from outside this researcher's institutions, to fully review his dissertation.

Each of this researcher's steps was fully documented to assure his doctoral committee and future readers of his reliability (Creswell, 2014, p. 203). Also, the emphasis of this

researcher's methodology highlighted the "particularity" of his phenomenological study rather than its "generalizability" (Creswell, 2014, p. 204). At the same time this study was intended to be transferable (Given, 2008, p. 2). For example, this study was intended to be useful to its participants and transferable not only to similarly situated institutions but also dissimilar institutions (Given, 2008, p. 2). Not only could what was learned from this research be put to use by MAR-ACSI, it could also be relevant to other organizations across the United States. Other non-profit charities, inside and outside of the field of education, may benefit from the findings and conclusions reached in this study of the phenomena of the impact of debt on institutions. So, while it was not theoretically possible to generalize actual experience from one association to another, it was possible to inductively examine, in a transferable sense, this association and look for systemically and socially similar actions and reactions. This researcher was also mindful that this dissertation could serve as a call to action or a call to reform (Creswell, 2014, p. 200).

Setting

This researcher was interested in exploring the impact of debt on K-12 Christian schools in the region of the country wherein he resided, because he hoped to help such schools survive and thrive in the future. This made the Mid-America region an ideal geographic location for the study. As of this writing the Mid-America Region of the Association of Christian Schools International was comprised of approximately 370 schools. The majority of MAR-ACSI member schools come from a conservative, evangelical background.

The average student body size of MAR-ACSI's schools in this study was approximately 150-200 (See Table 4, p. 84). The size of a school was an important factor in the principal's decisions related to managing institutional debt. 20% of schools interviewed were formally or informally associated with churches, in terms of their management and property ownership (See Table 9, pp. 142-143). The 9.6 year average work experience of member school principals was

not publicly available but learned in the course of the interviews conducted (See Table 1, p. 84).

As an educator himself, this researcher was very familiar with the inner workings of

nondenominational K-12 Christian schools. The MAR-ACSI was comprised of similar schools.

Participants

The primary sample for this research involved a combination of "maximum variation,

homogeneous, typical case," (Creswell, 2007, p. 127), "purposefully selecting" (Creswell, 2014,

p. 189) and "criterion sampling" (Creswell, 2007, p. 128). "Maximum variation" (Creswell,

2007, p. 127) allowed this researcher to examine the full range of institutional indebtedness that

best represented what he believed was the full range of participants' possible interactions with

institutional debt. For example, he wanted to include participants who thought they had no

institutional debt, a little debt, and a lot of debt. He wanted his sample to include participants

who intended to go into debt and participants who intended to get out of debt. His dissertation's

sample was "homogeneous" (Creswell, 2007, p. 127) in the sense that it was comprised of

participants from just MAR-ACSI schools. It was a "typical case" (Creswell, 2007, p. 127)

sample in that this researcher's dissertation sought to show what was "normal/average" for

MAR-ACSI schools (Creswell, 2007, p. 127). The sample was "purposefully selecting"

(Creswell, 2014, p. 189) in the sense that this researcher would only interview the paid Christian

lead administrator of each school. Most of these leaders held the title of principal or systemically

and socially similar title. He wanted "criterion sampling" (Creswell, 2007, p. 128) to ensure that

his data possessed "quality assurance" useful to his readers and ACSI (Creswell, 2007, p. 127).

All the participants' schools had to be members in good standing with MAR-ACSI.

This researcher interviewed enough participants to achieve "sufficiency" and "saturation"

of the data (Seidman, 2013, pp. 58-59) in accordance with his research design. This researcher

worked with two MAR-ACSI "formal gatekeeper[s]" to identify potential participants (Seidman,

2013, p. 47); their research department and their regional director. The international ACSI office had a research department with research guidelines similar to the LU IRB. Upon achieving permission to conduct research, this researcher was allowed to contact MAR-ACSI's regional director. Working with ACSI's international office and this director provided accreditation guidelines and connections to member principals (Seidman, 2013, p. 49). The process of identifying principals was one of self "referral" rather than "snowballing" (Smith et al., 2009, pp. 48-49). MAR-ACSI served its member schools by providing accreditation services but it did not control them in any administrative or financial way. The directly relevant demographic data regarding these ten principals were presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Demographic Data

Demographic Category	Data	
Gender	Male: 70%	Female: 30%
Ethnicity	Not Applicable (The pilot study participants strongly discouraged this researcher from collecting this data point and thus it was removed.)	
Years at current school in five year increments	0-5	30%
	6-10	60%
	11-15	00%
	16-20	00%
	21+	10%
Years of prior leadership experience in five year increments	0-5	60%
	6-10	00%
	11-15	10%
	16-20	30%
	21+	00%

The collection of data came from the following: "qualitative interviews, qualitative documents, and audio files" (Creswell, 2014, p. 190). Examples of "qualitative documents" (Creswell, 2014, p. 190) included bylaws and written policies for debt acquisition and management. Examples of "audio/video files" (Creswell, 2014, p. 190) included the audio recording of the interviews.

Role of the Researcher

In accordance with accepted practices of phenomenological interviewing, this researcher acted as a recorder and reporter, but also as a limited interactor (Seidman, 2013, pp. 91-92). Interviewing was a relationship that was carefully constructed (Seidman, 2013, pp. 108-111). Kvale (1996) suggested that the role of the researcher was one of "integrity, knowledge, experience, honesty, and fairness" (p. 268). Kvale meant that this researcher had to maintain a professional distance between him and his interviewees (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, pp. 96-97).

Prior to a discussion of bias, this researcher noted that his choice of phenomenology as a method of research was because of his personal and professional interest (Englander, 2012, p. 15) in the general phenomena of the use of debt vis-à-vis principals. One bias held by this researcher was his initial assumption that the use of debt may or may not be Biblically justifiable. Acknowledging this potential bias equipped him to properly take it into account during his research and analysis. To protect against this bias unduly influencing his research, this researcher established a pilot test of his instrument.

Ethical Considerations

Research for this dissertation was done in complete compliance with Liberty University's Institutional Review Board and its Graduate School of Divinity's Christian Leadership in Education doctoral program and ACSI's international research department.

The field of phenomenological research posited two approaches to collecting data, "overt and covert" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, pp. 28-29). This researcher did not conduct any covert

research for a number of ethical reasons, which included his "personal morality" stance against deception (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, pp.28-29). The entire field of qualitative phenomenological research was heavily influenced and instrumentally guided by the ethical guidelines developed in the Belmont Report (Seidman, 2013, p. 61). Kvale (1996) suggested that ethical issues could arise throughout approximately "seven research stages" (p. 111). Therefore, this researcher conducted his research with "respect for persons, beneficence, and justice" (Seidman, 2013, p. 61). Interviewees were identified only by pseudonyms throughout the study.

MAR-ACSI was not the only possible research population considered for this phenomenological research. Two other populations came to mind. One such population was the Michigan Association of Christian Schools (MACS). A second population, with its world headquarters in Grand Rapids, Michigan, was the Christian Schools International (CSI) accreditation agency. While not as large as ACSI, CSI was certainly larger than MACS in terms of member schools. MACS declined to participate in this study. This researcher also ruled out working with CSI because it recently merged its administrative and oversight arm with ACSI, making the two into one organization in the mind of this researcher.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

The purpose and use of the phenomenological method in research was twofold, in positive and negative senses. First, in a positive sense, the purpose of this particular method was to provide the reader with a descriptive sense of the phenomena under investigation. Van Manen (2014) labeled this purpose as a "phenomenology of practice" in order to genuinely convey an understanding of the "reality of the real" (pp. 15-16). In other words, the purpose of this method was to describe a sense of "lived experience" (Vagle, 2014, p. 29) to the readers of this research. Second, in a negative sense, the purpose of this approach was not to "test hypotheses" (Seidman, 2013, p. 9). Phenomenology was rarely interested in generalizing experiences for audiences.

In terms of its use, or usefulness, this researcher conducted interviews in order to convey an experiential understanding of the impact of debt, in descriptive and interpretive senses, on the sustainability of K-12 Christian schools. He hoped to use his research to help MAR-ACSI and other K-12 Christian schools develop sound financial plans for long-term sustainable growth.

Phenomenological driven data collection methods and instruments were both very similar and very different, from other qualitative research methodologies. For example, conducting research using a phenomenological method depended on the interview as an important means of collecting data, much like work in grounded theory studies, case studies, and ethnography (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, p. 258). Phenomenological interviews differed from other qualitative designs in the way they were conducted, given that phenomenological interviews sought to reveal the participants' experiential "point of view" and thus were far more "in-depth" and "unstructured" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, p. 258).

Collection Methods

In this phenomenological study, it was not unusual for this researcher to sometimes become part of the interview experience. As a means of collecting data this researcher first staged and engaged in the phenomenological practice of "epoche" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 87). The essence of epoche was the ability of this researcher to hold "no position whatsoever" and to be sure to that "nothing is determined in advance" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 87). While Moustakas (1994) almost made epoche into some kind of pseudo-spiritual state (p. 87), this Christian researcher did not go to such extremes in order to effectively utilize the methodology. For example, while not founded in a Biblical worldview per se, the general sense of the idea of epoche was partially found in the Scriptural admonition to be open-minded and impartial when reaching a conclusion or making a judgement (Proverbs 18:17, NIV).

The second stage of collection that this researcher did was to practice "bracketing"

(Smith et al., 2009, p. 13). Bracketing occurred when this researcher laid aside his biases and prejudices and more actively and fully engaged the participant during the interview data collection process (Sorsa et al., 2015, p. 10). Bevan (2014) called this idea maintaining a "deliberate naiveté" (p. 138). In this manner this researcher did not seek to bend the interview to fit a preconceived hypothesis or preferred conclusion, but rather inductively followed the interviewees where they wished to go in the semi-structured interview (Sorsa et al., 2015, pp. 10-11). For example, this researcher sought to neutralize his biases through bracketing. This researcher was then free to research and understand the participants' views on debt irrespective of his own. This researcher emphasized its descriptive nature (Davison, 2014, p. 1).

The third stage of data collection for this researcher was engaging the participants—in this case, the selected principals from MAR-ACSI schools—in a modified, three-part interview process (Seidman, 2013, pp. 20-23). The first part, prior to the interview, was a brief email to each participant introducing the consent form and semi-structured interview questions. At the beginning of the interview this researcher collected general demographic data from each participant with a short questionnaire designed to acclimate this researcher to the lived experience of the participant. Seidman (2013) called this stage learning the participant's "life history" (p. 21). The second part of the actual interview used a script and a guide (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, pp. 156-157). Seidman (2013) labeled this interview "details of the experience" (pp. 21-22). This interview occurred via the telephone, as online webcam technology proved problematic. This researcher noted minimal participant frustration when technological glitches occurred. The third part was follow-up emails to clarify data from the first interview. This third part was labeled by Seidman (2013) as "reflection on meaning" (pp. 22-23).

The core tool of phenomenological research was the interview. Kvale (1996) wrote that the field was wide open, in terms of rules about conducting an interview (p. 13). There was no

standard protocol regarding the qualitative interview in the then-extant literature (Kvale, 1996, p. 13), as its methodology ranged from no advance planning to the meticulous crafting of specialized questions far in advance of the interview. Brinkmann, upon pondering the work of Kvale, revealed that conventions and protocols in the field had become much more pronounced (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 4), as the following sections began to explore in greater detail.

Instruments and Protocols

In this phenomenological study there were two key instruments, the researcher and the researched, and a select number of secondary instruments, such as questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis.

Interviews. This researcher developed an "interview protocol" as articulated by Creswell (2014, pp. 193-194). This allowed for a degree of standardization and also encouraged following open-ended questions to wherever they led. Creswell's interview protocol began with a greeting, shifted to asking the research questions, and closed with thanking the participant for their time (2014, p. 194). In this study, this researcher utilized a one-on-one interview protocol.

For these interviews, this researcher defined reliability and validity in the context of the phenomenological method in the following ways. Reliability referred to the "consistency and trustworthiness" of the research (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 281). A key component of crafting appropriate questions was to avoid any and all appearance of leading the participant to a conclusion unintentionally or unconsciously preferred by this researcher (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, pp. 281-282). Validity was the "truth, correctness, and strength of a statement" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, pp. 282-283). Using these definitions the questions asked by this researcher accurately reflected, or sought to reflect, the phenomena of this dissertation. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) suggested validity was partially achieved in the "design" phase of interviewing, which incorporated "beneficence" for the participants (p. 284). This meant that the

question process should benefit them in some fashion.

Interview questions used in this research were generated from the relevant literature on the topic and approved by the researcher's dissertation committee. For example, Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) discussed nine "types of interview questions" (pp. 160-161). As this researcher wrote his interview questions he considered the following types: "1) introductory, 2) follow-up, 3) probing, 4) specifying, 5) direct, 6) indirect, 7) structuring, 8) silence, and 9) interpreting" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, pp. 161-162). The difference between "direct" and "indirect" questions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 161) in terms of this phenomenological study was the way that this researcher approached asking about information related to his research questions concerning debt. "Structuring" referred to refocusing the participants' attention on the research questions when they drifted off on a seemingly unproductive topic (Brickmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 162). Scripture was clear that listening was better than speaking (James 1:19, ESV). "Silence" was Brickmann and Kvale's way of waiting for answers, listening, in lieu of a constant barrage of questions (p. 162). This researcher sought, with limited success, to simply be quiet and allow the participants to follow their own trails of thought when appropriate (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 95). The importance of the art of listening attempted by this researcher cannot be overstated.

For an additional example of interview protocols from the literature, this researcher turned to Leedy and Ormrod (2016, pp. 264-268). He found practical advice that he adapted and applied to this study of institutional debt. Leedy and Ormrod posited 11 relevant protocols, paraphrased as follows: 1) prep questions in advance, 2) consider participants' cultural backgrounds, 3) seek a relevant sample, 4) use an appropriate location, 5) obtain permission in writing, 6) create an appropriate atmosphere in the interview, 7) avoid abstraction, 8) don't finish a participant's thoughts for them, 9) record the interview, 10) react appropriately, and 11) discern facts from opinions (Leedy and Ormrod, 2016, pp. 264-268).

Surveys/questionnaires. Surveys and questionnaires were not the primary means of conducting research in the phenomenological approach. Such tools were typically the purview of quantitative analysis (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008, p. 4). This researcher did not use a formal survey as articulated in the literature cited herein. But such tools were occasionally used in the field of phenomenology (Smith et al., 2009, p. 57). What a short survey or questionnaire did accomplish for this researcher was to uniformly provide the demographic data needed for analysis at the outset of the interviews. For example, this researcher created a brief questionnaire instrument to find out the basic information about the Christian school, such as its student population count and annual budget. This basic demographic data was useful when this researcher contextualized and analyzed his phenomenological research.

Document analysis. This researcher interacted with a variety of documents made available to him. But text-based documents played only a minor role in the research (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 92). This researcher engaged in a line of inquiry with participants about the underlying systemic policies and protocols pertaining to the use of debt. These policies and procedures were not always found in the documentation surrounding the schools in question. For example, there were not always written policies in place about debt ratios of revenue and expenses. Occasionally there were bylaws that provided institutional insight into the use of debt by Christian school boards.

Procedures

Pseudonyms played a critical role in research. Using pseudonyms was a "sensitive task" (Seidman, 1013, p. 9) that was implemented with great care and concern. The choice of pseudonyms was done in a culturally sensitive manner, to seek to prevent readers from jumping to incorrect assumptions about the participants and their lived experiences (Kvale, 1996, p. 160). Kvale (1996) described several components of implementation of this method. For example, it

was important that this researcher provided "informed consent" to his interviewees (Kvale, 1996, p. 159). In this way the participants had an idea of what the research was used for. "Confidentiality" was another important piece of implementation (Kvale, 1996, pp. 159-160). Names, places, and events discussed during an interview were protected from accidental or intentional disclosure in order to protect the participants' privacy (Kvale, 1996, pp. 159-160). Third, "consequences" was a term used to describe the fact that the research should not harm participants (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 96).

Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) developed the "seven stages of an interview" implementation process (pp. 128-129) that this researcher used to develop his research protocols. Brinkmann and Kvale's stages were as follows: "1) thematizing, 2) designing, 3) interviewing, 4) transcribing, 5) analyzing, 6) verifying, and 7) reporting" (2015, pp. 128-129). This researcher sought to accomplish each stage consistent with the policies and protocols of Liberty University's Institutional Review Board and ACSI. It was interesting to note that subject matter experts in the field did not entirely agree with each other on these stages. For example, Brinkmann and Kvale suggested that this researcher use an "interview guide" (2015, p. 129) while Seidman (2013) opposed its use (p. 94).

This researcher used the following short series of subsections that explained his approach to doing the following procedural tasks: 1) Liberty University's Institutional Review Board approval process, 2) engaged participants for the study, 3) outlined the steps in recording interviews, 4) field-tested interview questions, 5) data security, and 6) confidentiality and anonymity of data.

IRB approval process. The Liberty University Institutional Review Board approval process involved several steps, accomplished before actual field research began. The process was described in detail in the Liberty University Institutional Review Board Handbook (2019) and on

the Liberty University Institutional Review Board website (2019). The application required this researcher to submit information in the following areas: 1) basic protocol information, 2) study materials and considerations, 3) purpose, 4) participant inclusion/exclusion, 5) recruitment, 6) research procedures, 7) data analysis and methods, 8) parental/guardian consent, 9) assent from children, 10) process of obtaining informed consent, 11) use of deception, 12) waiver of consent elements, 13) waiver of signed consent, 14) privacy and confidentiality, 15) participant compensation, and 16) risks and benefits (Application Instructions, 2019). Full and transparent cooperation and coordination with Liberty University's Institutional Review Board and dissertation committee in accordance with CLED programmatic policy was absolutely essential. The Liberty University Institutional Review Board approved this researcher's Consent Form (see Appendix B) and issued a Letter of Exemption (see Appendix J).

Participant engagement. The entire MAR-ACSI population consisted of approximately 370 member schools. Each school had a principal, sometimes called an administrator, employed by the school to manage their finances, including their debt. This researcher engaged enough participants to achieve "saturation" of data (Seidman, 2013, pp. 58-59). The procedure to engage these participants, in full and complete compliance with the IRB, was as follows: 1) obtain the list of participant population from the executive director of the MAR-ACSI, 2) purposively select the sample of participants (Seidman, 2013, pp. 58-59), 3) contact each participant to establish rapport (Seidman, 2013, pp. 98-99) set up a time for the interview, 4) conduct the 60-minute (Seidman, 2013, pp. 23-24) interview, and 5) follow-up with the participant as needed and share content when deemed appropriate (Seidman, 2013, p. 100). This procedure was slightly modified by the national ACSI office, but still well within LU IRB requirements, as ACSI controlled this researcher's initial invitation to his research via two blind emails.

Recorded interviews. This researcher recorded each interview (Seidman, 2013, p. 117) with a telephone, microphone, and a laptop. He attached a microphone to the laptop and tested his phone's speaker prior to conducting interviews (Seidman, 2014, p. 117). The interviews were recorded behind a closed door in a sequestered office down in a basement.

Transcribed interviews. This researcher transcribed relevant selections of each interview himself (Seidman, 2013, p. 118). He simply listened and wrote it down verbatim, which was the method most consistent with his theoretical model (Kvale, 1996, pp. 182-183).

Field testing. Instruments such as this researcher's informal questionnaire, the semi-structured open-ended interview questions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 156), and electronic devices were field tested prior to operational use. When crafting interview questions, Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) cautioned that research questions rarely made good interview questions per se (pp. 157-158). "What and why" questions were posed prior to "how"-related questions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 159).

Prior to conducting research in the field, the interview questions were field tested to meet the requirements of face/content validity (Rockies, 2019, p. 23). Face validity, more commonly known in field research as content validity or construct validity, as mentioned above, measured what Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) sometimes called the "correspondence theory of truth" (p. 282). In other words, this researcher's interview questions were reviewed to ensure that they asked what they were intended to ask (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 282).

This researcher contacted four former K-12 principals unconnected with the research population to experience the interview in the form of a practice exercise. They were asked to evaluate the following: 1) did the questions make sense and 2) should this researcher have deleted or added any questions (Rockies, 2019, p. 23). This process was done under the supervision of his dissertation committee (Rockies, 2019, p. 23).

Data security. All information gathered in this research study was kept electronically secure through password access and physically secured in a quarantined location when not in use (Seidman, 2013, p. 73). Data in use during the research and writing process were used anonymously to prevent accidental disclosure (Seidman, 2013, p. 73).

Confidentiality and anonymity. Confidentiality referred to the "agreements with participants about what may be done with the data" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, pp. 94-95). This researcher ensured his research was used in a manner consistent with the policies of the LU IRB, CLED program, ACSI, and the informed consent agreements signed by the participants. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) were concerned that confidentiality and anonymity must not become an "alibi" for sloppy research and artificial conclusions (p. 95). This researcher sought to ensure this did not take place (see Trustworthiness, p. 102). But there was a legal limit to the confidentiality of the records this researcher collected. For example, according to Seidman (2013), all research data were subject to a judicial subpoenas should the need arise (p. 73).

Anonymity referred to the practice of disguising potential identifying information in this study that could have compromised in some way the participants' identity and privacy had it not been disguised. The most common mechanism to ensure anonymity was through the use of pseudonyms, as mentioned above. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) warned that sometimes the unintentional misuse of pseudonyms resulted in readers thinking they knew something about the participants that was not accurate (pp. 306-307). Therefore this researcher took care to ensure that his pseudonyms for participating K-12 Christian school principals did not refer to existing institutions or people located elsewhere. He simply labeled each participant as "A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J," in the order that he interviewed them.

Data Analysis

In this section this researcher described how he examined the data gained from the

interview process and procedures outlined above. Bengtsson (2016) called a variation of this approach one of "content analysis" (pp. 8-14). This section contains an overview of this researcher's 1) Analysis Methods and 2) Trustworthiness.

Analysis Methods

Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) asked the "1,000 page question" (p. 215). Then they answered their rhetorical quandary, wherein a researcher had 1,000 pages of transcripts but no idea what do with them, by suggesting that researchers should have a strong method in place to analyze their data before they began their first interview (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 216).

Phenomenological methods contain several data analysis processes. Noted scholars in the field have provided a plethora of different advice about how to analyze and process data for explication in a dissertation. The apparent overall key to approaching analysis in phenomenology was to avoid deductive reasoning, with an inductive approach preferred instead (Seidman, 2013, pp. 119-120). For example, this researcher could not come to the data simply looking for content that backed up some preconceived notion about the use of long-term debt. Rather he analyzed the participants' interviews and allowed them to speak for themselves regarding debt.

Kvale (1996) solemnly warned novice researchers that the time to think and develop a plan about the analysis of data should occur long before the data is accumulated (p. 177). Kvale (1996) asserted that this researcher should have established a clear "what" and "why" before he developed a "how," in terms of creating data analysis processes (p. 179), as mentioned above.

However, these scholars were not uniform in their advice. For example, Seidman (2013) suggested that recorded interviews, as mentioned above, were essential to process data from those interviews at a later date (p. 117). However, some scholars disliked such recordings as they affected what the participants were willing to say (Seidman, 2013, p. 117). Kvale (1996) actually warned against the use of transcripts of interviews altogether (pp. 182-183). This advice was

partially taken by this researcher. Kvale claimed that transcripts were not "collected" from interviewees; rather they were "coauthored" with them by the interviewer (p. 183). This researcher did not completely agree with Kvale's point of view on that issue.

Analysis of data processes. Kvale (1996) had six steps in his analysis of data processes: 1) subject description, 2) subject discovery, 3) condensing, 4) interpretation, 5) re-interview, and 6) action (1996, pp. 189-190). Several steps stood out for further explanation: condensing and interpretation. In steps three and four, Kvale (1996) suggested that this researcher consolidate the data gleaned from the interview and then seek to further understand that data (pp. 189-190). This researcher sought to do so.

Organizing data analysis. Leedy and Ormrod (2016) provided this researcher with a ten-step blueprint for "organizing and analyzing qualitative data" (pp. 292-297). This blueprint was summarized herein as follows: 1) convert data into usable electronic form, 2) broadly organize data, 3) identify categories for data coding, 4) divide data, 5) apply initial coding, 6) finalize codes/sub-codes, 7) rate codes through triangulation, 8) identify patterns, 9) examine contradictory data sets, and 10) interpret data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, pp. 292-297). It should be conceptually noted here that using numeric descriptors, seemingly more akin to quantitative or mixed methods in their approach, were nonetheless often used by qualitative researchers as needed (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, p. 89) to further a qualitative understanding of this phenomenological research. For an example of this technique, see this researcher's use of numeric descriptors in Figure 1, found in Chapter Four (p. 163). Leedy and Ormrod also discussed "Creswell's data analysis spiral," which this researcher utilized (p. 297). This spiral was a process wherein this researcher examined and reexamined the data several times to ensure the accuracy of his conclusions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, p. 297).

Codes and codebook in data analysis. Codes were "tags or labels for assigning units of

meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study" (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011, p. 137). This researcher's list of codes was both "theory" and "data" driven (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011, p. 142). DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2011) provided this researcher with several categories of codes with examples such as "conceptual, cultural, and procedural" (p. 145). DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2011) defined a codebook as "a set of codes, definitions, and examples used as a guide to help analyze interview data" (p. 138).

Codes in a codebook were initially developed by this researcher during his planning stage, as he began to theorize anticipated data markers. For example, he asked a question somewhat similar to "Did your school have a mortgage?" followed by an open-ended question like, "How did having a mortgage impact your budgeting process?" and, very roughly, "How did budgeting for a mortgage payment impact your prayer life?" Leedy and Ormrod (2016) provided this researcher with a partial list of eight codes that he conceptually considered in his data analysis for "organizing and analyzing qualitative data" as follows: "1) topics, 2) characteristics, 3) actions, 4) processes, 5) emotions, 6) beliefs, 7) values, and 8) evaluations" (p. 293). However, this researcher came to believe that codes needed to be data-driven in an inductive sense rather than deductively derived from a theoretical model a priori (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011, p. 147). Therefore his codes were more fully developed during the research analysis phase, described in Chapter Four of this dissertation. See Table 13 in Appendix A for the researcher's codebook (Creswell, 2014, p. 199).

Themes, patterns, and relationships in data analysis. In *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*, Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) provided this researcher with his working definition of themes, summarized as developing an understanding of important reoccurring comments from participants. For example, this researcher discovered the phenomena that many participants found peace in their prayer life as a result of dealing with their school's

mortgage payments. Peace, then, was an emergent theme consistently found in participant interviews. This researcher also found that the opposite, anxiety, also occurred. So, a mixture of both peace and anxiety also became a noted theme. Smith et al. suggested that the development of themes, patterns, and relationships in the data would typically occur as this researcher moved through transcript analysis to the development of initial notes during research (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009, p. 91). This in fact was the case.

Patterns and relationships were important to the development of answers to this researcher's research questions, conclusions, and ultimately to the transferability of the study. Smith et al. (2009) provided advice as to how this researcher accomplished "searching for connections" during the interview and writing phase of his research (pp. 92-96). Smith et al. cautioned that in qualitative research, these patterns and relationships should not be construed as prescriptive (p. 96) but rather as descriptive. They also suggested that the mere existence of a noticeable pattern in emergent themes did not require this researcher to fully explore them if he deemed them largely irrelevant to his research problem (Smith, et al., 2009, p. 96). Smith et al. provided types of patterns that found expression in this researcher's research, as follows: "polarization, contextualization, numeration, and function" (pp. 97-99). To apply Smith et al. briefly, patterns in and among participant interviews emerged that provided this researcher with insight into an overview of their individually perceived phenomenological experiences with debt.

Computer aided data analysis processes. Among contemporary scholars who addressed the mechanics of data processing, they apparently favored "Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software" (CAQDAS). This type of processing software allowed researchers to more effectively sort, categorize, and code their data (Seidman, 2013, pp. 132-133). This software was available in a variety of online platforms, some of which were free to the user. For example, Aquad, Coding Analysis Toolkit, Compendium (no longer updated), QDA Miner Lite, RQDA,

Weft QDA, were all free with a wide degree of user-friendly functionality (University of Illinois

Library, 2018). MAXqda, Atlas.ti., and QSR NVivo were also popular (Creswell, 2014, p. 196),

but were more costly options. This researcher found NVivo-12 the most user-friendly. However,

the learning curve costs of successfully operating the software outweighed its benefits, given the

sample size of this study (Creswell, 2007, p. 165-166). Thus this researcher used tables carefully

generated in Microsoft Word and Excel instead.

 Seidman (2013) warned that while any software can "organize and manage" data, it could

not "analyze and interpret" that data (p. 134). Smith et al. (2009) advocated for an "independent

audit" of all research to help ensure the data's validity (p. 183). Seidman called this "sharing the

data" (p. 130). This audit, in the sense as they described it, naturally fell to this researcher's

dissertation committee, consistent with LU IRB and CLED programmatic protocols. This

researcher provided an audit trail evaluation in this dissertation as well (See Chapter Four, p.

181, Evaluation of Research Design).

 Validation strategies in data analysis. This dissertation, using a phenomenological

methodology, came to a conclusion about the data's contextualized meaning. Camic, Rhodes,

and Yardley (2003) made the claim that phenomenological research was genuine scientific

research because this approach was "systematic, methodical, critical, and general" (pp. 258-259).

Questions about this study's validity were asked and answered. While "validity" was used in

both quantitative and qualitative research, the term did not mean the same thing in both fields.

Validity in phenomenology involved adhering to "four broad principles" (Smith et al., 2009, pp.

180-182). They were: "1) sensitivity to context, 2) commitment and rigor, 3) transparency and

coherence, and 4) impact and importance" (Smith et al., 2009, pp. 180-182). In terms of their

fourth principle, the basic idea was that the dissertation produced something of lasting

significance to those interested in the research.

Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) also addressed the issue of validity in phenomenological data analysis processes. He rejected the "extremes of subjective relativism" and the absolutes of "objective meaning" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 277). He described data processes in terms of their "objectivity, reliability, validity, and generalization" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 277). Brinkmann and Kvale said that phenomenological research had to be reliable, in the sense that it must be "consistent and trustworthy" (2015, p. 281). Data analysis produced valid research in the sense that conclusions were "correctly derived from its premises" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 282). Validation of data occurred at every stage of research, according to Brinkmann and Kvale (2015, pp. 283-284). Data analysis processes also produced a level of generalizing applicable beyond its research (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, pp. 295-296). Brinkmann and Kvale called this "analytical generalization" (p. 297). This was not to be confused with replicable generalization as understood in quantitative methodology.

Taylor and Bogdan (1984) further shaped this researcher's conception of validity, as they by deemphasized "reliability and "replicability" (p. 7). Whereas reliability and replicability were essential in quantitative research, it was nearly impossible to achieve and did not need to be achieved in qualitative research, especially replicability (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p.7). For this dissertation, it meant that the conclusions reached in this dissertation may apply to similar phenomena but did not absolutely need to do so in a methodological sense.

Summarizing data. Reduction, in its broadest sense, was the overarching process by which this researcher inductively made some sense of all the data he compiled (Seidman, 2013, p. 119). The key to correct data analysis was to look at the emergent themes and their corresponding patterns and see what developed from them. The challenge became to determine what to keep and what to discard in terms of data material and analysis (Seidman, 2013, p. 121). Seidman (2013) called this data analysis process a way to build a profile to "share interview

data" (p. 121). Seidman stressed that profiles had to be built and "presented in the words of the participant" to be the most valid (p. 123). He also cautioned that doing so could not compromise the confidentiality and anonymity of the participant (Seidman, 2013, pp. 123-125). It should be noted that, conceptually, the authors cited herein collectively seemed to present the idea that all these processes can and do occur both in stages and simultaneously. One startling observation offered by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) honestly took this researcher by surprise. They said, in sum, that the researcher must not be boring (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, pp. 303-305). One can only hope that, of all the things to be concerned about, this researcher was not altogether boring!

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was an essential biblical quality for qualitative research. Christian researchers were called to conduct their research in ways that demonstrated integrity, seriousness, and soundness (Titus 2:7-8, NIV). In terms of phenomenological research, trustworthiness simply asked the question, "Can the findings be trusted?" (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 121). In the field of qualitative research, trustworthiness was defined and explained with five terms: 1) reflexivity, 2) credibility, 3) dependability, 4) confirmability, and 5) transferability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 121). These five concepts are further defined and explained, in terms of strategy for accomplishing them, below.

Reflexivity. Korstjens and Moser (2018) defined reflexivity as the "process of critical self-reflection about oneself as researcher (own biases, preferences, preconceptions), and the research relationship (relationship to the respondent, and how the relationship affects participant's answers to questions)" (p. 121). They suggested that this researcher keep a journal of sorts to chronicle his interaction with the data to recognize, record, and thereby reduce the impact of his bias on the analysis (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 123).

Credibility. Korstjens and Moser (2018) defined credibility as "confidence that can be

placed in the truth of the research findings" (p. 121). "Credibility establishes whether the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants' original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants' original views" (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 121). Korstjens and Moser suggested that a strategy for accomplishing credibility involved four areas of intentionality: "1) prolonged engagement, 2) persistent observation, 3) triangulation, and 4) member check" (pp. 121-122). An example of prolonged engagement was the lengthy interview and follow-up questions (Seidman, 2013, pp. 23-24). Triangulation was achieved by this researcher using three methods of data collection, including 1) in-depth interviews with follow-ups, 2) field notes (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 122), and 3) document analysis (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008, p. 201). Triangulation was also achieved by examining the various participants' differing points of view about the use of debt (Smith et al., 2009, pp. 52-53). One additional triangulation method used by this researcher was through analysis of multiple sources (Patton, 1999, pp. 1189-1208). It was important to note that triangulation was not used to provide an oversimplified "whole from the sum of complex parts" in terms of analysis (Scott and Morrison, 2005, p. 252).

Dependability. Korstjens and Moser (2018) defined dependability as the "stability of findings over time" (p. 121). "Dependability involves participants' evaluation of the findings, interpretation and recommendations of the study such that all are supported by the data as received from participants of the study" (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 121). This meant that this researcher was "consistent" with the "accepted standards" of the methodological design (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 122). Korstjens and Moser also suggested a strategy for accomplishing dependability by providing the reader with a transparent "audit trail" (pp. 121-122). This researcher provided complete documentation of all his research as required by the IRB and his dissertation committee.

Confirmability. Korstjens and Moser (2018) defined confirmability as the "degree to which the findings of the research study could be confirmed by other researchers" (p. 121). "Confirmability is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination, but clearly derived from the data" (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 121). In other words, this researcher had to be inductively "neutral" toward the data and allowed the data to drive his conclusions (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 122). Korstjens and Moser suggested that a strategy for accomplishing confirmability also provided the reader with the aforementioned transparent "audit trail" (pp. 121-122). As mentioned above, this researcher provided complete documentation of all his research as required by the LU IRB.

Transferability. Korstjens and Moser (2018) defined transferability as the "degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts or settings with other respondents" (p. 121). They continued as follows: "The researcher facilitates the transferability judgment by a potential user through thick description" (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 121). Thick description included a contextual analysis as well as an analysis of the interview data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 121). Achieving transferability was partially beyond the direct control of this researcher according to Korstjens and Moser (2018, p. 122).

By providing rich/thick description (see Step Four: Textural/Structural Description Data Analysis Process in Chapter Four), this researcher provided enough applicable research content to enable the reader to make a "transferability judgement" about whether or not the study applied to their particular and unique situation (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 122). This transferability judgement could not be directly and entirely known by this researcher because he did not precisely know the public reader's circumstances (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 122). Scott and Morrison (2005) provided additional insight into the issue of transferability. They suggested that it was theoretically impossible to make an inductive "universal claim"

from a "finite" number of cases, or in this dissertation, the interviews (Scott and Morrison, 2005, p. 251). Therefore, while this researcher sought to make his research appropriately transferable, much of that decision-making process belonged to the reader.

Chapter Summary

This chapter included this researcher's qualitative phenomenological research design synopsis, setting, participants, role, ethics, data collection and analysis. To provide the reader with a brief summary of this researcher's overall methodological approach consider the steps he followed, consistent at the time of publication with the requirements of Liberty University's Christian Leadership in Education program and its Institutional Review Board, as listed below:

1. Engaged in prayer and authentic self-reflection to acknowledge any potential bias,

2. Recruited willing participants with help from the organization's gatekeepers,

3. Recruited pilot study participants, sent them interview questions, reviewed and reflected on their feedback, then adjusted the interview questions as deemed necessary,

4. Sent interview questions to the actual participants with clear and concise instructions,

5. Scheduled interviews, conducted and recorded interviews while taking notes, thanked participants for their participation, closed interviews with prayer,

6. At a later date listened to the interviews multiple times and compared annotated first impressions with recollected memories of the conversations and,

7. Inductively developed a codebook using codes representing collections of meaning units, then developed patterns and themes to conceptualize and craft accurate and authentic thick descriptions, findings, and conclusions.

Using these steps this researcher sought to provide an in-depth look at the current state of his research methodology. As iron sharpens iron (Proverbs 27:17, ESV), this researcher sought to humbly submit this dissertation to his dissertation committee. To God be the glory!

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

"…the words of scholars are like well-driven nails…"
- Ecclesiastes 12:11b, NKJV

The first three chapters of this dissertation explored the problem, background, literature review, and gap in the literature pertaining to this qualitative study of the phenomenology of institutional debt in the K-12 schools of MAR-ACSI. Chapter Four presented an analysis of this researcher's findings. The chapter was divided into four sections as follows: Compilation Protocol and Measures, Demographic and Sample Data, Data Analysis and Findings, and Evaluation of the Research Design. Each section was subdivided as needed to further explore the content therein. The purpose of this chapter was to provide the data-rich descriptions inductively uncovered during the phenomenological interview and analysis process.

Compilation Protocol and Measures

In this section of Chapter Four this researcher presented a description of the compilation protocol and attendant measures necessary to fully describe the process by which this researcher conducted his study. This researcher used five protocols and measures to assemble his data: Question Field Testing Protocol, Interview Transcripts Protocol, Codebook Protocol, Data Spiral Protocol, and an Emotional Intensity Index Protocol.

Question Field Testing Protocol

Having developed the research questions and the semi-structured interview questions, this researcher then had to ensure that the interview questions actually explored the research questions as intended. To maximize the intentional and internal content validity of these interview questions, this researcher recruited four independent participants using the LU IRB approved process and procedure. The pilot study recruitment letters (see Appendix G, Interview Questions Feedback Letter) were delivered via email and personally by this researcher. These

four pilot study participants were experienced former principals of MAR-ACSI K-12 Christian schools personally known to the researcher. Thus, these four people comprised a convenience and "criterion" sample (Creswell, 2007, p. 127) and were referenced below as follows: Person 1, Person 2, Person 3, and Person 4.

It should be noted that none of the people were currently employed in any MAR-ACSI school at the time of this research. That was an important consideration to this researcher because he had not wanted the pilot study group to be biased in any way toward the research questions. He took into account epoche and bracketing on the part of his pilot study group. He wanted to make sure his pilot study group did not feel pressure to review his questions in any preconceived way. Therefore the four participants were not part of the research population.

The four participants of this pilot study independently reviewed all of the semi-structured formal interview questions. After several days, this researcher contacted each participant and received their feedback. This researcher communicated with Person 1 and Person 2 principally via email and Person 3 and Person 4 principally in person.

Person 1's comments were encouraging and suggested possibly rewording RQ1-2/3/5 and rhetorically clarifying RQ3-1/2. Person 1 did not directly answer using the feedback form (see Appendix I, Open-Ended Interview Questions Pilot Test Form), preferring instead to comment directly on the copy of the questions themselves.

Person 2's comments were also encouraging in nature and contained no suggestions. Person 2's additional comments were largely spent speculating on the possible answers that the study's participants might give. Person 2 also ignored the feedback form (Appendix I).

Person 3's comments were the most extensive of the four pilot study responses. Person 3 strongly cautioned against using the first demographic question that requested information pertaining to the principals' age, gender, and ethnicity. That question initially read as follows: "1.

What is your name, age, gender, and ethnicity?" This researcher responded to that advice by deleting the question entirely. Before doing so this researcher reasoned that he would obviously already know their name and that their age/gender/ethnicity was not entirely germane to the subject of this dissertation (see the section on Evaluation of the Research Design, p. 186 for additional consideration on this decision). Person 3 also partially answered the questions from that person's prior experience in the sense of suggesting possible follow-up questions to interview questions. Person 3 did not utilize the Feedback Form (Appendix I), and jotted down comments in the margins and under the questions in the document provided by this researcher.

Person 4's comments on the pilot study questions focused primarily on RQ2, with shorter reflections jotted down for RQ3-3 and RQ4-2. Person 4 wondered if RQ 4-2 was necessary. In the pilot study, RQ4-2 had asked the following question: "How do you view the use of debt in terms of Christian liberty?" Person 4 suggested that it may not have been an issue of Christian liberty and that perhaps the question had not been necessary to include. This researcher reviewed Person 4's suggestion and decided to keep the question in the interview as it had been initially worded. This researcher considered it important to know if participants viewed the use of debt in terms of a commandment, or wisdom literature, or as a Christian liberty, or something else entirely. Person 4 was the only person who answered a question listed in the Feedback Form (Appendix I). Person 4 answered question four, which asked the following: "Which questions should be added or deleted?" Person 4's suggestion was to add a follow-up question asking what the plan would be if a school could not handle the debt. This researcher later used the content from this suggestion during the course of conversations with the participants.

Prior to conducting the pilot study this researcher had wondered how his research population might act, interact, and react to questions involving the topic of finance in general and debt in particular. By this he meant he wondered if his research population might have found the

entire study too controversial or too contentious to participate in at all. He had worried that his research questions about finance and debt might have elicited no response at all from his population (it is hard to conduct a qualitative study with no willing participants). After he reviewed the pilot study's responses he concluded that such concerns had been unwarranted. None of the pilot study participants seemed unduly concerned that the topic might have appeared off limits, or somehow beyond polite consideration, to anyone in the research population.

In sum, this researcher reviewed, analyzed, and compiled a formal interview question instrument that had been refined, but not comprehensively redefined, based on feedback from the pilot study protocol. The most significant change had been the removal of the first demographic question. But none of the questions were extensively revised beyond that modification. The next protocol vetted was the interview transcript protocol.

Interview Transcript Protocol

Clearly the participant interview tool was the focused and featured protocol used in the compilation of data. Each of the five research questions were developed and subdivided into five interview questions. To develop this interview transcript protocol, this researcher had to address two structural issues, especially given the time constraints of his research window. First, how important were word-for-word written transcripts to the study? Second, how important was the use of a computer aided research program to the study? These two issues were addressed below.

Transcript format. This researcher concluded that full, word-for-word, written transcripts were not entirely necessary, given the extensive notes he had taken during the actual interviews. In fact, overuse of the full written transcripts was viewed as an inductive distraction from the accurate compilation and analysis of data (Kvale, 1996, pp. 182-183). For example, a comment made by a participant, reduced merely to its written form, partially obscured its emotional intensity as verbalized by that participant. Thus, this researcher found it qualitatively

more important to reference his compiled notes for each interview and listen again, and again, and again to his audio files as needed. Doing so likely made the process of analysis much longer than perhaps it would have been otherwise, but this researcher thought that this component of his methodology was worth the perceived extra effort. That said transcripts of the most germane comments made by each participant were included in the data sets (pp. 117-153).

Computer data management. The use of a computer research tool called NVivo-12 was initially embraced but then rejected by this researcher, as too time consuming given its possible benefits. This researcher's reasoning was the same as above, in the sense that restricting spoken words to written text, even in a computer program that potentially aided triangulation of data, risked the loss of inductively driven discourse achieved from the participants' spoken words. Also, the program simply was not intuitive to the researcher. He tried to use NVivo-12 but it did not work well enough for this researcher. In addition, uploading the interview audio files to the internet cloud for transcription and subsequent download seemed to potentially risk the letter, if not necessarily the spirit, of the LU IRB policy regarding confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. It was not entirely clear to this researcher what might become of his transcribed audio files after they were uploaded and downloaded to and from the internet cloud managed by the company that owned NVivo.

Rejecting overuse of the full transcription and rejecting the use of an online computer program still left the question of compiling the interview data largely unanswered. To answer that systemic question, this researcher simply turned to a three-ring binder and Microsoft Word and Excel documents. A sample size of ten lent itself to quickly referencing interviews, question by question, using this researcher's copious notes, extensive use of limited transcripts, and the audio files as discussed above. Thus, the data was primarily compiled using the codebook protocol discussed in the section below.

Codebook Protocol

Creswell (2007) developed a "template for coding a phenomenological study" comprised of five descriptors as follows: "bracketing, significant statements, meaning units, textural descriptions, and structural description" (p. 170). This researcher adopted and adapted Creswell's descriptors for the overall broadest categories of his inductively developed codebook. The table below adapted and visually reproduced Creswell's template (2007, p 170).

Table 2: Codebook Template

"Essence of the Phenomenon"			
"Bracketing"	"Significant Statements"	"Meaning Units"	"Textural/Structural Description"

"Bracketing" referred to the care this researcher took as he acknowledged and analyzed his own personal bias (Creswell, 2007, pp. 60-62). "Significant statements" referred to when this researcher searched for and analyzed the participant's answers to uncover their key ideas (Creswell, 2007, pp. 60-62). "Meaning units" referred to the process by which this researcher inductively cataloged these "significant statements" into thematic collections of understanding (Creswell, 2007, pp. 60-62). Developing "textural descriptions" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 117) occurred when the researcher analyzed the "what and how" of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2007, pp. 60-62). This "essence" became this researcher's conceptual and concrete research observations and conclusions presented in Chapter Five (pp. 191-195). This researcher's Codebook Protocol was inductively developed using the Data Spiral Protocol described below.

Data Spiral Protocol

This researcher's Data Spiral Protocol was based on Creswell's (2007) four-step data spiral (p. 151) compilation protocol referenced in Chapter Three above and expanded upon here in Chapter Four. As Creswell predicted (2007, p. 151), all four steps occurred simultaneously for

this researcher. Step One was "data management" (Creswell, 2007, p. 151). During this step, this researcher compiled the data gleaned from each of the participants' answers to each of the research questions. This compiled data was presented in the Demographic and Sample Data (pp. 115-116). Step Two was "reading/memoing" (Creswell, 2007, p. 151), which had generally occurred throughout the study. Step Three was "describing/classifying/interpreting" (Creswell, 2007, p. 151) the data, which was presented in Data Analysis and Findings section below. Step Four was "representing/visualizing" (Creswell, 2007, p. 151), which found expression in the various tables and in the research conclusions of Chapter Five (pp. 191-195).

Emotional Intensity Index Protocol

Phenomenological qualitative research was done inductively by this researcher. He asked the interview questions with no entirely preconceived responses in mind. So it was that he, during the course of the interviews, noticed that the participants had varying degrees of emotional intensity related to their verbalized opinions. To find a consistent way to convey this varying degree of intensity to the reader this researcher turned to Livermore's assertions on the subject. Livermore (2015) described emotional intelligence as the "ability to detect and regulate the emotions of one's self and others" (p. 34). It became evident to this researcher that an emotional intensity index protocol was needed to more fully comprehend, compile, compare, contrast, and codify responses during the data analysis phase.

Finding an effective and efficient measurement tool for emotions proved to be a problematic process as there was no consistent approach favored by a majority of phenomenological researchers at the time this study was written. However, outside this field examples abounded. Although an in-depth study of verbalized emotionality was outside the scope of this research, this researcher located and used two relevant case studies. A study by Scherer categorized emotional intensity using "happiness, confidence, indifference, anger,

contempt, and sadness" as represented by tone of voice (Scherer, as cited in Plutchik &

Kellerman, 1989, p. 237). Kornacki and Caruso also developed a protocol (Kornacki & Caruso,

as cited in Ciarrochi & Meyer, 2007, pp. 73-75). Kornacki and Caruso suggested that perceived

swings in emotions were based on "patterns of energy" (Kornacki & Caruso, as cited in

Ciarrochi & Meyer, 2007, p. 73). They suggested that a range of emotional terms included

"anger, annoyance, contempt, disgust, excitement, fear, happiness, interest, rage, sadness, and

surprise" (Kornacki & Caruso, as cited in Ciarrochi & Meyer, 2007, p. 72). The following table

expressed, in visual form, the Emotional Intensity Index Protocol (EIIP), or "measurement

strategy," formulated and then utilized by this researcher (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, pp. 88-89).

He used this protocol as he coded and compiled the relative degree of emotionality verbalized by

the participants as they answered the interview questions. This researcher's five descriptors were

developed inductively after conducting the live interviews, listening to them again, and again,

thereby uncovering their most commonly used emotional expressions.

Table 3: Emotional Intensity Index Protocol (EIIP)

Emotion Descriptor	Intensity Ranking
Indifference	1
Calmness	2
Enthusiasm	3
Irritation	4
Frustration	5

Demographic and Sample Data

In this section of Chapter Four this researcher presented a description of the demographic

and sample data necessary to fully describe the process by which this researcher conducted his

analysis. This researcher used six demographic and sample sets to organize his data: Demographics Background, Views and Values, Biblical Perception, Oversight and Accreditation, Short- and Long-Term Strategy, and Foundational Documents. Each of the data sets were based on descriptors of the research questions as found in the responses by the participants. It should be noted that the ten participants were identified in this study by a letter, beginning with an "A" and ending with a "J." It should also be duly noted again at this point that each of the ten participants agreed to the terms and conditions of this researcher's consent form in accordance with the Institutional Review Board of Liberty University (see Appendix B).

The raw data included in these sets came from the most germane "verbatim examples" (Creswell, 2007, p. 159) made by the participants during the interviews (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, p. 333) and from some of this researcher's notes that he had taken during these live interviews. To present these conversations as succinctly as possible, tables were used consistent with established qualitative research design and practice (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, p. 333). When possible conflicts between clarity and confidentiality arose in the course of transcribing their "significant statements" (Creswell, 2007, p. 61) in the raw data sets below, this researcher used ellipses "..." when necessary to protect participants' anonymity.

It should be duly noted here (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, p. 335) that this researcher made two errors of a technical nature during two of the interviews. First, this researcher neglected to press the record button on his laptop until he had reached RQ3-1 when he conducted participant "D's" interview. Second, given the unique circumstances that led to his interview with participant "H," he did not have his recording equipment with him and could not record the interview. To overcome the potential validation issues that could have possibly arisen from these procedural deficiencies, this researcher conducted extensive "member checking" (Creswell, 2007, pp. 207-209) with both "D" and "H" to review his field notes, both via email and in

person. In both cases the participants substantially and substantively confirmed this researcher's interpretation based on his field notes and they also provided additional comments which were then used in the applicable tables below.

Demographics Background Data Set

The first set was a collection of raw data derived from the nine demographic questions that formed the introductory preface to the research question-driven interview questions. Listed below was a table with the nine questions and succinctly summarized participant answers (Table 4). Most of the conversations in this portion of the interview were summative in nature, akin to filling in the blanks in preparation for further conversation later in the interview. Therefore Table 4 does not include their verbatim responses.

Table 4: Demographic Data from Introductory Questions

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1. How long have you been a principal/administrator at _____? (years)									
7	30	6	5	7	1	2	6	7	27
2. What prior experience, if any, do you have as a principal at previous schools?									
0 years	0 years	3 years	20 years	0 years	30+ years	17 years	17 years	2 years	0 years
3. What is your current student body count? What is your current trend in enrollment?									
1,300, up	251, down	625, down	691, up	602, up	397, Up	90, down	190, up	150, even	519, up
4. What is your current faculty/staff/administration count? (approximately)									
235	23	48	153	95	60	17	30	30	90
5. What is your annual budget roughly speaking? (in millions)									
$14	$2	$4.7	$5.1	$4.5	$3	$1.5	$1.1	$1.2	$4.7

(continued)

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J

6. Does your school have a school-related mortgage? If so, how much is it? (m = million)

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
$670,000	$0	$1.25 m	$0	$1.8 m	$195,000	$0	$450,000	$900,000 (loan)	$228,000

7. What percentage of your annual budget is assigned to debt service?

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
3%	0%	4.5%	0%	3%	0%	0%	7%	0%	4.7%

8. How many years will it take to pay it off?

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1.5	0	16	0	10	1	0	10	1	1

9. What role did you have, if any, in the decision making process of acquiring the current school-related mortgage?

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None

From the Demographic Background Data Set this researcher then moved on to compile the raw data collected from the interview questions that explored the five overall research questions. The tables are arranged by participant. The bracketed number, i.e. [00:00] was the time stamp for the start of each of their quotes. Their verbatim responses are presented within quotation marks. Under each participant's germane verbatim responses this researcher included his interpretive stances pulled directly from his field notes that he took during the actual interviews. Reviewing his notes while reconstructing the narrative through transcribing their conversations helped this researcher reflectively reveal and analyze any unintended bias on his part (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, p. 335).

Views and Values Data Set

The second set was a collection of raw data from the five questions that comprised the first research question. For the reader's ease of reference, the first research question was as follows: "**RQ1**. What were the views, values, and attitudes of MAR-ACSI school principals

toward the use of long-term debt to fund school expansion projects?" The following tables

compiled the interview questions and answers from the participants.

Table 5: Research Question 1

Research Question 1-1

Participant	How do you view the use of debt in your school?
A	[16:15] "A tale of what not to do...who could have predicted a once...in a generation...stock market crash? (2008)..." *Not bad in itself*
B	[2:07] "We don't like debt...five individuals...they are very, very successful in business...we are not into paying interest..." *Don't like debt*
C	[7:53] "I am comfortable...I feel it is very manageable...use it strategically to move us forward...without putting us at risk...we are working on a new capital campaign...we could wipe out our debt if we chose too..." *I am comfortable using debt strategically to move us forward*
D	[00:09] "Our school does not enter into debt...basic remain...debt free..." *Carefully...no going into debt*
E	[09:12] "It is not a hindrance to us accomplishing our mission but I don't like any debt...we could take...and turn it into scholarship money... *Not a hindrance...but don't like debt...means less kids here due to less funding for scholarships*
F	[13:41] "They built and incredible gym and half way through construction a significant donor backed out...when I got there the school was struggling financially largely through the debt that it carried...I view debt cautiously...personally I am not against it..." *Cautiously*
G	[09:46] "The school over the years has taken the position that we will not go into debt.." *Debt free*
H	[No time stamp] "Debt has a negative effect on school finances…school needs a balanced budget with at least 3 to 6 months reserves" *Negative...run a balanced budget with reserve funds*

<div align="right">(continued)</div>

Participant	How do you view the use of debt in your school?
I	[14:12] "I, by nature, do not like having any debt...our board feels the same way...but I think this is a special season...I personally think we activated too soon (the new loan) because once we activated...donation money stopped...tapered off...maybe psychologically...you got the loan...you are taken care of...from a spiritual standpoint if we already use our human way to get our funding...God (would say) you don't need My funding..." *Do not like debt...but in a special season...donations stopped when board decided to borrow*
J	[10:34] "No matter what we are paying back that debt...they gave it to use in good faith...we are not going back under...how could I even look the Lord in the face if we didn't do that? (pay back the debt) [11:58] "For me...I understand that there will be time that debt needs to happen...I would prefer to pay as you go...after we get out from under this we are not going back under..." *Pay as you go...not going back under*

Research Question 1-2

Participant	How do the parents of your students view the use of debt in your school?
A	[17:04] "Because we'd been there it's going to be a long time...even if there's great financial reason to do it...to enter back into that fray." *No way*
B	[2:46] "Our demographics have changed dramatically over the last ten years...basically, most of our families live beyond their means..." *Demographics have changed over the years with debt more acceptable*
C	[9:17] "You know...I don't know that it has hardly come up...10 years ago the school just about died financially...we had terrible debt...we had to give ourselves over to the bank...the bank loves us now..." *Does not come up much (10 years ago the school almost died with debt)*
D	[00:28] "Parents...not much opinion because it is a board decision...they know we don't borrow money..." *Half of them have no big deal...the other half strongly oppose it...no middle ground*
E	[09:54] "You get both sides of this...it doesn't affect me...I do a state of the school every year and I don't get anybody coming up to me saying why don't we reduce the debt..." *Both sides...state of the school...never gets asked why to reduce debt*

(continued)

Participant	How do the parents of your students view the use of debt in your school?
F	[15:18] "The few that I talk to are...board members...are not adverse to it...not excited about it...but understand that sometimes debt is necessary..." *Not excited but not adverse to it*
G	[11:25] "Because of this community...it is an anomaly...view debt as something they do not want to support..." *Dislike it*
H	[No time stamp] "Information that came from parents was that they were opposed to the school having debt" *Opposed mostly according to focus groups...many are in personal debt*
I	[18:55] "We don't have many Christian parents...we have open enrollment...I did not hear any negative comments nor positive comments...sort of neutral...reasonable...normal..." *No negative comments...no positive comments...just neutral and reasonable*
J	[12:30] "You know it is a mixed bag...some of them understand that...debt has to happen if you are going to build...other parents...feel like debt is part of life...other parents...pay as you go...it's split...we have been very conscientious about sharing where we are in the debt process and the paying of thereof...they have been thrilled that the debt is shrinking...most would be glad we are out...who wants a mortgage..." *Mixed bag...all opinions out there...conscientious about being transparent about debt*

Research Question 1-3

Participant	How does your school's governing board view the use of debt in your school?
A	[17:18] "The structure way we are now...philosophically after debt reduction fund paid off...implemented an annual fund campaign...$400,000 a year in terms of capitals need...instead of debt... *No way*
B	[--:--] Not specifically addressed (See "B's" answer for 1-1) *Don't like it*
C	[11:04] "I would say...they look at it strategically...they are all Christian business men...we do not want to back to where we were ten years ago..." *Use it strategically*
D	[00:45] "The governing board supports the philosophy of being debt free..." *Against debt, school has never been in debt*

(continued)

Participant	How does your school's governing board view the use of debt in your school?
E	[10:24] "Kind of the same as the parents...it is not a bad thing to carry debt...none of the original board members are active...some on the finance committee...and foundation board..." *Same as parents...debt not a bad thing...none of the original board members are active that approved current debt*
F	[15:46] "We cannot incur any more debt until we pay off the property...I live in a very conservative area...they are very leery of debt..." *Board members not adverse, but not excited about it...open but leery of it*
G	[11:54] "We have a foundation...capital revenue...they will give us the revenue..." *Need capital funds in the near future*
H	[No time stamp] "The school board is opposed to borrowing money…the current debt that we have game from previous boards years ago…the current board is committed to not borrowing any more money" *Opposed to it...don't borrow anymore...preferred approach*
I	[--:--] (Answer merged with 1-1) *Doesn't like debt*
J	[13:50] "Our school board is all about getting rid of it...and not going back underneath it..." *Wants to get rid of it*

Research Question 1-4

Participant	How do you navigate the various points of view about debt in your school?
A	[21:38] "In our society today...other than home mortgage...don't incur debt...especially for Millennials...this generation of Millennials...most like the first generation...going to be less well off than their parents...wages not having risen...they're used to having...what their parents would have...those principles are strong...I don't tend to process that by the letter of the law...) *Easy...they all agree*
B	[3:34] "...they (parents) don't have the same view of debt that we (board) do..." *Familiar view of debt and like it*

Participant	How do you navigate the various points of view about debt in your school?
C	[12:51] "There was six month period back then in the dark ages back then where basically new board members got in, realized how bad it was and insisted that the other board members leave...volunteering up to 40 hours a week to...how to get out of it...it was a herculean effort...we have an annual town hall meeting...in October of every year where we spend close to an hour...financial data reporting...put out an annual report every year...where the budget is...finished in the black now for about 8 years straight..." *New board replaced the old board 10 years ago...with an annual meeting with financial reporting*
D	[00:53] "Again, however, with younger members some are suggesting we can go into debt since we have a large amount of endowment to cover it...it really has not been a contentious issue...we just recognize that is what we do..." *New board members might be open to debt to improve something that would pay for itself later...*
E	[11:23] "I love to hear opinions one way or another...we have great relationship with the bank...I listen to both sides of it...we don't really talk about it a lot...renegotiate for a lower rate..." *Love to hear opinions...great rapport with the bank...might renegotiate lower rate*
F	[16:48] "There's always been discussion...pros and cons each side...the board says, hey, this is what we are going to do...(at previous school) we as the school created our own problem...at this school...there is a place for it, again, managed well..." *There are pros and cons for each side...place for it if managed well and board makes the decision*
G	[13:33] "I would say for the most part...those that are knowledgeable...they feel like that (no debt) is one of our strengths..." *Those that are in the know, know debt is a bad idea*
H	[No time stamp] "We are actively working to eliminate it." *Inherited debt...just need to get out of it and no more*
I	[19:58] "No strong opinions either way..." *No strong opinions on debt*
J	[14:05] "That's tricky...it's dance...some of the parents have strong views...they don't want their tuition dollars going toward debt...that's the way they see it...not very often but it's there...under the surface...most of them have been very gracious...we have been careful to let them know where we are at...that makes a difference...if you don't give them information they will make up their own...the parking lot mafia..." *Tricky dance...no tuition should go towards debt so says a few parents*

Research Question 1-5

Participant	How much social/systemic control do you have over the use of debt at your school?
A	[18:05] "...fund...whatever we can raise through non-tuition donations...in addition to financial aid" *None beyond using the fund for scholarship and tuition*
B	[3:48] "First of all it would not be my decision to make...we save for it...or we put it on hold" *No control*
C	[17:44] "I am very...much on the same page as the board...we just finished a four year strategic plan..." *On the same page as the board*
D	[01:34] "I don't control that...it is a board decision...I could...but that is not something I would do..." *Minimal control*
E	[12:28] "We have policies in place to make sure I don't spend anything over $15,000...must get three quotes...anything outside of the budget..." *Must get approval, with three quotes, to spend anything over $15,000 outside the budget*
F	[20:35] "If I don't get us out of debt I don't think I am getting rehired...laughter...I have control over the current budget...going into this year they knew they were not going to be able to create a balanced budget...you don't want to use up your reserves..." *No access to making debt but has control over approved budget and need to get out of debt*
G	[14:26] "I would have to get permission...they have already said we will not go into debt...it is not our bylaws but it is like this...I cannot go into debt without board approval..." *Need permission by the board*
H	[No time stamp] "As an administrator you don't have the authority to incur debt…it would take board approval." *None, requires board approval...can influence...but don't have the authority*
I	[20:00] "It is always a board decision but the board respects my opinion very much..." *Board decision but respects and responds to input*
J	[15:13] "I have no control over that...and I am not allowed to do that under our governance model..." *No control*

Biblical Perception Data Set

The third set was a collection of raw data from the five questions that comprised the

second research question. For the reader's ease of reference, the second research question was as

follows: "**RQ2**. For those MAR-ACSI school leaders that supported debt acquisition for school

expansion projects, how was this position biblically understood or supported?" The following

table compiled the questions and answers from the participants.

Table 6: Research Question 2

Research Question 2-1

Participant	How would you characterize the Old Testament's views on debt?
A	[18:59] "You're talking to a finance guy...funding growth whether debt or equity...you need capital to grow...it's all about margins...neither a borrower or lender be...be really, really careful...be cautious" *Funding growth is necessary...if the margin is ok...neither borrow nor lend*
B	[4:10] "I think scripture is pretty clear...2,500 scriptures...on how to handle your debt..." *Clearly no debt allowed*
C	[19:24] "I think...I would characterize as it generally to be avoided...don't take advantage of other people with debt...with Nehemiah...he had to go after people...they were taking advantage...of their own countrymen...in so many cases...it is recognized debt is going to take place...good reason to avoid getting into debt in that time period...you don't see this person getting in trouble for what they did...is Joseph and his use of grain he collected...he was letting people go into debt into the nth degree..." *To be avoided generally...rules on bad lending in Nehemiah...Joseph not condemned for debt practices*
D	[01:48] "I think that it is a bad idea according to the Old Testament...you can't lend to strangers...lending guidelines but not borrower guidelines...borrower is servant to the lender..." *Borrower is servant to the lender...not a good idea...don't have freedom*
E	[13:19] "You don't want to be slave to the lender...trust God for everything..." *Slave of the lender is bad...trust God*
F	[22:03] "This is where you asked me to be a theologian...I do know that when you borrow you become the slave of the lender...I don't think it is wrong to borrow...but you need to borrow within your means..." *Borrower to be slave to the lender*

Participant	How would you characterize the Old Testament's views on debt?
G	[15:58] "I think to be honest with you...I think it is probably a good underlying principle...I don't have a problem with indebtedness if it is used properly...in the proper ways...this school will never go into debt..." *Underlying principle is not a problem...debt used in proper ways...don't go into debt*
H	[No time stamp] "The Old Testament discourages debt." *No debt!*
I	[20:30] "I believe that people are in need....those who are blessed with resources...they should help..." *People in need should be helped by the wealthy*
J	[18:22] "Proverbs 27:13...14:23...Genesis 1:1, He worked...we work...need to be financially solvent...The scriptures are very plain...it is important to be honest...be careful with your finances ...make sure you pay your tithe...God was very clear...Psalm 37:21...the borrower is slave to the lender..." *Proverbs 27:13, be honest, be careful, pay tithe, Psalm 37:21*

Research Question 2-2

Participant	How would you characterize the New Testament's views on debt?
A	[20:30] "Don't overdo it...yeah" *Wise management*
B	[--:--] (Answer merged with 2-1) *No debt*
C	[23:20] "It was interesting how Jesus...how debt came up a number of times in His parables...the person who seems to be the portraying the god type person...who had them owning him something...not the bad guy...there is a legitimate view for debt..." *There's not a bad guy associated with debt*
D	[02:24] "We just feel that it's not wise because we are trying to be good stewards of the Lord's money...owe no man anything...it has to do with grace..." *Manageable debt: Paul said to pay what you owe people*
E	[13:44] "Very similar...in the marketplace Jesus turned over the tables...we want to make sure you are above reproach..." *No difference between Old and New Testament...marketplace crashed by Jesus...be above reproach*

(continued)

Participant	How would you characterize the New Testament's views on debt?
F	[22:47] "Don't just borrow to trust God to get a way out of it..." *Don't think it is wrong...but stay within means*
G	[18:02] "Persecuted church...putting all things in common...I don't think it is a requirement for the New Testament...my deep concern over the years has been...that boards...indebtedness...putting it on the backs of the staff..." *No command to operate like the early, persecuted, church...disagree with having all things in common*
H	[No time stamp] "Only one debt is permitted…the debt of love." *One debt is allowed...the debt of love!*
I	[22"52] "I believe in the New Testament...our era...have to have discernment...we are stewards and we have to use wisely..." *Be discerning*
J	[20:55] "How about Luke 6:38...give and it shall be given unto you...Philippians 4:19...My God shall supply all thy needs...we are crazy not to ask...got to ask with the right spirit..." *Luke 6:38 give and it will be given...Phil 4:19 God supplies all needs...ask God*

Research Question 2-3

Participant	How would you explain your views on the use of debt from a scriptural perspective?
A	[20:32] "Managing that risk effectively...and not overdoing it...for us we wouldn't back into the game for a while...yeah" *Be good stewards*
B	[--:--] (Answer merged with 2-2)
C	[25:15] God is in the business of not holding that against us...forgive a debtor...how can I forgive a debtor if I haven't given them something..." *God's in the business of debt and forgiveness*
D	[03:09] "If God wants us to do it I think he going to he will provide the funds for it..." *Manage effectively or must increase enrollment*

Participant	How would you explain your views on the use of debt from a scriptural perspective?
E	[14:15] "I don't much difference at all (between the Old and New Testament)...owe no man...slave of the lender...we don't know what the economy is going to do...if the bank called the note...what do we do then?...it would behoove us to pay down the debt as fast as possible..." *Owe no man...don't become a slave...don't know what economy is going to do*
F	[--:--] (Answer merged with 2-2) *Don't presume upon God*
G	[20:30] "I think scripture says in essence...owe no man nothing...it doesn't mean you can't buy a house... *Owe no man anything...*
H	[No time stamp] "I agree with William Carey's statement that doing God's work, God's way, never lacks God's supply." *If God does not provide...human means cannot accomplish God's plan...doing God's work His way will not lack God's supply*
I	[24:28] "When He (Jesus) gave....He expected people to be grateful and that was good enough...when we borrow we need to exercise discernment..." *People should be grateful for loans*
J	[22:12] "I would say that He (God) says don't get it because once you do you are burdened with it...or if you get it pay it back and pay it back in a timely manner..." *Don't get debt...it becomes a burden...pay it back on time*

Research Question 2-4

Participant	How do you view the use of debt in terms of Christian liberty?
A	[20:44] "We wouldn't get back into the game." *Wise management*
B	[5:28] "Debt needs to be understood and used wisely...there needs to be good plan to paid off rapidly...not to be used frivolously" *Debt understood and used wisely and paid off quickly*
C	[26:00] "I never really thought of it in that terminology...are we eating meat sacrificed to idols...should be sensitive to that and should not be provoking your brother...we can't always make everyone happy..." *Should be sensitive to people's opinions about the issue but can't make everyone happy*

Participant	How do you view the use of debt in terms of Christian liberty?
D	[03:22] "I think that anybody who says it is ok to go into debt has that liberty to do so...it is not something I would divide the church over..." *It is ok to obey your conscience...it presumes upon the future...presumes upon God's plan*
E	[15:15] "It is more of a command issue...God provides for our needs..." *It is a command, not a liberty through provision*
F	[24:03] "I am not aware of any thou shalt not borrow money...be good stewards..." *Not a commandment, but be a good steward*
G	[21:37] "When confronted with being upside down...why don't you consider selling short...my conviction is I needed to tough it out...I was underwater for a period of time...so be it...God took me into the world and He will take me out of the world..." *Can't sell things short or upside down...must pay debt*
H	[No time stamp] "Debt is not wise…but I am not dogmatic about when it comes to mortgages that are not underwater or student loans that can be reasonably paid off and do not prevent future opportunities for ministries." *Debt is not wise...but not dogmatic on mortgages or student loans*
I	[25:16] "For the giver it is a commandment...for the receiver there should be a sense of freedom...and ask..." *Commanded to give as a giver...for the receiver there should be a sense of freedom to ask*
J	[23:12] "The Lord says all things are good but the important thing is to stay out of debt as much as possible...once you get into debt you are bound by it..." *All things are good but stay out of debt...debt is bondage*

Research Question 2-5

Participant	If needed, how do you balance your personal beliefs with your professional views about the use of debt?
A	[21:31] "Don't incur debt...have cash available...I don't tend to process that by the letter of the law...being good stewards..." *Don't incur debt...not by the letter of the law*
B	[5:50] "They are the same..." *Same views on both*

Participant	If needed, how do you balance your personal beliefs with your professional views about the use of debt?
C	[27:44] "The debt we have right now...we bought...this facility...revenue has been growing...I feel like all the property in this area is appreciating...from a logical standpoint...we can grow our ministry...the property is more valuable...that is not a bad thing...I don't carry debt on our cars...I don't take loans on that...we are very blessed where we are right now...we would not buy a brand new bus..." *There's a difference between appreciating and depreciating debt*
D	[03:39] "I am not into debt and try to pay my bills every month...it seems to fit into God's economy in a better way..." *Had a home mortgage...real estate debt is different due to appreciation*
E	[15:40] "It is actually the same...absolutely the same...we are called as organizations and as individuals to follow the bible..." *Actually the same*
F	[24:46] "For me I would say they are both the same..." *Not against debt personally...both the same*
G	[22:32] "I think there are principles laid down...not necessarily rules...owe no man nothing...I have to be able to live with a clear conscience...speak the truth in love...and submit to those in authority over me...but not illegal, or violates my conscience... *Live with a clear conscience, speak truth in love...be under authority but do not sin*
H	[No time stamp] "Both should be consistent with the principles taught in the Word of God." *Should be consistent...operating on principles of the Word of God*
I	[26:21] "I believe there is no difference..." *No difference*
J	[25:33] "Our school pretty much as my personal view...pay as you go...they did start the building before they had the money...the people had promised it but...didn't have it in hand...now that we have gone through it I don't think we would go back...a lot of years a lot of debt...it kept us from doing what we needed to do...God have mercy on our soul...we learned a very important lesson...we are going to have the money in hand... " *Same views...pay as you go...frees up resources...*

Oversight and Accreditation Data Set

The fourth set was a collection of raw data from the five questions that comprised the

third research question. For the reader's ease of reference, the third research question was as

follows: "**RQ3.** To what extent, if any, did MAR-ACSI oversight and accrediting requirements

relating to fiscal policy influence debt-related decisions of MAR-ACSI member schools?" The

following table compiled the questions and answers from the participants.

Table 7: Research Question 3

Research Question 3-1

Participant	How do your school's stakeholders (parents, board, donors, etc.) influence your decision making process about the use of debt?
A	[23:22] "Being good stewards...well managed debt can play a role..." *Well managed*
B	[--:--] (No debt)
C	[--:--] (Answer merged with 1-3/4) *Not addressed*
D	[00:34 (time stamp reset due to recording oversight)] "Heavily influence..." *Heavily influenced*
E	[16:13] "They influence our decision making by being involved in our strategic planning...debt does not come up in those discussions except for when they make sure we are fiscally responsible...our stakeholders do have influence...they just don't exercise it..." *Strategic planning...debt does not enter in except through fiscal responsibility*
F	[25:10] "When this topic would come up they would give a lot of input...whether to me directly or to our board members...we would have the spectrum of parents who would say, no, don't go there...and others who would say you can, just be reasonable...people will pay for what they value..." *Gives a lot of input (a full range of options)*
G	[24:29] "Practically speaking our board is a self-perpetuating board through recommendation...our constituency is made up of parents...meet on an annual basis and vote on nominated board...three year terms" *Practically, self-perpetuating board recruited through recommendations...voted in by parents*

Participant	How do your school's stakeholders (parents, board, donors, etc.) influence your decision making process about the use of debt?
H	[No time stamp] "We are dialoguing and surveying parents to get their input which impacts our decisions…at one time we were afraid to be totally transparent with our stakeholders for fear we would cause a panic of financial failure of the school…but then we realized that the best policy was to be totally up front…done through focus groups." *Takes years to decide to be transparent to avoid a panic...decided to share things in focus groups*
I	[26:50] "The board has heavy influence on the decision...parents actually do not..." *Board has heavy influence...parents do not*
J	[27:41] "I would say that...parents don't have as much say...they have their opinions...the church is charge of purchasing...the church influences the decision making process about debt and they are not ready to back under that any time soon..." *Parents don't have much say...church has the greatest use of debt*

Research Question 3-2

Participant	How do ACSI guidelines influence your decision making process about the use of debt?
A	[24:12] "We were just reaccredited...a year ago..." *They don't review*
B	[6:24] "Not at all...they have none..." *Not at all*
C	[33:43] "What I love about the flourishing model...the schools that seem to be rock solid...that's what you see in the flourishing model...knowing where were 10 years ago...we are close to the flourishing model we think is a miracle..." *Flourishing level recommended...very excited about the miracle of the school*
D	[00:49] "No." *No influence*
E	[17:11] "They don't...they really don't...I don't know of any guidelines I have ever read on that..." *Doesn't affect it*

Participant	How do ACSI guidelines influence your decision making process about the use of debt?
F	[28:37] "We'd just gone through accreditation...a lot of things...they want good, solid finances...they are encouraging in the right direction...I have been appreciative... " *Huge influence in recent accreditation...encouraging in the right direction*
G	[26:26] "To be honest with you...you are gonna do it (work with ACSI) or I am not coming...people need guidelines outside themselves...a good way to do that is with ACSI accreditation..." *Required school to certify with ACSI before joining staff*
H	[No time stamp] "They provided recommendations for financial advisors to help us refinance." *Referrals from ACSI provided coaching on refinancing efforts*
I	[27:36] "Honestly I did look at it when we made the decision (to borrow money)..." *Do not look at it*
J	[28:34] "Our processes are much more stringent than ACSI...that's never been an issue..." *Internal processes more stringent than ACSI*

Research Question 3-3

Participant	How important to you is complying with ACSI guidelines about the use of debt?
A	[25:05] "One of the flourishing school models dealt with cash flow...we did not need that" *Not particularly*
B	[6:30] "We have a form to fill out...we hire outside, independent CPA...not required by ACSI..." *Fills out annual form but that's it*
C	[35:04] "Our goal is not be a flourishing school...our number one goal is that we are...training and inspiring through exceptional... students...for a long, long...long time to come..." *The goal is not to be flourishing but training exceptional students*
D	[01:02] "Not important." *Not important*

(continued)

Participant	How important to you is complying with ACSI guidelines about the use of debt?
E	[17:28] "3.3 doesn't apply because I don't know of any..." *Doesn't apply*
F	[29:35] "This is where I don't know all of their guidelines...I know that my board values their accreditation and we will abide by those guidelines...you can interpret in different ways...I have to raise $200,000...you are limited in what you can do if you are always trying to pay off your debt..." *Not clear about flourishing guidelines...*
G	[27:10] "I am not aware of what their indebtedness principle is...probably wouldn't affect us...under the impression that you could choose to do what you are doing...if stable..." *Don't know them...don't apply*
H	[No time stamp] "We recognize ACSI's guidelines based on wise principles." *Recognized ACSI's wisdom...wise principles*
I	[27:53] "We did not look at it because we did not know it existed... *Did not look at ACSI...*
J	[30:15] "It is very easy...it is what we do...it is a natural thing..." *Easy to do...natural thing*

Research Question 3-4

Participant	How does ACSI staff/programs/initiatives interact with you regarding the use of debt?
A	[25:25] "Pretty boilerplate and not as flexible as it should have been...but we were not coming at it from a position of strength..." *Not flexible*
B	[7:14] "No..." *None*
C	[36:57] "They don't...I see them...the REACH model of accreditation...standard #2 indicators 2.7/2.8...you read through there it doesn't talk about debt at all...just be a good steward and maintaining your viability..." *Don't interact outside of "REACH" accreditation standards...just be a good steward*

Participant	How does ACSI staff/programs/initiatives interact with you regarding the use of debt?
D	[01:15] "No." *No interaction*
E	[17:35] "They really don't...written a book on long-term sustainability...but I don't know if they have adopted that...Dr. Allen Pue...he goes around to schools and talks about long-term sustainability...and he covers debt in that..." *They don't...but there is a useful long-term sustainability book from ACSI* (See reference list)
F	[31:08] "Team visit...I just came up and took things over...we were really scrutinized the board was asked many challenging and difficult questions...administratively they would describe us as in our infancy...I would agree with that..." *Board was asked tough questions during accreditation*
G	[33:40] "Not so far..." *Not so far*
H	[No time stamp] "We have an annual financial report and a five year accreditation report where we have to show we have sound financial resources…they need to see our auditor's report." *ACSI gave resources and financial standards with an audit report*
I	[29:18] "Actually zero interaction...we are not working on reaccreditation until we have a building..." *Zero interaction*
J	[30:38] "We have report that we need to send every year during our accreditation cycle that goes along with financial reports...we have at least 3 audits a year...it is really been handled with integrity that is why God had mercy on our soul...I can't take credit for it..." *Financial report sent each year to ACSI...3 independent audits a year*

Research Question 3-5

Participant	How should ACSI interact with you about the use of debt in your K-12 school?
A	[25:45] "...nothing to complain about..." *Not clearly addressed*

Participant	How should ACSI interact with you about the use of debt in your K-12 school?
B	[7:43] "Some of the standards are related to the finances..." *None*
C	[38:27] "We've been accredited for a long time...the issue that ACSI gets into...has to be careful...some school associations control things like this...ACSI does not have...control...it has influence...just a little nervous about being dictatorial...how far down the debt load to you go in telling schools how they have to be..." *Provide influence but not control*
D	[01:26] "None of their business." *None of their business*
E	[18:15] "I think an advisory role is good...schools want practical application...if ACSI came out with guidelines...based on what is happening to other schools that carry debt...had those kind of things would help our board...I am familiar with the flourishing model..." *Advisory role...practical application*
F	[33:40] "Because I am dealing with a young board...great men and women...if ACSI were to say best practices...take a fairly strong stand in regard to certain standards...lay the cards on the table...I really appreciate that..." *ACSI should stress standards toward board governance*
G	[34:02] "They always have a recommendation that you not be dependent upon fundraising...more than...15%...never been in a place where they (ACSI) said you can't do it..." *Used to see recommendations not to be reliant on donations for over 15% of budget*
H	[No time stamp] "Doing great…but not nearly enough…great legal services above and beyond just finances." *Doing great...but not nearly enough...great legal services*
I	[30:33] "I think as a consultant...ACSI is...wonderful...with more communication they could make us aware...of the good things they have..." *As a consultant*
J	[32:30] "They do it well...what they are doing now...you can't have too many checks and balances...when it comes to money...the processes they use...keep us in check and it should..." *What they are doing is good...checks and balances with processes are good*

Short- and Long-Term Strategy Data Set

The fifth set was a collection of raw data from the five questions that comprised the fourth research question. For the reader's ease of reference, the fourth research question was as follows: "**RQ4.** To what extent, if any, did long-term institutional debt impact the decision-making process of MAR-ACSI school principals' long-term plans for their schools?" The following table compiled the questions and answers from the participants.

Table 8: Research Question 4

Research Question 4-1

Participant	How does the mortgage, if any, affect your school's strategic planning?
A	[26:17] "It was essential...it was actually central...it got out of whack...we had to adjust...we had to recalibrate...and it still is..." *Essential and central to everything*
B	[8:18] "We still have to manage our money carefully...if you don't plan strategically and you need a new roof...that would be very problematic..." *Must still manage money*
C	[41:58] "We used a consultant firm to help us with our strategic planning...they have a financial strategic plan...they are really good at pushing you to financial stability and strength..." *Consultant firm hired to engage in financial stability and strength...strong reserves important*
D	[02:09] "It gives us the freedom to plan knowing that even if there is a downturn we can still move forward....when the economy tanked we did not lay off anybody...and continued with the programs they had...that's the key...it gives me freedom...to plan for the future..." *No mortgage gives freedom to plan even with a downturn, still move forward*
E	[19:17] "Increase teacher pay to...within 75% of the local market...so it does hinder that...if we didn't have any debt we could get there quicker...4 year plan..." *Hinders the ability to increase teacher pay to 75% of local market...slows the 4 year plan to do so*
F	[35:125] "Significantly...we really don't have a strategic plan...financial stability it plays a huge part of that...not only with the mortgage debt but what are we going to do for tuition...to generate other streams of income...the income plays an important part in the planning..." *...no strategic plan yet...need financial stability*

Participant	How does the mortgage, if any, affect your school's strategic planning?
G	[37:05] "It liberates me...I get focused on...I rent my facilities out...trying to develop...streams of income in this debt free building...I have a variety of freedoms that not having a mortgage gives me..." *Liberated to focus on future planning and being active in the community...rents buildings to non-profits*
H	[No time stamp] "It robs the reserve fund… need to fundraise for everything else since tuition isn't enough to cover expenses. We need $250,000 a year in donations to break even." *Robs the reserve fund...need to fundraise for everything else since tuition isn't enough to cover expenses*
I	[31:51] "Whatever tuition comes in will stay with operations..." *Tuition will not go to future mortgage*
J	[33:37] "Everybody already has it spent...it has been spent twelves times over...the rainy day (fund)..." *Every department wants to spend recent surpluses*

Research Question 4-2

Participant	How does the mortgage, if any, affect your school's annual budget planning process?
A	[27:04] "It has been a big piece of our strategy...in 18 months we are going to be done..." *Done in 18 months*
B	[9:50] "The tuition dollars are not going toward bricks and mortar and the mortgage...be thankful for the people who sacrificed ahead of you...be thankful..." *Money doesn't go toward bricks/mortgage*
C	[43:20] "How we would increase our reserves...going to be really strong...to weather a financial storm...oh yeah...no question" (when asked if strategic and annual planning were similar) *Got to pay it*
D	[03:30] "It just means we have to raise enough money...we don't have to raise money to pay a mortgage..." *Raise less money since no mortgage*

(continued)

Participant	How does the mortgage, if any, affect your school's annual budget planning process?
E	[20:10] "It comes up for discussion on our annual budget...we want to renegotiate it...in the future all capital campaign projects are going to go through the foundation..." *Discussion to renegotiate each year*
F	[40:42] "In the sense, yes it does because we knew we had the balloon payment coming up...we want to have a balanced budget every year we knew this year it was not going to be balanced...balanced as possible..." *Balanced budget not possible this year*
G	[40:48] "I am not that far behind the public school...we didn't put the burden of...operations...on the faculty...we want to free them up to do their job well..." *Close to public schools in salary*
H	[No time stamp] "We cannot be late on payments to insure the building is still here…at times it has been tough to make payroll in order to make the mortgage payment." *Can never be late on the payments...tough to pay payroll sometimes*
I	[33:00] "We would not allow the school expansion to affect our normal operations...so the payback of the loan would need to totally rely on fundraising..." *School expansion not allowed to impact operational budget*
J	[35:45] "What people asked me for (things in the past) I said I am sorry...after you cut...every year...your cutting everything you possibly can...we have been very cautious in what we spent...hold off on buying things you need and you make due..." [42:55] "We have got a parking lot that would scare you but we can't get it done...it is a huge parking lot...there's stuff we've had to hold off on...busses...held off on doing..." *Defers maintenance...hold off on transportation maintenance...hold off on buying anything*

Research Question 4-3

Participant	How does the mortgage, if any, affect your faith in God's faithfulness?
A	[27:20] "Dealing with the bank...that was really interesting...not assertive at first...then...how do we handle this?...God put me that situation...I had been there before on the other side...they needed a year or two to see our plans were actually working...many wake you up in the middle of the night...while I explain this to an outside secular world...needed to be transparent...God led every piece of that...increased my faith" *Be transparent...dealing with assertive bankers increases faith...wake up in the middle of the night*
B	[9:01] "I don't take it for granted...I think we are thankful for what the Lord has done...gratitude is very important" *Don't take God for granted…gratitude very important!*
C	[44:06] "Who is trusting God more...the wises steward...the virgins who brought enough oil...were the virgins who didn't praying more...maybe they were but does that mean they trusted God more...we are going to do what is wise and good...the wise man sees what's coming...I believe in God's faithfulness...I don't believe God rewards foolishness..." *Who is trusting God more in the parable of the virgins and their oil? God is faithful and does not reward foolishness*
D	[03:49] "I think it increases it...it means that I have to do this by faith that God's people are going to provide it...not that the bank is going to approve it..." *Increases faith in God's provision...people, not the bank, provide it*
E	[21:14] "It's one of things you rely on God...my prayer would be that a donor step up and pay for it (new gymnasium)...it doesn't affect my faith in God...|God is trustworthy and able...in some sense (the mortgage) it is the thorn in Paul's side for us..." *Rely on God...pray for a donor...possibly mortgage is akin to Paul's thorn in the flesh*
F	[41:31] "I know God is going to provide I've been around long enough to know that...each journey is unique...and I am still a sinful person and I will worry...I will have to confess my sins to God...understand what I can do and cannot do..." *God will provide...been around a long enough to know*
G	[42:08] "Not having a mortgage...I still a payroll every month and bills due every month..." *Payroll and bills still due...*

Participant	How does the mortgage, if any, affect your faith in God's faithfulness?
H	[No time stamp] "Amazing to see Gods faithfulness…month to month a challenge but God always provided and never missed a mortgage payment or payroll or utility payment for many months in a row." *Amazing to see God's faithfulness...never missed a mortgage payment/payroll/utility payment*
I	[33:27] "Big time...for me to do fundraising is not a good fit...he (a donor) was so shocked about the goal you guys set...you have nothing and you step forward and are going to take on (this project)...faith is like you decided to do something and you decided to believe in it but you did not see it...some people need to see it...sometimes God will vision to some people and those so called leaders lead...but if no one follows something is wrong...I want to make sure I don't leave people behind...faith is something that is very abstract...believing that God will enable that..." *Big time...*
J	[44:03] "I have seen God in tangible ways...God did not necessarily love the debt...but not under judgment...the biblical principle is if you got it you are bound...if you don't have to have it, don't (get it)...watching it unfold...miraculous....my faith is so much stronger...I have seen God...work...it is marvelous..." *God is seen in tangible ways...not under judgment...don't have debt...years of miracles make faith stronger*

Research Question 4-4

Participant	How does the mortgage, if any, affect your prayer life?
A	[32:45] "I went through about a two year period...not just the financial side of it...God your calling on my life here is so apparent...I can't do this myself...God, you are going to have to do this..." *Rely on the Lord*
B	[9:27] "Our prayer life...doesn't exactly focus on finance but it sure does on gratitude..." *Hedge of protection sought*
C	[45:10] "I trust God is going to take care of me...I think God is for me...the planning we do pleases Him...without God's help...I'm done..." *Trusting God means doing wise things*
D	[04:19] "I don't [pray about it]...just to be candid." *No mortgage...no impact*

Participant	How does the mortgage, if any, affect your prayer life?
E	[21:57] (answer merged with 4-3) *None*
F	[45:04] "I pray more...I have come across people who are incredible prayer warriors...I am spending more (time) corporately...we are encouraging more and more prayer...God is our source...our prayer life has improved..." *Praying more...everything is a gift from God*
G	[42:41] "Pray more and worry less...most Christian schools say mortgage first, payroll second...we say payroll first...we want to have a good testimony..." *Pray more and worry less*
H	[No time stamp] "God delivers! God is faithful. Driven to pray! Driven closer to God!" *God delivers! God is faithful. Driven to pray! Driven closer to God!*
I	[39:35] "Not only my life but a lot of people...we got stuck on the sales tax (for the new building)...I quickly texted (friends)...I prayed...spread the word around to the prayer net and they started praying...five minutes later...the lawyer signed the paper in a dismayed manner and threw the pen on the table...God won...I may not be able to pray on the spot...they are praying...and that won the war..." *Prayer chain started to seek and secure new property*
J	[45:08] "Oh yeah! I got the callouses (laughter) I am not going to lie...you can't do anything about it...pretty heart wrenching things...not recently...teachers coming to the board...can you help us (with tuition)..." *Oh yeah! Lots of callouses from prayer*

Research Question 4-5

Participant	How does the mortgage, if any, affect your work life in terms of stress?
A	[34:05] "That's all a part of the calling...clear ministerial calling...I had a confidence...that God was going to fulfill...angry parents, confused parents...had to deal with it..." *had a sense of peace b/c called to be there...peace in the midst of uncertainty...there was a focus and mission*
B	[11:21] "Oh yea...less stressful..." *Less stressful*

Participant	How does the mortgage, if any, affect your work life in terms of stress?
C	[45:53] "I don't have sleepless night...but I would over...our kids giving their whole heart to Jesus...are they avoiding the foolishness that could ruin their lives..." *No amount of money can help if God is opposed...but God is for the school...at peace...but sleepless nights over students who are suffering*
D	[04:33] "It lessens my stress level significantly...(This researcher's follow-up question: "Did you have more stress in other schools?)..."yeah..." *Lessens stress level significantly...more stress in previous jobs with mortgages...*
E	[22:01] "I don't really stress over it...I haven't in 7 years anyway...if in an economic downturn I probably would... " *Don't stress over it...at least not in the past 7 years*
F	[45:38] "Our theme for this year comes out of John 15:4-5...all of life...comes from being connected to God...that permeates our entire school...I am very excited about how staff has come together...and are open to learning them..." *John 15:4-5...vine...theme for the year*
G	[44:24] "I learned to trust the Lord more...my experience has been usually you have some business people on your board who will figure out a way to borrow money...they want that mortgage paid...my board wants my staff to be paid...it has taught me the important thing is people...not buildings..." *Worry less...business people tend to want to borrow more*
H	[No time stamp] "You have a heart attack for a reason…maybe the stress." *Incredible toll and health problems as a result*
I	[42:51] "I lot of people expect that I will be beaten up and very, very tired...I need to thank God for ------- (family)...I work twelve hours a day...three or four hours sleeping...but somehow I am operating ok...I believe because we are plugged into the source that is why we don't run dry...I can handle the work load but internally something is not quite right...I think things are better because God has a lot of grace..." *Thanks God who keeps people healthy*
J	[46:28] "I'm a mess (laughter)...it keeps me up at night because it is heart rending because you are working with people and you want to honor them...and you want to do things with excellence...and you are bound by it...you know what the right thing to do is and yet you've inherited this beast...it is a faith walk...God has gone before me...I feel that responsibility...your only as good as your last act...I keep my bible by my bed...I grab that bible and put on the whole armor of God and try again..." *Keeps people up at night over the years...put on the whole armor of God*

Foundational Documents Data Set

The sixth set was a collection of data from the five questions that comprised the fifth

research question. For the reader's ease of reference, the fourth research question was as follows:

"**RQ5.** To what extent, if any, did MAR-ACSI schools have institutional guidelines regarding the

use of debt in their founding documents such as their charters and bylaws, and to what extent did

they follow them?" The following table compiled the questions and answers from the

participants.

Table 9: Research Question 5

Research Question 5-1

Participant	How do your school's governing documents (constitution/bylaws, etc.) address the use of debt?
A	[35:55] "Debt was incurred in the early 2000's there was not...we added something to the bylaws that required board approval..." *No policy at the time of getting mortgage*
B	[12:09] "I'm sure they do...school was here before the church...turned over the church..." *Sure they do…but school is run by the church*
C	[46:45] "It asks us to do a review yearly...but it does not forbid debt or set a level..." *Annual review of debt but no rules about the amount*
D	[05:37] "Actually, no." *No reference to debt*
E	[22:35] "($15,000 spending limit with 3 quotes)...it is yeah...it is...board policy...it specifically says 3 to make sure we are getting the right price..." *$15,000 spending limit requires 3 quotes*
F	[46:50] "According to board policy...that dictate debt...the board clearly says certain things I can and can't do financially...financial planning shall not deviate materially from the board's...priority...I have learned to talk to them and let them know what is going on...I can't provide too little information...I got to keep them informed...need board approval...shall not allow the development of fiscal jeopardy..." *Cannot deviate from plan...need board approval for debt which cannot jeopardize fiscal health*

Participant	How do your school's governing documents (constitution/bylaws, etc.) address the use of debt?
G	[48:04] "I would say that I don't believe it is in our bylaws...we just revised them recently...they (the board) wanted me to understand that we do not borrow...." *Nothing formal in the bylaws but can't borrow due to school's culture*
H	[No time stamp] "Allowed with board approval but cannot overspend the total budget but could within categories." *Allowed with board approval but cannot overspend the budget*
I	[49:02] "We do have bylaws...but this is a new thing for us...there's something in the bylaws..." *Bylaws are vague*
J	[48:52] "What it does...we are under the constitution of the church...we are under the financial policies of the church...the (school) model did not go with the church...diabolically opposed spent the summer...the Lord has been very gracious and we are in one accord..." *Recent revision aligned the church and the school in a vision of unity*

Research Question 5-2

Participant	How do your school's governing documents influence your use of debt?
A	[36:30] "...added financial forecasting...I can't remember if we put in...ratios...30% ratio (back then) was not best practice" *Financial forecasting required*
B	[12:52] "Not so much debt but there are financial procedures...nothing in bylaws...no influence..." *None*
C	[47:30] "I think their encouragement to us...to be fiscally responsible...I don't think we reference our governing documents much...but if we did they would be encouraging us to do what we already did..." *Not much...but they encourage to do what is currently going on*
D	[06:14] "No." *No*
E	[23:23] "They are just guidelines, they're boundaries to make sure we don't spend more than we have or...expect to have in the future..." *They provide guidelines and boundaries*

Participant	*How do your school's governing documents influence your use of debt?*
F	[51:46] "I don't think it takes a stand on it at all...if I go into debt at all that is a board decision..." *Board only control going into debt*
G	[49:59] "If it's not in the bylaws it is the guiding principles...we operate on a model where the school board hires me and then I hire the faculty...they made it very clear...I don't borrow...they don't borrow..." *Not in bylaws...in guiding principles...board just hires one employee...*
H	[No time stamp] "All debt must be board approved." *All debt must be board approved*
I	[49:49] "We are working on the board governance...we have one third to go to finalize it...we never had a board governance manual...we are working on that...to fine tune it...until the whole thing is done..." *Reworking board governance documents...no board manual*
J	[51:05] "Well it is protective...the part they have in there I can't go out...and buy buses...anything over...$3,000 I have to go 'what do you think guys'...I can't offer a contract without permission...everybody needs oversight..." *Protects against the use of debt...can't spend over $3,000 without board consent*

Research Question 5-3

Participant	*How does your school's finance committee, if any, affect your use of debt?*
A	[37:18] "It provides accountability...people with financial expertise on that committee" *Provides accountability*
B	[13:35] "Yes...made up of board members...financial geniuses...very successful businesses that they run...(no parents)" *Board has financial geniuses helping run the school*
C	[48:54] "We have a finance committee with our board...a treasurer heads that up with are business manager as well...everyone is 100% on board...there's no difference between the finance and board as far as that is concerned..." *Board with treasurer and business manager...no differences between committee and board*

Participant	How does your school's finance committee, if any, affect your use of debt?
D	[06:25] "Yes...they recommendations as board committee...yes (in response to a question from this researcher about the composition of finance committee members)... they would say we should never go into debt..." *Board committee says never go into debt...includes non-board members*
E	[23:48] "Accountants...the finance committee is the first line of defense...when it comes to debt...protecting the school...board not necessarily accountants...full board trusts the finance committee..." *Full board makes final decision with input from finance committee comprised of accountants and also non-board members*
F	[52:24] "We had a board member who worked with my finance manager...I guess we did have a committee...I would call it formal..." *Board members works with a finance manager*
G	[51:14] "Board members very familiar with our history...we do our accounting on a fund basis...profit/loss...we do an internal audit every year...outside depends on what ACSI is requiring...we'd like to do it every two or three years...but it is so expensive..." *Board members very familiar with our history...internal audit every year...external audit every couple years*
H	[No time stamp] "Finance committee oversees operations…includes board treasurer and parents." *Finance committee oversees operations...includes board treasurer and parents*
I	[50:54] "We have a finance committee...they look very closely at the monthly report and they do question...making sure that everything is in intact..." *Looks over monthly reports*
J	[52:26] "No...we did...but the church didn't like that...I work with a business manager...now there's a wonderful relationship...church based..." *None...managed by the church*

Research Question 5-4

Participant	How do you resolve possible conflicts that arise, if any, between your fiscal policies and the fiscal culture of your school?
A	[38:01] "That's been interesting because we had all this cash flow issues...very austere...deferring normal, major maintenance...we have now caught up...we were a little backwards...our culture was a result of where we were...we've changed that...it wasn't the policies" *Always deferring big maintenance...now under control…debt culture now changed*

(continued)

Participant	*How do you resolve possible conflicts that arise, if any, between your fiscal policies and the fiscal culture of your school?*
B	[phone disconnected/reconnected...no time stamp, no transcript...just notes below] *Policy in place to help parents...cannot be more than a month behind in tuition payments*
C	[49:52] "I don't see any...I don't see any cracks between those things...over a hundred different churches...there is no one fiscal culture...some...who are Dave Ramseyites...other people...in debt...we don't make that a basis of whether you get in the school or not...I don't see people getting up in arms about... *Few fissures observable...not one fiscal culture...like-mindedness is not a criteria for entrance*
D	[07:20] "Actually our conflicts are handled very smoothly...people get along here...everyone moves forward..." *Conflicts handled smoothly, people get along here...unified behind decisions*
E	[24:24] "We do it by getting the right people in the room...the finance committee is the ultimate authority on any type of conflict financially..." *Get the right people in the room...finance committee resolves conflict first*
F	[54:45] "We do that in board meetings...we talk through things...they will listen to one another and then come to a decision..." *Board meetings resolve any conflicts*
G	[54:43] "When I came...the board has a policy of not trying to get entangled in operations... *Board doesn't get involved in administrative decisions*
H	[No time stamp] "If there's a conflict you resolve it with dialogue among the people/parents." *Take it to the people, parents*
I	[51:17] "When it happens I will deal with it...I try to do prevention...as a principal there are things that you should do and should not do...I don't push that...I operate within my limit to prevent conflict...but if conflict does happen...communication is the key...I am ready to apologize...if it is really my fault..." *Navigate them when it arises and try to do prevention...don't push boundaries*
J	[54:37] "Any issues that come now...it's just easy...it's just like a breath of fresh air because now the church and the school are working together..." *Any issues are easy because new governance structure created one unified ministry*

Research Question 5-5

Participant	How do you characterize the value of your school's institutional guidelines in terms of practical and spiritual significance?
A	[40:08] "The whole thing about accountability...to one another in Christ...some level of transparency to our constituency...both practically and spiritually to be good stewards...to be reasonably practical...got to live in the ambiguity and gray areas...can't be totally be transparent because of those issues (confidentially laws)...different than the financial perspective..." *Accountability/transparency are practical and significant...be good stewards...being reasonable and practical is ambiguous*
B	[phone disconnected/reconnected...no time stamp, no transcript...just notes below] *Christ centered need to go back to the Word each time*
C	[51:10] "We talk about the mission statement all year long...there are things you need to talk about all year long...when we hire people we go over that...be prudent...be good fiduciaries...take it...seriously..." *Be prudent...it is important to take the mission statement and guidelines seriously*
D	[08:08] "Moderately influential...the board through the years...made a significant amount of policy in terms of operation...becoming administrative policies..." *Moderately influential...board used to make a lot of day-to-day decisions...shifting to policy now*
E	[24:58] "I think it is strong...very strong...I think we could do better...when I first read your questions...it would be nice to have no debt...I wish my answers could be we have no debt..." *Strong and could do better in terms of debt*
F	[55:20] "If it is done properly it really draws the borders as to what they can do and can't..." *Done properly, it creates clear borders*
G	[57:31] "I love it...because I feel like we are...doing what the New Testament would have a para organization like us do...I don't think a school is an institution that is God ordained...the church is...and the home are...we are the third leg of a three legged stool...parents have a right to make a bad decision...we can't be everything to everybody..." *School works with church and parents...can't be all things to all people*
H	[No time stamp] "The spiritual principles continue to govern every decision and hopefully practically too." *Continually governs every decision*

Participant	*How do you characterize the value of your school's institutional guidelines in terms of practical and spiritual significance?*
I	[52:35] "The school is different than seven years ago or eight years ago...the spiritual development of the school...the school almost sinking...spirituality is very important...led with teaching of the bible...staff retreats...now we have a spiritual culture...felt like church..." *School is different now...greater spiritual growth*
J	[55:46] "Our school has a very biblical, healthy, view of...institutional/financial guidelines...and because of that...it has brought peace...it has brought wonderful, wonderful peace...we can speak about it now...the Holy Spirit...we are one ministry now..." *New biblically healthy view of institutional/financial guidelines has brought peace*

Table 10 and Table 11 below were generated from this researcher's examination of the participants' governance documents and websites. These tables were made to authenticate the triangulation of participant responses to RQ5-2 in terms of a validation strategy. When this researcher designed RQ5-2 he did not initially anticipate the confidentiality and anonymity issue that immediately seemed to arise as he generated the tables. His initial plan was to copy and paste the relevant texts directly from the participant's bylaws and websites. In this way this researcher could demonstrate to the reader a higher sense of validity by using primary source documents during his analysis. However, such texts could then be searched for online and possibly traced to the participants' school websites. This could possibly lead to exposure of the participants' anonymity and confidentiality in a manner inconsistent with the guarantees found in this researcher's consent form (see Appendix B) and in the policies and procedures of the Institutional Review Board of Liberty University.

Therefore Table 10 and Table 11 below contained data about the participants' bylaws that were summarized in such a way so that it did not raise anonymity and confidentiality concerns. Admittedly, this slightly impacted the systemic and social efficacy of this specific component of

this researcher's analysis, but not in such a negative way as to undermine its usefulness in the triangulation of data (See the Findings section, pp. 173-181). In any event this researcher's overriding concern was the protection of the participants' identity consistent with the LU IRB.

Table 10: Governance Documents and Debt

Participant	*School governance documents describing policies and procedures concerning institutional debt.*
A	*Only the school board may authorize institutional debt.*
B	*Only the school board may authorize institutional debt.*
C	*No reference was made to the acquisition or management of institutional debt.*
D	*A committee of the school board oversees fund-raising for capital and campus development. There was no specific grant of authority to the board to authorize or not to authorize institutional debt.*
E	*A superintendent must ensure that all debts must be paid in a timely manner and must comply with fund-raising guidelines set by the school board.*
F	*A superintendent must ensure that all debts must be paid in a timely manner and must not spend more than what was budgeted. Only the school board may authorize institutional debt.*
G	*The school board is obligated to pursue only debt-free financing of capital expansion projects and must not unduly borrow to fund its continuing operations.*
H	*The school board may only acquire institutional debt with a supermajority vote of 75% in favor of doing so.*
I	*Only the school board may authorize institutional debt.*
J	*The church has final authority over the finances of the school. No reference was made to the acquisition or management of institutional debt.*

Table 11: School Website Data on Institutional Debt

Participant	*References to the use of institutional debt on participants' school websites.*
A	*Multiple references to the school's existing institutional debt, financial statements posted, no publicly accessible access to bylaws*
B	*Institutional debt was not referenced on this school's website, two annual fundraisers were conducted to fund general operations*
C	*Multiple references to the school's capital campaign to fund a multi-million campus consolidation plan, annual and biennial finance reports gave reports on status of institutional debt, no publicly accessible access to bylaws*
D	*Highlighted the fact that they were a debt-free organization, references to fundraising for operational funds, no publicly accessible access to bylaws*
E	*Institutional debt was not referenced on this school's website*
F	*Institutional debt was not referenced on this school's website, no publicly accessible access to bylaws*
G	*References to fundraising for operational funds, the parent/student handbook was posted with references to financial analysis to determine tuition assistance, institutional debt was not referenced on this school's website, no publicly accessible access to bylaws*
H	*Institutional debt was not referenced on this school's website, fundraisers for operational expenses were advertised, no publicly accessible access to bylaws*
I	*Multiple references to the school's current and upcoming capital campaign, financial statements posted, no publicly accessible access to bylaws*
J	*Multiple references to fundraising for operational expenses, financial statements posted, no explicit reference to long-term institutional debt in recent newsletters posted to the website*

Formal Follow-Up Data Set

The seventh data set was a collection of data from a semi-structured question (Capone, 2016, p. vi) prompted by this researcher's further reflections upon his initial data sets. The question was emailed to each participant in accordance with procedures as described in this researcher's consent form. The following table compiled the question and its answers as suited

the participants' preferences. These responses were copied verbatim from their emailed

responses but were edited to preserve anonymity and confidentiality consistent with the policies

and procedure of the Institutional Review Board of Liberty University.

Table 12: Research Question Follow-Up

Participant	*When you first began your current position leading your school, how would you characterize your initial thoughts concerning the impact of your school's long-term debt (or lack thereof) on your school's long-term viability and your current thoughts now on the issue?*
A	"The debt that our school had accumulated and the corresponding annual debt service was literally crippling our school. We were in technical default of our debt covenants. The servicing of the debt was a primary factor in our cash flow issues and concerns. We were in technical default of bond debt covenants. The future viability of the school was definitely at risk."
B	"I have been at my school for 30 years. When I started academic excellence, quality programing and increasing enrollment were at the forefront of my focus, not debt. When those three areas improved, enrollment would increase and finances would take care of themselves. (Name of School) never had lengthy long-term debt and when we did incur debt we had an aggressive plan on how to eliminate it quickly. We have had 3 major building expansions in my tenure with one new wing costing 2.8 million dollars. This debt was paid off in 5 years. I have a strong awareness of fiscal responsibilities and give great attention to fiscal matters…My view of debt has changed slightly through the years. I understand the need to live within our means at the school, save when possible and in the area of school finances, "run a tight ship". Our tuition has been modest and our finances have always been positive. As I grow older I think more about…long-term viability and what steps must be taken to ensure the school's continued success. I have a responsibility to my board, parents and the community of steadfast donors to faithfully oversee budgetary compliance. That I will continue to do as long as I am administrator."
C	"When I first came to…we did not have any debt. However, in the five years prior to my coming, we incurred debt that almost destroyed the school. I viewed that past debt as unwise...Within two years of my coming, we did buy a building and incurred debt which seemed...sustainable and not just wishful thinking. That was debt I could live with."
D	"The fact that the school had no debt was the reason I decided to take the position realizing the school could "weather the storm" of any economic downturn, and my thoughts remain the same."

Participant	*When you first began your current position leading your school, how would you characterize your initial thoughts concerning the impact of your school's long-term debt (or lack thereof) on your school's long-term viability and your current thoughts now on the issue?*
E	"When I first took the position and current thought around school debt is unchanged. Summarily: Debt to some extent hinders long-term sustainability, the ability to lower our cost to educate, affordability of middle class Christian families and recruit, hire and professionally develop a diverse, talented and Jesus following faculty and staff."
F	"My initial thoughts concerning the impact of our school's long-term debt are of concern. I knew we had to pay off her facility in 2021, the amount of the debt was $200,000. We had $25,000 in the bank and if we paid by June of 2020 we would only have to pay $190,000. Additionally we are facing an unbalanced budget that was created because of smaller enrollment and poor decisions by my predecessor. The board understood this very well…At the beginning I knew we had a bill hill to climb. Currently, we are figuring out how to climb. Many of my teachers and parents do not understand the financial challenged we are facing as they were never privy to that information. I will be approaching the Board to consider being more transparent with our families as we go into next year."
G	"I suspected that one of the reasons that the school had such a long history…was because one generation / board did not mortgage their dreams on the shoulders of the next board when their terms in office ended. This was a big personal encouragement for me having worked in another situation where the leadership did not understand the nature of private Christian schools and operated their school budget like that of a church. No debt helped the administration not have to place an unequal burden on the backs of the normally under paid faculty or in raising tuition so much so as to force middle and low income families desiring a solid Christian education away from enrollment…"
H	"I saw the debt as a huge obstacle for the financial health of the school. I knew that it was one of the challenges...ahead as an administrator to either have it paid off or at least have it fit into a balanced budget that was not stretched because of it."
I	"When I took up the Principal position in 2012, the school had no debt, and it has remained no debt with the operational expenses. I feel fantastic and I thank God for that, though the school has very limited resources, He always provides for us and we ended in black every year! Now…the school is in debt for the first time, we are working on clearing the debt by the end of this year. Through this experience, I pray that God will strengthen our faith to totally rely on Him and His provision when we launch phase II…with a much bigger goal…So that the world might know that He is God."

J   "I was told when I started that the school was headed for doom and destruction... they used those words!:) I didn't believe them and got to work. For me, it had to be a multi-pronged approach with God and prayer at the top. Once I worked through the fact with my team that we were going to pay back the debt, God stepped in and allowed several things to help us in the meantime. I am absolutely certain He has brought us through! We will pay off the debt (in) May 2020 and it is exhilarating and scary because everyone on staff has 1001 ideas on how we should spend the $300,000 that will be freed up in the budget!☺ My faith has been bolstered by witnessing God's faithfulness and His provision through this process! He does "supply all our need according to His riches in glory!" Praise the Lord!"

Data Analysis and Findings

In this section of Chapter Four this researcher presented the data analysis and findings inductively uncovered as this researcher conducted his study within the framework of transcendental phenomenology. Using the four-step data analytical process (see Chapter Three, pp. 97-98 and Creswell, 2007, pp. 60-62) this researcher developed four descriptive findings by exploring and examining the data sets mentioned above.

Step One: Bracketing Data Analysis Process

A phenomenological study required that this researcher examine and acknowledge his bias during the research and writing process. There were three biases that this researcher had already acknowledged (see Research Assumptions, pp. 23-24). But three additional potential biases were uncovered as the interview process began, continued, and closed.

The first potential bias that surfaced was that this researcher found himself conceptually cheering on his interviewees as they described the challenges they feared, faced, and fought as it related to their handling of their institutional debt. This researcher found himself hoping that each of their stories would end well for the participants, meaning that the participants would be satisfied with the results of all their efforts. This tempting tendency was called "researcher bias" by Leedy and Ormrod (2016, p. 170). To guard against artificially moving the participants

toward this congratulatory frame of mind this researcher had taken care not to ask leading questions that might have led the participants to artificially provide so-called happy endings.

This researcher also had to take care that the opposite did not occur. This researcher noted in particular that one participant, "E," said the following: "When I first read your questions...it would be nice to have no debt...I wish my answers could be we have no debt..." (see the Research Question 5-5 table in raw data sets). Throughout the interviews this researcher worked to word his responses to ensure that the participants did not engage in "response bias" wherein they simply told this researcher what they thought he wanted to hear (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, p. 170).

The second potential bias that emerged during the interview process was the temptation faced by this researcher to speed up the interviews when it was revealed that the school had no institutional debt. Now, this researcher wanted and needed his sample to include the full range of examples of "debt" phenomena, from done with it to drowning in it, and was pleased to find and use them. But he also found himself unnecessarily worried that these interviewees might not make meaningful contributions that would lead to the saturation of the data. Fortunately this researcher resisted the urge to speed up the conversations and consequently found rich descriptions of their answers to each of his questions from an additional variety of perspectives.

The third and final potential bias brought into the interview process was the worry that this researcher needed to bring the interview to a possibly premature close at precisely the one-hour mark. In his recruitment materials he had made the commitment to take no more than one hour of his participants' time. He felt he needed to honor that commitment. Fortunately, by the grace of God, this researcher was generally able to honor that commitment with several interviews actually taking less than the allotted time by a few minutes. He was also able to efficiently cover all of his research questions in that allotted time span as well.

Step Two: Significant Statements Data Analysis Process

After collecting and compiling the data sets above using the significant statements from each participant, this researcher further developed his codebook (see Appendix A). From each set of research question data this researcher examined a working list of sub-codes that reflected this researcher's bracketed interpretation of the participants' emotional and rational responses to the questions. These sub-codes were merged into subject/content codes from which he developed overall themes (Moustakas, 1994, p. 117) and then developed a theory for each research question. The codebook provided this researcher with a "condensed" conceptual framework used to "consolidate" (see above, Chapter Three, Kvale, 1996, pp. 189-190) these "meaning units" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 117) into his descriptive texts below.

Step Three: Meaning Units Data Analysis Process

After more fully developing the conceptual framework of his codebook, this researcher then inductively examined each data set to uncover the aforementioned meaning units. Meaning units were developed from and for each research question. This researcher analyzed each table within each set to determine its relative level of data saturation and emotional intensity as well.

Research question 1. Research Question 1 asked participants to describe their views, values, and attitudes toward the use of long-term debt to fund school expansion projects. In Question 1-1, the meaning unit that found the most saturation took the form of a general discomfort with debt, rated at an Emotional Intensity Index Protocol (EIIP) of 2.5. In Question 1-2, a saturated meaning unit took the form of ambivalence toward debt on the part of parents—both supportive and unsupportive (see sub-codes in Appendix A). There was no strong opinion on either side, which indicated an EIIP of 1.0, that of generalized indifference. In Question 1-3, the meaning unit that achieved saturation was a clear dislike for institutional debt on behalf of the participants' boards. Comments like "they are very leery of debt," from participant "E," and

"the school board is opposed to borrowing money," from participant "H," with "our school board

is all about getting rid of it" (see raw data table for RQ1-3) indicated an EIIP of 5.0, that of

frustration with debt rising almost off the chart to anger. In Question 1-4, the saturated meaning

unit coalesced around the sub-code of "sympathy" for multiple points of view, rated at an EIIP of

2.0. In Question 1-5, the saturation level was perhaps systemically the highest of all of the

interview questions. None of the participants had significant authority to incur debt of any kind

without board approval. Nor were any of the participants eager to gain that authority; hence the

meaning unit coalesced around the sub-code of "none" in terms of the Control/Oversight code.

This generated a 1 on the EIIP.

       Research question 2. Research Question 2 asked participants to describe their views of

debt from a biblical perspective. In Question 2-1, the basic idea that the borrower was a slave to

the lender gained saturation as a meaning unit. There were minimal references on the part of the

participants to specific verses from the Old Testament, which seemingly indicated participants'

preferences for conceptual responses along the lines of the sub-codes characterized as both

"minimal and wise/foolish." Likewise, participant responses concerning Question 2-2 were

similarly positioned. This researcher rated both RQ2-2 and RQ-3 as a 2.0 on his EIIP. The

meaning unit for this question, found in the sub-code of "practical," rose to the level of

saturation. An EIIP of 5.0, intense frustration, found saturation in Question 2-3. "I agree with

William Carey's statement that doing God's work, God's way, never lacks God's supply,"

mentioned by Participant "H," was perhaps the clearest expression of their general view of debt

from a scriptural perspective. The question that achieved the least saturation was probably

Question 2-4. When asked if debt was an issue of Christian liberty, the participants often

responded with little reference to the concept of Christian liberty (see Table 6, Research

Question 2-4 in the raw data sets). This apparent dialectic indifference generated sub-codes of

"commandment" and "irrelevant." Reflection on this question from this researcher was included in the Evaluation of the Research Design section (pp. 184-185). The meaning unit in Question 2-5 coalesced around the saturated idea that there was little difference between participants' personal and professional views on debt. Both 2-4 and 2-5 were rated a 2.0 on the EIIP.

Research question 3. Research Question 3 asked participants to describe the influence of ACSI as it pertained to their use of debt. This researcher designed Question 3-1 in part to double back on Research Questions 1-2, 1-3, and 1-4 (see this researcher's discussion of participant response bias above). He wanted to see if there was a triangulation of similarity in responses from participants as they answered a similar, but still different, question in the contextual framework of the role of ACSI. In preparing to move into questions about ACSI, the participants described not just the views and values of their stakeholders, but now their actual influence over the decision-making process.

The stakeholder influence sub-codes for Question 3-1 were "a little" and "a lot" (see Appendix A). The overwhelming meaning unit here was "a little," with an EIIP of 2.0. This initial triangulation of data sets suggested to this researcher that the participants had a valid level of consistency (see p. 176 for additional discussion of validity in the Findings section). The saturation of a meaning unit for Question 3-2 was found in the sub-code of "slight," as participants nearly uniformly found that ACSI guidelines were almost irrelevant to them. This researcher found the same to be true for Question 3-3. Complying with ACSI's guidelines merited a sub-code meaning unit of "marginal" usefulness when discussing the "ACSI compliance" code. A high level of uniform saturation was found in Question 3-4, as participants found they had a meaning unit sub-code of "negligible" in reference to their interaction with ACSI. The responses from several participants went so far as to rank their interaction as "not as flexible as it should have been" from participant "A," "they really don't" from participant "E,"

and "actually zero interaction" from participant "I." Their commentary, their tone of voice, and perceived lack of interest in 3-2, 3-3, and 3-4 consistently ranked at 1.5 on the EIIP. This ranking reflected their sense of "indifference" mixed with "calmness" to the idea of future involvement as well. A sense of saturation into an overriding meaning unit was also difficult to inductively uncover for Question 3-5. This researcher found that when he asked the participants what they thought ACSI should be doing with/for them, the participants ranged from an EIIP of 1 to an EIIP of 2, "indifference" and "calmness," to land at 1.5 on the EIIP. Thus the sub-code of "disregarded" took priority over "well-regarded" (see Appendix A). None of the participants conveyed any strong sense of enthusiasm, irritation, or frustration with ACSI. Prior to conducting the interviews this researcher had wondered if there would be more of these latter emotions rather than indifference and calmness. In a sense, the meaning unit that achieved saturation here was the lack of uniform clarity about what ACSI should have been doing.

Research question 4. Research Question 4 asked participants to describe how debt impacted their long-term plans for their school. Whereas Research Questions 1, 2, 3, and 5 dealt with the past and present, Research Question 4 dealt with the participants' present and future. In a general sense, this researcher found a greater deal of emotional intensity in this series of questions than in any other. Sub-codes shifted to such emotionally driven descriptions as "reduced/strained, wonderful, pressured, peaceful, and sleepless" (see Appendix A for the full list of sub-codes). Replies to this researcher's follow-up question were also relatively passionate; even though these replies were confined to emailed insights (see Table 12, pp. 151-153).

Perhaps the most significant difference in participants' opinions was evidenced in Question 4-1. Two dialectic meaning units were clearly uncovered. Debt was either seen within a meaning unit sub-coded as "accounted for" or as "ever present," which merged into a code of "strategic planning" (see Appendix A). As it pertained to future planning, those with no debt

demonstrated "enthusiasm," ranked as a 3 on the EIIP. Participants with debt overall

demonstrated considerable "irritation and/or frustration" which resulted in a strong 5 on the EIIP.

There was no scale of 1, "indifference," to be found in any of their overall responses. Therefore

this researcher collectivized their composite EIIP score for Question 4-1 at 4.5.

The responses to Question 4-2 were curious to this researcher, in the sense that he

expected the emotions expressed in Question 4-1 to continue into Question 4-2. But that did not

occur. Even those participants with little to no institutional debt reflected a sense of

"indifference" bordering on a sense of resignation that having to pay the bills seemed to

engender, resulting in a sub-code of "minimal impact." Comments from participant "D," such as

"it just means we have to raise enough money...we don't have to raise money to pay a

mortgage..." reflected a saturated sub-code meaning unit of "reduced/strained" in the topical

code of "Annual Budget" (see Appendix A).

The participants were generally the most descriptive in their responses to Questions 4-3,

4-4, and 4-5. Question 4-3 signaled a significant emotional reaction with an EIIP ranking of a 3,

"enthusiasm," as the meaning unit of "comforted" gained clear saturation in the data set.

Comments like "I think we are thankful for what the Lord has done" from participant "B," "it

means that I have to do this by faith..." from participant "C," "I know God is going to provide"

from participant "F," and "I have seen God...work" from participant "J" were all clear examples

that the participants rejoiced in "God's faithfulness" which became a clearer codebook code.

This researcher found differences in the contextual and conversational circumstances

between those participants with and those without institutional debt. But the meaning unit

revolving around the importance of prayer was clearly saturated in the responses to Question 4-4,

with an EIIP of 3. For an overall example consider participant "G's" statement to "pray more and

worry less" and participant "I," who stated "God won...I may not be able to pray on the

spot...they are praying...and that won the war." Nearly all of the participants stressed the importance of prayer one way or another, with both meaning units sub-coded as "pressured" and/or "peaceful" (see Appendix A).

Responses to Question 4-5 ranked 2 on the EIIP. This indicated to this researcher that stress, that sense of endless worry, had far less of an overall impact than he might have anticipated, other than participant "H's" comment, as follows: "You have a heart attack for a reason...maybe the stress." But most of the participants commented something similar to participant "E," who said, "I don't really stress over it."

This researcher wondered if the response bias of "social desirability effect" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, p. 170) was possibly at work in the answers to this question. After all, the New Testament clearly equated behavioral worry with sin (Matthew 6:34, NASB). Part of this researcher's semi-structured research question follow-up was thus designed to examine this issue (see Table 12, 151-153). In Table 12 it seemed clearer that stress had been an underlying issue indicating an overall meaning unit coding of "ever-present" that saturated their conversations.

Research question 5. The emotions that had risen up the Emotional Intensity Index Protocol in Research Question 4 dropped dramatically for Research Question 5. Research Question 5 had asked the participants to reflect on the role of their schools' institutional guidelines regarding the use of debt. Apparently there was nothing like a discussion about bylaws to dry out the eyes, as "indifference," a 1 on EIIP, ruled the vast majority of these participant responses throughout all the interviews.

Responses to Question 5-1, ranked as a 1 on EIIP, were saturated by the bylaws being "peripheral" in their importance to the participants. The same meaning unit held true for Question 5-2, also ranked as 1 on EIIP, in the sense that participants considered their governing documents as nearly "non-existent" in their relative day-to-day importance. Another ranking of 1

on EIIP, found that the meaning unit in Question 5-3 reflected the thoughts of the majority of participants, who said it was important to have both sub-codes of "accountability" and "oversight" (see Appendix A).

Question 5-4 was developed by this researcher to inductively circle back around to the culture of the school found in earlier research questions (see 1-2 and 3-1 above). The saturated meaning unit in this question, ranked as 2 on EIIP, was perhaps best illustrated by participant "E," who stated, "we do it by getting the right people in the room" and participant "F's" statement that "we talk through things." In that sense the participants generally tended to voice a sub-code of "conversational" over the occasional "controversial" sub-code.

This researcher intended Question 5-5 to ask the participants to synthesize and summarize their thoughts from Question's 5-1 through 5-4 and to reflect back on 2-3. But, as it was the last formal interview question at the end of an hour-long conversation, the question was perhaps more nuanced that it should have been and this researcher found that most of the participants were either calm or perhaps just too tired. Thus he found that 5-5 ranked as 1.75 on EIIP. There was a clear sense of saturation, or meaning unit, into either "insignificant" or "significant" (see sub-codes in Appendix A) from Question 5-5. This researcher interpreted this clear distinction as a saturated meaning unit based on its end result. In other words, the participants generally demonstrated the most wide ranging and varied interpretation of the question. But they all did find the culture of their school important and improving. Perhaps this observation was best illustrated by a quote from "H," who said, "The spiritual principles continue to govern every decision and hopefully practically too" and "J," who said, "Our school has a very biblical, healthy, view of...institutional/financial guidelines...and because of that...it has brought peace." Given the highly varied interpretations of the question this researcher further addressed Question 5-5 in the Evaluation of Research Design, pp. 184-185.

Emotional intensity index protocol analysis. The preceding section included this researcher's subjective evaluations (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, p. 82) of the emotional intensity of the words spoken by the participants as they answered their interview questions. This researcher intended the EIIP rankings to give him a collective sense of the emotional ebb and flow of all the interviews (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, p. 82). He used numeric descriptors because, at the end this section, he wanted to visually uncover and reflect on the emotional ebb and flow of the interview while engaged in "epoche" (see Chapter Three, Collection Methods, pp. 87-89, and Moustakas, 1994, p. 87). Essentially, this researcher wanted his analysis to inductively, relatively, and independently uncover part of the emotional essence (Creswell, 2007, p. 62) of the entirety of the interview phenomena. Therefore, the overall experience found in the raw data sets has been visually transcribed into and described by the graph found in Figure 1 (see below).

Figure 1: Emotional Intensity Index Protocol
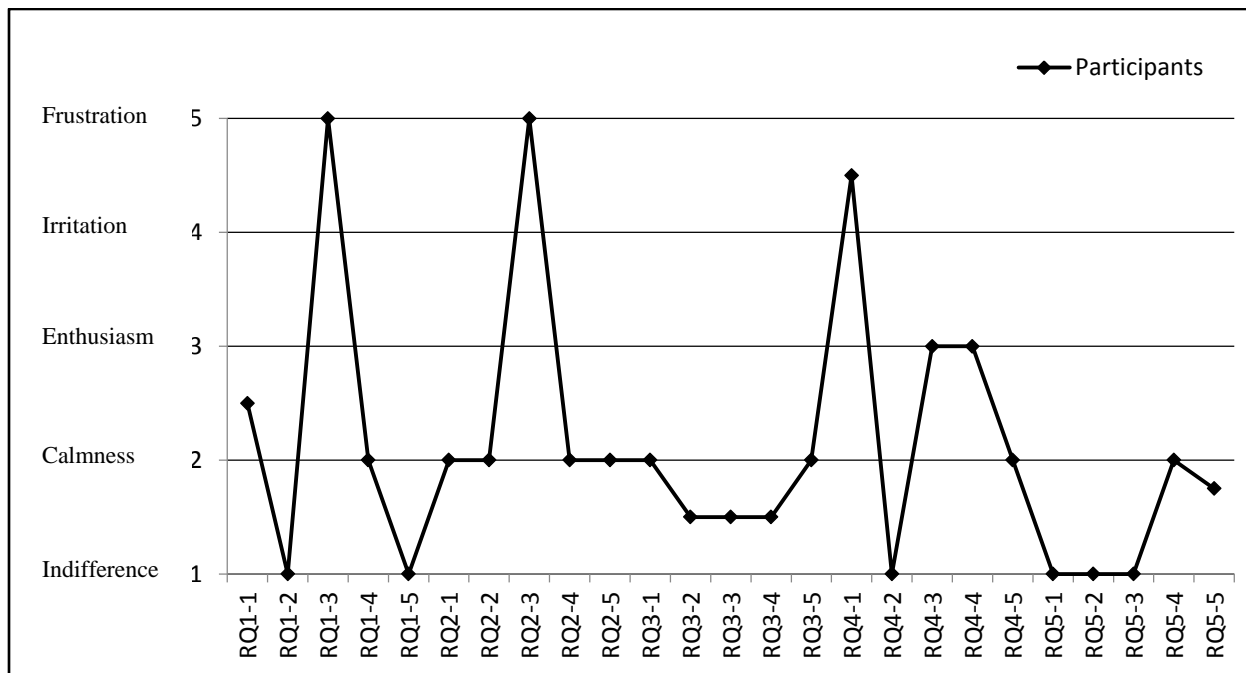
In sum, Figure 1 revealed a commonality of experience wherein most of the time the interviews were spent in an emotionally calm state. RQ1 and RQ2, dealing with the participants'

personal and professional interactions with debt, apparently created the most emotional volatility. RQ3 seemed to plateau in an emotional sense as participants dialogued with the researcher about their interaction with ACSI. Volatility returned as participants discussed their views on mortgage debt in RQ4. Most of the interviews bottomed out, in terms of emotional indifference to the questions, as the interviews wrapped up, with a discussion about the participants' institutional guidelines in RQ5.

Given the commonality of the emotional experiences by the participants with each question, this researcher was inclined to believe that changing the order of the questions would not have prompted different emotional responses. This was a relevant observation, in the mind of this researcher, because it seemed to authenticate his analysis of data saturation. It should be noted that the raw data from the formal follow-up interview question (see Table 12, 151-153) was not included in Figure 1 because this data was emailed and not subject to verbal analysis.

Data saturation. Saturation, in phenomenological research, was typically achieved when adding new participants did not add new insights or did not change the direction of the conclusions (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013, p. 11). As the field of phenomenology had not yet established clear and unequivocal guidelines for establishing saturation (Marshall et al., 2013, p. 11), it was left to this researcher to rationalize a rational level for saturation.

As the above five research question subsections and the EIIP analysis suggested, this researcher found that saturation had been substantially reached in 23 of the 25 questions. Since the participants were largely, conceptually, rhetorically, and emotionally consistent in 23 of the 25 questions this meant that a collective saturation level of 92% had been achieved. This researcher deemed this consensus level high enough to ensure that a sufficient sample had been reached (Marshall et al., 2013, p.13) to base his findings upon, especially given their widely differing contextual experiences with debt (Creswell, 2007, p. 126).

Step Four: Textural/Structural Description Data Analysis Process

Step Four of the data analysis process in this phenomenological study involved this researcher's conceptualization of his textural/structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994, p. 117). Essentially this meant he inductively explored the participants' contextual framework. Each participant interview was observed from a holistic perspective. To enhance this study's overall validity this researcher applied "member checking" to this section (Creswell, 2007, pp. 207-209).

Essentially, this researcher wrote a first draft of each of the following subsections, sent the relevant subsection to the applicable participant, and asked for their feedback to evaluate his contextual summaries. As the participants responded, this researcher then adapted their comments into his holistic textural descriptions below. Wherever the participant asked to have a noteworthy modification made, this researcher noted the modification below with an italicized font and included a parenthetical explanation. Most of the participants responded that what this researcher had written was fine and therefore no further notations were made to those descriptions. It should be noted that textual details that might have compromised a participant's anonymity were intentionally omitted. This researcher viewed confidentiality as more important than linguistic style, so even pronouns like "he" and "she" were avoided where possible.

Before this researcher could present the participant's contexts, his phenomenological model required that he first bracket his prior experience (Creswell, 2007, p. 60). Thus, this researcher was forced to begin this section with his own description. His views on beginning this way were further addressed in the Evaluation of Research Design at the end of this chapter.

Rich/thick description of this researcher's interviews. Preparation for nine of the ten telephone interviews involved setting up an interview space in the basement of his parents' home about four miles from his own. As odd as that sounded, the reasons for this location were numerous. He could not conduct the interviews from his places of employment without

potentially jeopardizing participants' confidentiality. He could not use the comfort of his own home to conduct interviews because he refused to have internet service at that location.

Essentially this researcher set up a card table in the basement, behind a closed door in a nearly soundproof back bedroom, with a laptop and a notebook. He set up a microphone that recorded each interview with the speaker setting on the phone turned on. The telephone interviews generally occurred around approximately 4:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, taking into account the various time zones included in the MAR-ACSI research sample. These interviews typically occurred after this researcher' day of work teaching high school students.

To ensure the absolute anonymity of the participants, no one was allowed in the entire basement before or during or after the interview, including the time this researcher spent setting up and tearing down the equipment. This researcher felt anxious prior to each interview, so he prayed and stretched to prepare his mind and body to be completely attentive to the participants during the interview. As each interview concluded he thanked the participants for their participation. He also thanked the Lord. Lastly, he saved each interview as a WAV file to his secure, portable, hard drive.

Rich/thick description of participant A's interview. In sum, participant "A" had been a ~~principal~~ *the head of school* (descriptor preferred by participant "A," personal communication, October 14, 2019) for seven years at the school. "A" had no prior experience in school leadership but a lot in business. When "A" took over the school it was deeply in debt and struggled to meet its financial obligations. With a current student body count of 1,300 and a $14 million dollar budget, the remaining debt on this school was $670,000. Participant "A" had not had a role in the original decision-making process to incur the debt. But "A" did have a hand in implementing a *comprehensive fundraising* (text added by Participant "A," personal communication, October 14, 2019) plan that hoped to rid the school of it within two years from the date of the interview. In

terms of RQ1, "A" overall answered the question in a way that indicated a desire to avoid using debt again. But, if debt were deemed necessary, it was all about funding growth so long as the debt margin was manageable. "A's" overall response to RQ2, a view of debt from a scriptural perspective, suggested the importance of good stewardship and wise management in order to spread the gospel. RQ3, which asked about the participant's relationship with ACSI, was one of due diligence regarding reaccreditation. "A's" response to RQ4 suggested to this researcher that managing the school's debt restructuring required intense leadership at least for the past five years. Participant "A" experienced a sense of peace because of the Lord's calling on "A's" life to be there. "A" experienced this peace even in times of uncertainty in part because there was a strong sense of focus and mission. Regarding RQ5, "A" remarked that there was not much written about debt in the bylaws, etc. and that the culture of the school had improved over time because of efforts to be transparent with stakeholders.

Rich/thick description of participant B's interview. In sum, participant "B" had thirty years of leadership with a student body count of 251 and a budget of $2 million. "B's" school had no mortgage. "B's" view on RQ1 was that debt was a bad idea, and the school's stakeholders largely held the same opinion. "B" did not have the systemic authority to incur debt for the school. For RQ2, "B" characterized the Bible as being opposed to debt. Debt could be incurred within the context of Christian liberty so long as it was used wisely and paid off quickly. For RQ3, "B" found that the school had little involvement with ACSI beyond complying with an annual form. "B's" emphasis in answering RQ4 centered on the importance of gratitude toward God for the school's financial circumstances and that finances must constantly be managed wisely. "B" suggested a prayerful hedge of protection made life less stressful. "B's" school was overseen by a church and the church's governing documents. There were financial procedures in place but nothing specifically in print about the use of debt. "B" concluded the interview

emphasizing the need to be a Christ-centered school focused on the Word.

Rich/thick description of participant C's interview. In sum, participant "C" had six years of experience at the school with 625 students and a $4.7 million budget. The current mortgage was $1.25 million with sixteen years of an original twenty to go. The Board had made the final decision to acquire the debt. In response to RQ1, "C" stressed the need to be able to use debt strategically to move the school forward. "C" suggested that the Bible did not condemn the use of debt with an emphasis on wise management for RQ2. For example, having debt on depreciating items was foolish but debt on property that appreciated was wiser. As related to RQ3, "C" interacted with ACSI largely through its accreditation program. In terms of RQ4, "C" emphasized that trusting God meant doing wise things with money and that God did not reward foolishness. "C" had a sense of peace over the school's debt plan. "C" ~~was more likely to lose sleep over students/families with financial difficulties than to lose sleep over the school's mortgage~~ said he *would lose more sleep over never being able to minister to* [a] *poorer family than I would over a manageable mortgage* (text preferred by participant "C," personal communications, October 15, 2019). As it related to RQ5, "C" said that the school's governing documents required an annual review of debt but no rules about any particular amount.

Rich/thick description of participant D's interview. In sum, participant "D" had five years of leadership experience at the school with 691 current students and $5.1 million budget. The school not only had no mortgage but had no debt since the late 1940s. "D" had no role in acquiring any debt because the school had no debt to begin with. In answering RQ1, "D" stressed that half of the stakeholders were fine with debt and the other half strongly opposed it, with few people in the middle on the issue. "D" noted that borrowers don't have the same degree of freedom as those who were debt-free in response to RQ2. "D" indicated that to borrow meant to presume upon the will of God for the future; a bad idea at best. "D" did not interact much at all

with ACSI in response to RQ3. In response to RQ4, "D's" previous schools had had mortgages but now life was less stressful in that regard at this current school. "D" indicated that the school's governing documents had little to say about debt per se in response to RQ5.

Rich/thick description of participant E's interview. In sum, participant "E" had seven years of experience at this school with a student count of 602 and budget of $4.5 million. The $1.8 million mortgage was acquired to build a new gym. The school was ten years into a twenty-year repayment plan. "E" had no role in acquiring that mortgage. "E" saw the debt as a hindrance that meant fewer students could receive scholarships when answering RQ1. For RQ2, "E" said that the Bible portrayed debt as unwise, a form of slavery, and a presumption on God's provision. With RQ3, "E" found that ACSI was a source of advice, *teacher professional development* (text added by "E," personal communication, October 14, 2019), and practical application, but not particularly relevant at this time. "E's" response to RQ4 was that debt hindered the school's four year plan to increase teachers' salaries to at least 75% of the local public school market. The school's governing documents were portrayed as guidelines and boundaries in terms of RQ5. "E" suggested that the school was strong and could do better in terms of debt.

Rich/thick description of participant F's interview. In sum, participant "F" was the newest principal interviewed by this researcher, taking the job within the past year at the time of this interview. "F's" school had 397 students and an annual budget of approximately $3 million. It had a remaining debt of $195,000 scheduled to be paid off in mid-2020. "F" had no role in the acquisition of the current debt. For RQ1, "F" characterized the school as neither adverse nor excited about debt, but of the belief that it could be used if managed well. When answering RQ2, "F" suggested that the Bible does not say debt was wrong but that, if it were done, it should be done with good stewardship. "F" answered RQ3 by saying that ACSI had a huge, positive,

influence at the school since it had recently gone through an accreditation process. With RQ4 in mind, "F" said that God provided, but that worrying was a recurring issue. When "F" addressed the impact of the school's governing documents, the guidelines were clear that debt could not be acquired in an amount that potentially jeopardized the fiscal health of the school.

Rich/thick description of participant G's interview. In sum, participant "G" had been in the position of leadership for two years with a student count of 90 and no mortgage. "G" had no role in the school's current lack of a mortgage. In response to RQ1, "G" was quite clear that going into debt was not only not an option but also a bad idea. That said, "G" suggested that Scripture did not condemn debt outright in terms of RQ2. The Bible provided principles of living but not firm regulations in that area. For RQ3, "G" found that the school rarely interacted with ACSI beyond complying with accreditation standards. "G" responded to RQ4 by suggesting that having no debt liberated the school to be more active in the community and that there were still plenty of bills to pay nonetheless. With RQ5, "G" indicated that the school's bylaws were largely silent on the issue of debt.

Rich/thick description of participant H's interview. In sum, the interview with participant "H" provided the only exception to this researcher's standard operating procedure. "H's" school was within driving distance of this researcher and at "H's" request, the interview occurred in "H's" office behind closed doors after school hours. "H" had six years of experience at this school with a student count of 190 and an annual budget of $1.1 million. The school had a $450,000 mortgage with a new ten-year plan to pay it off. "H" played a role in managing the recent refinancing of the mortgage. For RQ1, "H" found that the school's stakeholders had grown opposed to debt given its past financial challenges. For RQ2, "H" was quite clear that the Bible only authorized one kind of debt, and that it was the debt of love. "H" suggested that doing God's work, God's way, would not lack God's supply, but that sin could wipe it out. In response

to RQ3, "H" found that ACSI had been quite helpful with navigating the recent refinancing effort. "H" answered that, in response to RQ4, God had been faithful to fully fund the school with last minute, seemingly random, donations used to meet monthly commitments during last year's very difficult fiscal challenges. "H" said that the school's governing documents required that all debt had to be authorized and approved by the board in response to RQ5.

Rich/thick description of participant I's interview. In sum, participant "I" had been principal of the school for seven years with a current student body size of 150 and a $1.2 million budget. The school had been debt-free until a recent expansion project. The current loan, not a mortgage, was a $50,000 *bank loan and $850,000 personal and organizational loans* (text added by participant "I", personal communication, October 15, 2019). A recent fundraising campaign had generated $2.65 million in donations to pay for new land. A planned $16 million *for phase II of the* (text added by participant "I," personal communication, October 15, 2019) campaign was planned to begin after repaying the loan. "I" said, in response to RQ1, that although the school did not like debt, they were in a "special season" where debt was more possible. "I" also remarked that donations slowed once it became more widely known that the school board had a backup plan to borrow money if fundraising were not entirely successful. For "I", the Bible said that people in need ought to be helped by the wealthy without an expectation of repayment. "I" suggested that financial giving was a command found in Scripture with the caveat that the giver ought to be discerning. "I" found ACSI to be an underutilized resource in response to RQ3. When answering RQ4, "I" indicated that "I's" prayer life grew dramatically over the past couple of years. "I" commented that "I" was plugged into the source of real power: God. When addressing RQ5, "I" said the school was currently reworking their governance documents.

Rich/thick description of participant J's interview. In sum, participant "J" had 27 total years of experience at the church-run school with a student body count of 519 and a $4.7 million

budget. The school owed the church $228,000. This amount was about to be completely repaid in mid-2020. "J" inherited the debt in question when transitioning to the position of principal. "J" was quite adamant that the school would not incur debt again in response to RQ1. "J" suggested numerous scriptures in response to RQ2 to include verses advising against co-signing and that God supplies all needs. "J" commented that debt was a form of bondage and that the school should pay as it goes. With RQ3, "J" found that the school did not interact much with ACSI beyond submitting an annual financial report. For RQ4, "J" remarked that the school finally had a financial surplus after weathering years of difficult restructuring. "J" also discussed the crucial importance of prayer and that stress sometime led to restless nights. In response to RQ5, "J" said that the school and church had recently worked through redefining and clarifying their relationship and that both had emerged stronger and more unified as a result.

Follow-up question data description and depiction. The raw data found in this researcher's follow-up question (see Table 12, pp. 151-153) could not have been fully integrated into the rich/thick descriptions above because this table's data came chronologically after the conclusion of those live interviews. Therefore this researcher inductively developed four interpretive categories to explore their follow-up comments as follows: 1) Strongly Opposed, 2) Opposed, 3) In Favor, and 4) Strongly In Favor. These categories were inductively uncovered based on this researcher's interpretation of all ten of the participants' views of debt over the course of their employment in their current position (see Table 12, pp. 151-153).

Participants whose comments seemed consistently "Strongly Opposed" to debt included "A, F, G, H," and "J." This researcher noted that the rich/thick description of "F's" interview and "F's" response to the follow-up question comments were slightly different in terms of a point of view about debt. This researcher interpreted the difference to further reflection and therefore used the follow-up emailed response as the basis for "F's" inclusion in the "Strongly Opposed"

category. For a representative example that justified these observations, consider "H," who wrote the following: "I saw the debt as a huge obstacle for the financial health of the school."

Participants whose comments seemed consistently "Opposed" to debt included "D" and "E." For a representative example that justified these observations, consider "E," who wrote the following: "Debt to some extant hinders long-term sustainability."

Participants whose comments seemed consistently "In Favor" of debt included "B" and to some extent "C." For a representative example that justified these observations, consider "C," who wrote the following: "That was debt I could live with."

Participants whose comments seemed consistently "Strongly in Favor" of debt included just "I." For a representative example that justified this observation, consider "I's" comment. "I's" school actively anticipated the acquisition of new debt, as follows: "Now…the school is in debt for the first time, we are working on clearing the debt by the end of this year. Through this experience, I pray that God will strengthen our faith to totally rely on Him and His provision when we launch phase II…with a much bigger goal…So that the world might know that He is God."

Figure 2 visually described and depicted these four categories. It should be noted that, theologically, there existed no neutral response in Figure 2 in order to have been consistent with the Biblical view on neutrality (Matthew 12:30-32, ESV). The colors used to represent data in Figure 2 below were chosen simply to reflect North American colloquial references to debt. For example "in the black" referred to being debt free.

Figure 2: Participant's Long-Term Point of View on Use of Debt
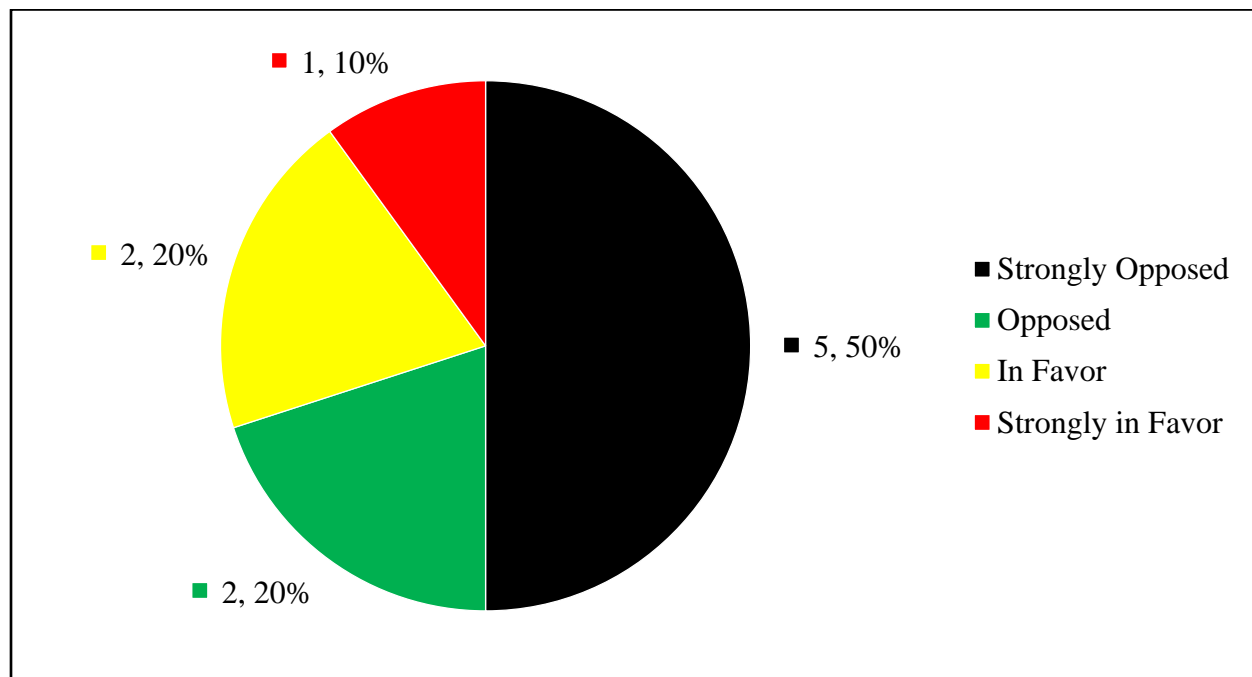
Introduction to the Findings

This section of the dissertation described the five major findings of this dissertation. Creswell (2007) called this section of a phenomenological study the description of the "essence of the phenomenon" (p. 62) and the descriptions within it the "long paragraph" (p. 159). Alternatively, Smith et al. (2009) referred to this section as the description of themes (pp. 92-96) that contain patterns and relationships (see Chapter Three, pp. 98-99). Seidman (2013) called for exploring themes as well (pp. 119-121). This researcher's codebook merged these two terms, essence and theme, into "Thematic Essence" (see Appendix A).

This researcher inductively uncovered ten emergent thematic essences from his data analysis above. From RQ1 emerged the two themes of "Views" and "Values." From RQ2 emerged the themes of "Stewardship" and "Discernment." From RQ3 the two themes that emerged were "Oversight" and "Accreditation." From RQ4 the two themes that emerged were "Fiscal Impact" and "Spiritual Impact." From RQ5 there emerged the two themes of "Board

Governance" and "Bylaws Governance." These were all recorded in this researcher's codebook under the column labeled "Thematic Essence" (see Appendix A).

The five findings below were conceptually filtered through five validation strategies to determine their overall accuracy and phenomenological trustworthiness. The filters were as follows: 1) Reflectivity 2) Transferability, 3) Confirmability, 4) Dependability, and 5) Credibility (see Chapter Three, pp. 102-105, for a methodological discussion of each term). This researcher used a different validation strategy for each finding. He did this in order to maximize his dissertation's overall trustworthiness.

First Finding, RQ1 (Reflectivity Filter): Views and Values

The collective data and analysis gleaned from RQ1, inductively filtered through the validation strategy of reflectivity, uncovered two compatible thematic essences: 1) Views and 2) Values. Using a reflectivity filter required this researcher to first consider his own biases as he conceptualized his first finding. To do this he considered his own preconceived views on his codes, listed herein as follows: Debt, Parents' Point of View, Governing Boards, Stakeholders' Point of View, and Control/Oversight (see Appendix A). This researcher concluded that he likely would have had conceptual preferences for these positions if he were employed as a principal. The fact that he was not in that actual position helped him become more open-minded in accepting and evaluating the participants' concrete responses. Also, this researcher kept in the forefront of his thoughts the admonition from Scripture that one perspective typically sounded correct until another perspective was offered (Proverbs 18:17, NIV).

This researcher found that the Thematic Essence of the "Views" and "Values" of the participants could have been perceived and interpreted as two parts of an integrated understanding. Collectively, their personal views on debt and their views of stakeholders' opinions about debt were similar to, and often grounded in, their schools' unique circumstances.

Schools with institutional debt had principals more or less comfortable with having that debt.

Perhaps the best representative expression of this essence could be found in quotes from two participants. Participant "I's" response to RQ1-1 (Table 5) was as follows: "I, by nature, do not like having any debt...our board feels the same way...but I think this is a special season...I personally think we activated too soon (the new loan) because once we activated...donation money stopped." With that statement, though, also came the clear value on the part of the majority of participants to eventually become debt free. For the essence of this point of view consider the following quote from participant "A," who said the following in response to RQ1-2 (Table 5): "Because we'd been there it's going to be a long time...even if there's great financial reason to do it...to enter back into that fray." For the participants, debt was something ultimately undesirable and something that they actively sought to control through oversight and eventually eliminate from their budget, even as circumstances sometimes warranted its strategic use.

Second Finding, RQ2 (Transferability Filter): Stewardship and Discernment

The collective data and analysis gleaned from RQ2 inductively filtered through the validation strategy of transferability uncovered two compatible Thematic Essences, as follows: 1) Stewardship and 2) Discernment. Ultimately, transferability is a judgment call made by you, the reader, to evaluate these findings and apply them, if needed, to your particular circumstances (see Chapter Three, pp. 104-105, for a discussion of Korstjens and Moser, 2018). As a validation strategy in this dissertation, transferability was conceived by this researcher as most applicable when applied to Scriptural principles about debt presented by the participants.

This researcher found that participants believed in the essence of stewardship and discernment as it pertained to their Scriptural understanding of debt. This researcher found that the most common stewardship principle suggested by participants was that the borrower was slave to the lender. This stewardship principle was found most succinctly expressed in Proverbs

22:7 (NASB). By referencing this principle the participants seemed to claim overall that institutional debt was not always the wisest course of action from a Biblical perspective.

Perhaps the best representative expression of this essence could be found in a quote from participant "H." In response to RQ2-3 (Table 6), "H" said the following: "I agree with William Carey's statement that doing God's work, God's way, never lacks God's supply." Discernment was called for by the participants in terms of Christian liberty and the compatibility of personal and professional views about debt. This researcher collectively interpreted the participants' comments to mean that in most cases if debt was allowed, the principal had to carefully discern if debt was the wisest course of action for the long-term interests of the school. In terms of transferability this researcher would likely have been hard pressed to find a reputable, conservative, evangelical scholar who would have denied the transferability of the essence of the participant's point of view regarding Scripture in this finding.

It should be duly noted here that Creswell (2014) suggested that transferability need not be a strategy used in qualitative research at all (p. 204). In fact Creswell stressed the unique "particularity" of a qualitative research study rather than its overall generalizability (p. 204). This researcher found it difficult to rationalize both of these conceptually incompatible, and perhaps even opposing, philosophical positions. But he would also say that the unique circumstances of each participant's thick description may make it difficult for a reader to see this study as a mirror of their own experientially derived understanding of the usage of institutional debt.

Third Finding, RQ3 (Confirmability Filter): Oversight and Accreditation

The collective data and analysis gleaned from the totality of content RQ3, inductively filtered through the validation strategy of confirmability, uncovered two compatible Thematic Essences as follows: 1) Oversight and 2) Accreditation. The themes in this finding were developed from the participants' comments about their interaction with ACSI. In terms of

confirmability, this research developed a transparent audit trail of information available to the reader to authenticate this finding (see Chapter Three, p. 104, for a discussion of Korstjens and Moser, 2018, pp. 121-122).

The audit trail validation strategy for this finding began above with the content provided in the "Compilation Protocol and Measures" section (p. 106), and most particularly with the "Question Field Testing Protocol" information (pp. 106-109). The audit trail continued in the "Demographic and Sample Data" that contained the eleven tables of raw data sets articulated by the participants in their interviews. This researcher's codebook found in Table 13 (see Appendix A) contained the interpreted sub-codes and codes for the significant statements, meaning units, and textural/structural descriptions. The Appendices at the end of this dissertation included the entire process of recruiting and interviewing participants.

In short, the reader and the next potential researcher had everything available to them that were available to this researcher. The only exceptions from the audit trail were the participants' identifying information, full transcripts of the interviews, actual institutional bylaws, and website addresses. These were necessarily excluded for anonymity and confidentiality reasons consistent with the policies and procedures of the Institutional Review Board of Liberty University,

Again, this researcher found that the participants believed in the Thematic Essence of 1) Oversight and 2) Accreditation (see Appendix A). In principle and in practice the participants engaged ACSI in terms of its oversight and accreditation through compliance with its guidelines. All of the schools involved in this study were members of ACSI in good standing and were either accredited or recently reaccredited. Or, the schools were in the process of becoming one or the other at the time the interviews were conducted.

Perhaps the best representative expression of this Thematic Essence could be found in a quote from participant "F," who said the following when answering RQ3-3 (Table 7): "I know

that my board values their accreditation and we will abide by those guidelines." As the raw data, meaning units, significant statements, and textural/structural audit trail suggested, the majority of participants had not intentionally interacted with ACSI about institutional debt. Nor had ACSI intentionally engaged the participants in a programmatic sense about institutional debt beyond accreditation and reaccreditation standards.

Fourth Finding, RQ4 (Dependability Filter): Fiscal Impact and Spiritual Impact

The collective data and analysis gleaned from the totality of content from RQ4, filtered through the validation strategy of dependability, uncovered two compatible Thematic Essences as follows: 1) Fiscal Impact and 2) Spiritual Impact. Dependability meant that this researcher used the "accepted standards" of his methodology (see Chapter Three, p. 104, for a discussion of Korstjens and Moser, 2018, p. 181). The standard bearer of recent transcendental phenomenological research was Moustakas (Creswell, 2008, p. 216). Creswell, as evidenced by this researcher's frequent in-text citations, was also a leading scholar of methodological design. The Christian Leadership in Education doctoral program of Liberty University, the Institutional Review Board of Liberty University, and the international level research department of the Association of Christian Schools International all gave this researcher their approval and permission to conduct the research for this dissertation in part based on his consistent use of accepted standards of transcendental phenomenology. See also Appendices B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, and J for additional information and details authenticating this researcher's claim of methodological researcher design dependability.

This researcher found that the participants of this study believed in the Thematic Essence of Fiscal Impact and Spiritual Impact. In terms of the Fiscal Impact of debt, the participants collectively evinced a belief that debt impacted and in most cases inhibited their schools' strategic planning and annual budget planning processes. As referenced in the commentary on

the raw data and saturated meaning units, most of the participants would have preferred to have greater fund balances, greater reserve funds, and greater scholarship funds rather than have a monthly mortgage payment. Even the participants with manageable debt loads viewed those loads as inhibiting such agenda items as capital expansion, deferred maintenance, and/or improving teacher compensation. The Thematic Essence of the Spiritual Impact of institutional debt was characterized by participants' references to God's abiding faithfulness, an increased prayer life, and varying degrees of relative stress.

Perhaps the best representative expression of this essence could be found in a quote from participant "J's" answer to RQ4-3 (Table 8), as follows: "I have seen God in tangible ways...God did not necessarily love the debt...but not under judgment...the biblical principle is if you got it you are bound...if you don't have to have it, don't (get it)...watching it unfold... miraculous ....my faith is so much stronger...I have seen God...work...it is marvelous." "J" continued in RQ4-4 (Table 8) as follows: "Oh yeah! I got the callouses (laughter) I am not going to lie." Apparently "J" had spent many days and nights in prayer. This researcher perceived that all of the participants thought they were going about doing God's work in God's way. None of the participants' contextual paths were identical but all of the participants sought to serve the Lord faithfully and all of them thought they felt the Lord continue to richly bless their efforts.

Fifth Finding, RQ5 (Credibility Filter): Board Governance and Bylaws Governance

The collective data and analysis gleaned from the totality of content from RQ5 (Table 9), filtered through the validation strategy of credibility, uncovered two compatible Thematic Essences as follows: 1) Board Governance and 2) Bylaws Governance. A key component of establishing credibility in terms of validity was to use triangulation in order to authenticate the accuracy of this researcher's understanding of the data and establishing findings (see Chapter Three, pp. 102-103, for a discussion of Smith et al., 2009, pp. 52-53). This researcher used

triangulation to ensure the credibility of this fifth finding. The three points of his research triangulation were as follows: 1) interviews, 2) school governance documents, and 3) school websites. Essentially, after concluding the interview with the participant, each of them emailed this researcher a copy of their school governance documents variously referred to as charters, bylaws, policies, and procedures (see Table 10, p. 149). These documents were then compared to the participants' various statements and then compared, when applicable, to publicly available information relevant to RQ5 on their websites (see Table 11, p. 150). In this way, this researcher gained insight from not just one or two related sources but from three different conceptually connected sources. Then he compared and contrasted the three in order to gain greater interpretive insight into their answers for Research Question 5.

This researcher found that the participants' interviews, board and bylaw governance, and relevant pages of their schools' websites matched overall. Participants almost seemed to believe that the board and the bylaws operated in different spheres of influence than those guiding their use of institutional debt. Generally the participants' bylaws did not emphasize their debt management strategies. The governing documents that gave guidelines which outlined the role of the participants' school boards were of a more practical and hands-on nature. Nor did most of the participants' websites emphasize their schools' institutional debt management strategies beyond fundraising efforts and summary financial reports. Only one school's website publicly highlighted their philosophy of being debt-free (see Table 11, p. 150, researcher's notes on "D").

Perhaps the best representative expression of this essence could be found in a quote from participant "E," who said, in response to RQ5-4 (Table 9, p.146): "We do it by getting the right people in the room...the finance committee is the ultimate authority on any type of conflict financially." Additionally the general perceived role of the bylaws governance of institutional debt was given much less day-to-day attention by the participants in a functional sense. This

point of view was perhaps best represented by a quote from "C" in response to RQ5-2, as follows: "I think their encouragement to us...to be fiscally responsible...I don't think we reference our governing documents much...but if we did they would be encouraging us to do what we already did." In other words, while bylaws created the systemic organization of the school, it was the board governance of institutional debt that most interacted and intersected with the professional lives of the participants.

Evaluation of the Research Design

In this section of Chapter Four this researcher presented an evaluation of the research design. This researcher organized two sets of evaluative criteria by which he reviewed his research design from start to finish. First, this researcher adopted and adapted Leedy and Ormrod's (2016) general "criteria for evaluating qualitative research" (p. 269-270). Second, this researcher adopted and adapted Creswell's "evaluation criteria" geared more particularly for phenomenology (2007, pp. 215-216, and 2014, pp. 203-204). This researcher explored this evaluation as follows: 1) General Evaluation of the Qualitative Research Design and 2) Specific Evaluation of the Phenomenological Research Design. But before he could describe this evaluation, this section first began with this researcher's reflective point of view (Creswell, 2007, p. 60), which discussed the totality of the research design as he reached the end of the research and writing phase of this dissertation.

Researcher's Reflectivity on his Research Design

Choosing a research design for the dissertation was a daunting task as this researcher faced a myriad of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods options. Given his topic and the inductive nature of his research interests and questions he decided on a qualitative approach. Then this researcher was faced with a nearly bewildering array of design options including, but not necessarily limited to, the following: 1) Narrative Research, 2) Grounded Theory, 3)

Ethnography, 4) Case Study, and 5) Phenomenology (Creswell, 2007, p. 10). During the course

of the Christian Leadership in Education program at Liberty University it became clear that

phenomenology was the research design most compatible with this researcher's interests, topic,

questions, and his intellectual strengths, weaknesses, and preferences.

This researcher was tempted to use this reflective section to simply vent his occasional

frustration with the research design but he decided against merely grumbling and complaining

(Philippians 2:14-16, NKJV). Rather, this section was used to interpret and evaluate the essence

of this researcher's use of the research design. The essence of his reflective evaluation was

divided into two parts as follows: 1) two conceptual strengths and weaknesses and 2) two

operational strengths and weaknesses.

First conceptual strength. In the opinion of this researcher, the first conceptual strength

featured when using a qualitative phenomenological research design was its semi-structured

ability to access and analyze the totality of the human experience in terms of noesis and noema

(Moustakas, 1994, p. 69). In other words, this design could effectively analyze reason and

emotion, facts and feelings, both socially and systemically (Moustakas, 1994, p. 69). This

researcher was interested in interacting with participants about their lived experience with

institutional debt. Interviews, the conceptual cornerstone of phenomenology, were absolutely

essential to inductively understand and interpret the essence of their experiences within their

professional and personal environments. Writing his interview questions based on his

interpretive research questions and providing those questions to the participants well ahead of the

time of the interviews enhanced this researcher's access to their rich/thick descriptions.

Second conceptual strength. From the literature it appeared to this researcher that

quantitative methods generally engendered a perceived greater respect and acceptance from the

academic community as compared to qualitative methods. However, the vast body of applicable

literature that gave organizational structure to qualitative methodology, and to phenomenological research design in particular, provided this researcher with the intellectual rigor necessary to justify its use.

The field of qualitative phenomenology has grown and matured dramatically since the relatively recent reinvention of phenomenology in the pioneering work of Moustakas (1994). Scholars like Creswell (2007, 2014), Hill et al. (2005), Korstjens and Moser (2018), Kvale (1996), Leedy and Ormrod (2016), Lester (1999), Luft and Overgaard (2013), Marshall and Rossman (2015), Marshall et al. (2013), Patton (1994), Roberts (2010), Seidman (2012), Sorsa et al. (2015), Smith et al. (2009), and Van Manen (2014, 2016) were but a few of the scholars who had developed and described a rigorous approach to phenomenological research design on par with any approach used in quantitative methods.

Not only had the descriptive nature of interview techniques improved since Moustakas (1994), but data analysis and validation strategies used to measure and affirm the general trustworthiness of the research design had improved as well. In sum, while there were still areas of minor theoretical disagreement about parts of the research design (Marshall et al., 2013) the overall approach had been well established in the field.

First operational weakness. Despite the rigorous ontological, axiological, and methodological (Creswell, 2007, p. 17) strength of the phenomenological research design, this researcher found that experientially engaging the design revealed several practical weaknesses. In this researcher's interpretive opinion regarding his use of the research design, the first operational weakness was in the research population sampling process and procedures. When developing his research design he had initially adapted a strategy for simply using "purposive sampling," wherein this researcher would pick his sample from the research population. But ACSI's research department had its own protocols for contacting participants. This resulted in

this researcher engaging in a "random purposeful" sample (Creswell, 2007, p. 127) in conjunction with a related collection of other sampling strategies (see the Participants section in Chapter Three, p. 83-85), which ultimately worked out fine. Fortunately, by the grace of God, this researcher was able to get the wide diversity of circumstances in his sample that he had hoped to find that ultimately strengthened the structural trustworthiness of his research design.

Second operational weakness. In this researcher's opinion, the second operational weakness involved two issues for which the research design could not have had an adequate, systemically driven response and immediate solution. The first issue was that this researcher simply had not done extensive, phenomenological, interviewing before conducting his interviews for this dissertation. Thus, the learning curve for this researcher was quick and sometimes steep insofar as knowing when to listen and when to speak (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 95). Subjectively speaking, much like he was a better teacher in his latest year of teaching students than in his first, so too his tenth interview went better than his first. There was just no experientially practical way around this lack of experience when using a phenomenological research design. Sure, this researcher had reviewed plenty of books filled with advice and interview tips (Kvale, 1996, pp. 124-135), but nothing worked better than the experiential learning that came from actually conducting the interviews.

The second issue was that discerning experience built expertise (Proverbs 1:5, NIV). For example, after conducting several interviews this researcher surmised that he should have switched the order of questions 4-1 and 4-2. It simply seemed to flow better during the live interviews despite the theoretical underpinning that justified its original order in the mind of this researcher. Also, 5-5 apparently was not written clearly enough to provide the participants with a consistent understanding of the interview question. Participants asked this researcher what he meant by that question more than any other interview question during the course of the

interviews. For another example, based on the point of view from a well-known scholar, Kvale, who was often referenced in phenomenological literature, this researcher had decided to forego the use of fully written transcripts (Kvale, 1996, pp. 182-183). At the conclusion of this researcher's research and writing he realized how much more time consuming it likely had been for him to have gone back and listened again and again to the recorded audio files to uncover verbal nuances as compared to simply reading and referencing the full transcripts.

This researcher subjectively supposed, then, that the research design was only as strong as the researcher who wielded it. In the end, this researcher attempted to make the best use of his research design as he knew how, given his relative experience with the field (Ecclesiastes 12:12, NIV).

General Evaluation of the Qualitative Research Design

Leedy and Ormrod (2016) offered nine general "criteria for evaluating qualitative research" (pp. 269-270), adopted and adapted by this researcher as discussed below.

Purposefulness. Leedy and Ormrod (2016) used this term to suggest that the research questions ought to determine the choice of methodology (pp. 269-270). Early in the development of the research prospectus this researcher found that his research questions would have been best addressed with the thick descriptions of phenomenological qualitative research. He perceived that such descriptions would have been unwieldly if not unavailable using a quantitative design.

Explication of assumptions and bias. Leedy and Ormrod (2016) used this term to suggest that a section of a dissertation should cover this content (pp. 269-270). See above for a discussion of this researcher's assumptions and biases (pp. 23-24, 153-154).

Rigor. Leedy and Ormrod (2016) said that a researcher should be as "thorough" as possible (pp. 269-270). This researcher endeavored to accomplish this through his detailed presentation of data and analysis. But it was thought by this researcher that ultimately only the

reader could make that determination based on their prior knowledge after the fact of this study.

Open-mindedness. Leedy and Ormrod (2016) said that a researcher should be willing to modify his research design when new evidence suggested it (pp. 269-270). This researcher modified his demographic questions by deleting his original first question when a field test participant suggested it (see Question Field Testing Protocol, p. 106-109). He also added a formal follow-up question to seek greater clarity (see Table 12, p.151-153).

Completeness. Leedy and Ormrod (2016) said that a researcher should spend sufficient time in the field to present "thick descriptions" of the phenomena (pp. 269-270). The research design called for this researcher to engage his participants in lengthy interviews with follow-up contact as needed. This researcher conducted the original interviews and also followed-up with "member checks" discussed above to ensure thick descriptions that were adequately and accurately conveyed. See the Limitations section in Chapter Five (pp. 199-200) for discussion.

Coherence. Leedy and Ormrod (2016) said that a researcher should triangulate his data to ensure "consistent conclusions" are reconciled (pp. 269-270). Creswell (2007) noted that sometimes scholars merge standards of validity with standards of evaluation in qualitative research (p. 211), thus indicating that both categories were still somewhat fluid in their structured arrangement. For a discussion of this researcher's use of triangulation see his Fifth Finding, RQ5, (Credibility Filter): Board Governance and Bylaws Governance section (pp. 179-181).

Persuasiveness. Leedy and Ormrod (2016) said that a researcher should present "logical arguments" that lead to one "interpretation" over and above others (pp. 269-270). This researcher attempted to do so in his five "Findings" sections above. However, transcendentally speaking, only the reader can decide whether or not he or she was ultimately persuaded by anything written in this dissertation.

Consensus. Leedy and Ormrod (2016) used this term to convey the need for researchers

to seek a common understanding of the data (pp. 269-270). This researcher accomplished a perceived sensitivity to consensus when he submitted his thick descriptions to his participants for their review and noted their additional commentary therein (as explored in Step Four: Textural/Structural Description Data Analysis Process, p. 164).

Usefulness. Leedy and Ormrod (2016) suggested that, ultimately, a qualitative research study should promote a "better understanding of the phenomenon" that "enhance[s] the quality of life" (pp. 269-270). This evaluative criterion was more fully explored in Chapter One's section entitled Potential Beneficiaries of this Research and Significance of the Study (see p. 21) and in the Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications section of Chapter Five (see pp. 191-199).

Specific Evaluation of the Phenomenological Research Design

Creswell (2007) offered five personalized "evaluation criteria" geared more particularly toward evaluating a phenomenological research design (pp. 215-216). They were adopted and adapted by this researcher below. Creswell's criteria explored below were given labels by this researcher that he thought best encapsulated the meaning of Creswell's standards of evaluation.

Tenets of phenomenology. Creswell (2007) suggested that the research design ought to portray a researcher's "understanding" of the philosophy of phenomenology (pp. 215-216). This researcher attempted to effectively convey his understanding in his literature review. See Chapter Two's Theoretical Framework for the Study for additional information and insight (pp. 43-54).

Phenomenological clarity. Creswell (2007) thought it important that phenomenological research have a clear focus that was conveyed in a "concise way" (pp. 215-216). This evaluation criterion was best illustrated by this researcher's short section that described his Statement of the Problem in Chapter One (p. 21) and Research Purpose in Chapter Five (pp. 189-190).

Use of phenomenological procedures. Creswell's (2007) third evaluative criterion

stressed the importance of using authentic and commonly accepted standards of phenomenological structures and strategies to conduct phenomenological research (pp. 215-216). This researcher was committed to using such structures and strategies. His intentionality was demonstrated when he consistently sought to use in-text citations with specific pages (VandenBos, 2010, p. 170) from the phenomenological literature. He sought to justify nearly every aspect of his research and writing in every chapter, section, and subsection of his dissertation with relevant references from the literature.

Description of participants' essence. Creswell's (2007) fourth evaluative criterion found it critical that a researcher convey the "essence" of the phenomena studied (pp. 215-216). This researcher attempted to do so in his thick descriptions, his use of Creswell's (2007) phenomenological template (p. 170) and in this researcher's Findings section (pp. 173-181).

Author reflectivity. Creswell's (2007) last evaluative criterion required that a researcher engage in self-reflection (pp. 215-216). This researcher frequently attempted to do so in various sections that had the label "Reflectivity" in their titles. For an example, see this researcher's section on Researcher's Reflectivity on his Research Design (p. 181). The fact that this researcher was required by the research design to put forth his point of view first felt a bit like he was forced to take pride of place (Luke 14:8-11, NIV). It did not seem appropriate to bracket his point of view first before exploring the points of views of his participants. However, in that parable in Luke 14, the Lord said that a person should wait to take a place of honor until they were invited to do so. This researcher thus rationalized that "being invited" was a sufficient metaphor for being instructed to put his point of view first by the research design (Creswell, 2007, p. 60). Ultimately only the reader can decide for themselves if this researcher met the burden of proof created by these evaluative criteria. To God be the glory!

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments."
- Ecclesiastes 12:13, NKJV

The first four chapters of this dissertation explored the problem, background, literature review, gap in the literature, and an analysis of this researcher's findings pertaining to this qualitative study of the phenomenology of institutional debt in selected K-12 schools of MAR-ACSI. This researcher presented his final conclusions in Chapter Five. One of the purposes for this chapter was to provide the reader with an answer to the question of "so what?" or "what now/next?" in terms of establishing this dissertation's place in the constellation of research that comprised the field (Leedy and Ormrod, 2016, p. 335).

The chapter was divided into five sections as follows: 1) Research Purpose, 2) Research Questions, 3) Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications, 4) Research Limitations, and 5) Further Research. Each section was subdivided as needed to further explore the content therein. The purpose of this chapter was to provide the reader with insight into the final, comprehensive, conclusions suggested by this researcher.

Research Purpose

This section of Chapter Five presented a description of the research purpose developed by this researcher to form and frame his phenomenological study. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand the views, values, and attitudes of K-12 Christian school principals. Essentially the purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand how school board and administration leadership's views on institutional debt impacted its use at Christian K-12 schools in MAR-ACSI. Institutional debt was defined as follows: "Long-term Debt (LTD) is any amount of outstanding debt a company holds that has a maturity of 12 months or longer" (Long-term Debt, 2019). This definition included mortgages

for school buildings. Debt acquired to meet annual operational budget deficits was also considered. The qualitative research theory guiding this study was transcendental phenomenological reduction, most recently fully articulated by Moustakas (1994) in his *Phenomenological Research Methods*. Moustakas' model and subsequent experts in the field like Creswell and others provided an effective way of inductively uncovering and understanding how institutional debt impacted the planning of school principals.

Research Questions

In this section of Chapter Five this researcher presents a description of the research questions used by this researcher to conduct his study. The five overall research questions were as follows:

RQ1. What were the views, values, and attitudes of MAR-ACSI school principals toward the use of long-term debt to fund school expansion projects?

RQ2. For those MAR-ACSI school leaders that supported debt acquisition for school expansion projects, how was this position biblically understood or supported?

RQ3. To what extent, if any, did MAR-ACSI oversight and accrediting requirements relating to fiscal policy influence debt-related decisions of MAR-ACSI member schools?

RQ4. To what extent, if any, did long-term institutional debt impact the decision-making process of MAR-ACSI school principals' long-term plans for their schools?

RQ5. To what extent, if any, did MAR-ACSI schools have institutional guidelines regarding the use of debt in their founding documents such as their charters and bylaws, and to what extent did they follow them?

Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications

In this section of Chapter Five this researcher presented a description of the Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications developed by this researcher from his findings. In

this section this researcher ponders two questions about his research: 1) Where did his dissertation fit in the constellation of prior research that he had explored in his literature review and 2) So what? For this researcher's answers to these questions see below.

Research Conclusions

After several years of preparation, months of researching, and writing 230 or so pages filled with approximately 66,000 words, this researcher believed he had made a useful contribution toward filling in a portion of the literature gap he had first found during his literature review. But did he? This researcher inductively concluded that "Christian Leadership in Education" was perhaps the most fitting coded characterization of the participants' overall point of view as presented in his codebook (see Appendix A). This observation was developed using the final stage of Creswell's (2007) data analysis spiral (p. 151) and concluded the inductive development of this researcher's codebook (see Appendix A).

This researcher believed that he contributed toward filling in the gap in the literature. In 2017, this researcher corresponded with ACSI about school management and found no directly applicable studies had been conducted (Swaner, personal communication, October 5, 2017). As late as 2019, this researcher confirmed with MAR-ACSI that the gap in the literature about school debt management still existed (Mattner, personal communication, October 13, 2019). He also communicated with Tesar, this researcher's point of contact with ACSI's international research department, who stated in late 2019 as follows: "...I cannot find anything on institutional debt" (Tesar, personal communication, October 25, 2019). It would have been the height of hubris to suggest that this dissertation could have filled that gap (Proverbs 16:18, ESV). But this dissertation contributed toward beginning to fill that gap through its Conclusions, Implications, and Applications, discussed below.

This researcher's research conclusions were presented here in three sections as follows:

1) two Theological Research Conclusions, 2) two Theoretical Research Conclusions, and 3) two Literature Gap Post-Research Conclusions. These conclusions also addressed applicable sections of this researcher's literature review (Roberts, 2010, p. 179) as described below.

First theological research conclusion. This researcher's first theological conclusion was inductively rooted in this researcher's literature review of Christian leadership in education as addressed in his sections on Practical and Debt theology (see Chapter Two, pp. 35-36). Based on the literature he tentatively suggested that K-12 Christian school leaders needed a strong grasp of Scripture in order to make biblically based decisions about borrowing money. His research inductively continued this discussion and concluded, from the totality of participants' responses for RQ2, that the participants possessed a general knowledge of Scripture pertaining to debt. Their point of view informed and framed their perspective on the use of institutional debt.

From the research this researcher concluded that the participants held to general principles from the Old Testament and were more specific in their use of New Testament passages to justify their various perspectives. All of the participants believed their decisions about their management of debt were biblical. The participants with no debt were more likely to believe debt was categorically wrong than those with some debt. Participants who had institutional debt felt the debt was generally unwise to have. But such debt had a somewhat practical value from a theological perspective.

Second theological research conclusion. This researcher's second theological conclusion was inductively rooted in this researcher's literature review of Christian leadership in education as addressed in his section on Stewardship (see Chapter Two, pp. 41-42). The concept of stewardship was spread throughout most of the research questions. RQ1 dealt with the participants' relationship with their stakeholders' sense of stewardship. RQ2 dealt with stewardship from a Christian liberty perspective. RQ3 explored a sense of ACSI's oversight of

the participants' conceptualization of stewardship. RQ4 perhaps dealt most directly with stewardship as it explored the participants' management of the schools' long-term institutional debt. Finally, RQ5 examined stewardship as found in the participants' institutional guidelines. All of the participants gave the phenomenological impression that stewardship of God's resources entrusted to them was of utmost importance. None of the participants presumed that the financial resources they managed belonged to them in any personal ownership sense.

First theoretical research conclusion. This researcher's first theoretical conclusion was inductively rooted in this researcher's literature review of Christian leadership in education as addressed in his various sections on Phenomenology (see Chapter Two, pp. 48-53). His literature review explored the Historical Guideposts, Components, Techniques, Challenges, and conceptually relevant studies of phenomenology. After conducting his research this researcher concluded that the state of the field of phenomenology had matured in many ways since its modern rebirth with Moustakas in 1994 (Creswell, 2007, p. 60).

In his section entitled Challenges in Phenomenological Interviewing Theory this researcher reviewed six challenges that researchers in the field often faced when using phenomenology as their research design (see Chapter Two, pp. 51-53). Many of those challenges also happened to this researcher in various ways throughout the research and writing of this dissertation. For example, discussing debt with participants during the interviews was not always "comfortable" and it did make their "voices heard" (Lester, 1999, p. 4). For another example, Sorsa et al.'s (2015) "reflective bracketing" (p. 12) was consistently challenging for this researcher to account for as he conducted his research and writing.

Second theoretical research conclusion. This researcher's second theoretical conclusion was inductively rooted in this researcher's literature review of Christian leadership in education as addressed in his sections on Related Literature (see Chapter Two, pp. 58-61). In his sections

entitled Organizational Best Practices of K-12 Christian Schools and Trends in K-12 Christian

School Leadership and Education the literature suggested that leaders created the needed change

while managers sought to sustain existing operations (Ledbetter et al., 2016, p. 21).

From a phenomenological perspective this researcher concluded that Ledbetter et al.'s

(2016) conceptual point of view was evidentially reinforced as expressed by all ten participants

to varying degrees. Participants with no mortgages universally agreed that they did not want

mortgages in much the same way that managers of successful organizations would want to

continue the status quo. Most of the participants with mortgages were leaders in the sense of

trying to lead their organizations out of the financial duress created by those mortgages. They

were, in effect, operationally and organizationally trying to create change consistent with

Ledbetter et al.'s approach to leadership modeling (p. 21).

First literature gap post-research conclusion. Anyone can make a claim (Proverbs

18:17, NIV). In one sense, it takes little effort to present any type of claim about the efficacy of

debt management rooted in intuitive conventional wisdom. To arrive at evidentiary conclusions

based, not on pithy opinion, but on actual research was quite a different matter altogether. This

researcher was hesitant to say he "proved" anything beyond the shadow of a reasonable doubt

(Leedy and Ormrod, 2016, p. 334). But he was able to suggest findings and applications with

implications that were rooted in an academically acceptable and actionable phenomenological

research design. Tesar, a member of ACSI's international research department, unequivocally

stated as late as the fall of 2019 as follows: "I searched my entire folder of doctoral research

proposals and dissertations and I cannot find anything on institutional debt" (Tesar, personal

communication, October 25, 2019). Apparently the long-term institutional debt practices of

MAR-ACSI, or the national ACSI, had never been qualitatively researched using a

phenomenological research design (see Missing Research from K-12 Christian School Debt

Management in Chapter Two, p. 74). But this dissertation has now begun to contribute to filling in the contours of that gap in the literature. Future researchers may one day be able to access this dissertation and continue this conversation about the efficacy of long-term institutional debt. See the section on Further Research (pp. 202-205) for further discussion.

Second literature gap post-research conclusion. In Chapter Two of this dissertation this researcher included sections in his literature review entitled K-12 Christian School Closures and Missing Research from K-12 Christian School Financial Practices (pp. 74-75). In those sections Nichols (2016, p. 87) was referenced as suggesting there was a lack of comprehensive scholarship as to why K-12 Christian schools were collapsing. Yet 60% of Nichols's respondents claimed some form of "financial stress" (Nichols, 2016, p. 110).

In this researcher's dissertation he inductively uncovered the phenomenological impact that financial stress, in the form of long-term institutional debt, had on the near-closure of many of the participants' schools that had such debt. This dissertation produced actual and tangible qualitative observations about the nature of the impact of institutional debt on the long-term vitality of K-12 Christian schools. Therefore, this research may have contributed to a greater understanding of at least one of the reasons for why Christian schools ultimately do close.

The next two sections, Implications and Applications, continued to address what could be characterized as the "so what" of this researcher's dissertation. In other words, these sections attempted to more fully answer why this study mattered in three ways as follows: 1) the context of the lives of the participants, 2) the context of ACSI, and 3) the long-term contexts of future readers perhaps unfamiliar with the first two contexts.

Research Implications

In Chapter One of this dissertation, this researcher developed a section describing the Significance of the Study (pp. 26-27). In that section he outlined the potential interpretive and

contextual value of this dissertation to K-12 Christian schools and MAR-ACSI. From his

findings (Roberts, 2010, p. 181) presented above, this researcher developed five implications for

K-12 Christian schools and two implications for MAR-ACSI as described below. This researcher

corresponded with Jeff Mattner, Regional Director of MAR-ACSI. Dr. Mattner indicated a desire

to be fully informed by this researcher of the conclusions, implications and applications of this

dissertation (Mattner, personal communication, October 13, 2019) if it was successfully

defended and published in accordance with the policies and procedures of Liberty University.

RQ1: First finding's implication for K-12 Christian schools. Among the participants,

very few of them openly advocated for the long-term benefits of acquiring institutional debt. In

fact, debt sometimes discouraged donations. This finding implied to this researcher that

principals considering acquiring debt ought to especially consider its potentially unintended

long-term consequences.

RQ2: Second finding's implication for K-12 Christian schools. Among the

participants, most of them considered that in some sense, scripturally speaking, the borrower was

a slave to the lender. This finding implied to this researcher that principals should, at the very

least, have conceptualized a strong, theologically accurate, justification for their preferred course

of action concerning the utilization of institutional debt.

RQ3: Third finding's implication for K-12 Christian schools. Among the participants,

very few of them utilized ACSI beyond its accreditation services. This finding implied to this

researcher that principals could potentially more fully explore what ACSI may have to offer the

participants' schools in terms of advice related to long-term institutional debt.

RQ4: Fourth finding's implication for K-12 Christian schools. Among the

participants with long-term institutional debt, most of them commented that their schools'

institutional debt negatively impacted their annual budgets. Among the participants with no long-

term institutional debt, most of them commented that they had greater financial freedom to administer their annual budgets. This finding implied to this researcher that whatever the strategic plan for paying the debt off may have been originally, eventually it reduced the financial flexibility of the school in other areas of their revenue and expenses.

RQ5: Fifth finding's implication for K-12 Christian schools. Among the participants, very few of them seemed to have governing documents that articulated clear and concise policies concerning the operational justification, acquisition, and management of long-term institutional debt. This finding implied to this researcher that most of the participants' K-12 Christian school bylaws viewed institutional debt as a board/finance committee or administration-level operation.

Sixth: An implication for MAR-ACSI. Among the participants, very few of them viewed ACSI as a practical programmatic source for debt management. This finding implied to this researcher that the potential existed for ACSI to have considered creating new programs or expanding existing programs into this service area.

Seventh: An implication for MAR-ACSI. Among the participants, most of them viewed ACSI as a valued source of accreditation. This finding implied to this researcher that ACSI had created a sense of good will among participants and that ACSI could have considered expanding its standards related to debt management for accreditation/reaccreditation purposes.

Research Applications

Applications, as typically construed in quantitative and qualitative research, were problematic to derive from within a phenomenological research design perspective. Essentially, in the available literature, applications of noema (Moustakas, 1994, p. 69) appeared to have been a form of concrete recommendations based on the research. But, philosophically driven issues like the debate between "particularity" versus "transferability" lent themselves to this researcher exercising caution in inductively uncovering a suitably generalized application (Creswell, 2014,

p. 204). Having stated that conceptual concern concerning noesis (Moustakas, 1994, p. 69), this researcher found two potential applications that could have been reasonably applied from his Findings and Implications sections above.

First application. None of the participants had been in their current leadership position at their schools at the time the schools' first institutional debt had either been acquired or initially denied. But all of the participants faced the consequences from the decisions that had been made by prior generations of stakeholders, boards, and administrations. This researcher's formal follow-up question data set (see Table 12, pp. 151-153) indicated an overall concern with managing long-term institutional debt.

In terms of applying this research study to future decisions related to institutional debt, it might have been well for K-12 Christian school leadership to remember that present actions have both positive and negative, intended and unintended consequences, both now and far into the future (Deuteronomy 28:1-68, ESV). Future annual and strategic budget planning by K-12 Christian school leadership may wish to have taken this first application into account, particularly as it related to the management of institutional debt.

Second application. This researcher's sixth implication as described above provided the context for this second application. This researcher's second possible application was that ACSI might consider expanding their professional development's webinar series offerings in this content area (see Chapter Two, pp. 71-72). Potential series could have included clear and unequivocal content related to research on the impact of long-term institutional debt similar to the focus of this dissertation. But there was one caveat to this application (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, p. 334). It should be noted that this researcher was philosophically cautious (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, p. 256) about proposing this application because none of the participants stated their need to view such content or a desire for ACSI to make such content available to them in

RQ3-5. That said, it seemed like a relevant application to make given the overall phenomenological nature of this dissertation (Lester, 1999, p. 4).

Research Limitations

In this section of Chapter Five this researcher presented a description of the research limitations uncovered by this researcher as he conducted his study. Before this researcher presented his limitations below he first wanted to address one possible issue that could have been viewed as a limitation, but was not entirely viewed as such by this researcher. Scholars in the field of qualitative research design, such as Leedy and Ormrod (2016), sometimes encouraged the use of multiple "raters to code the data independently" (p. 395). This procedure was typically encouraged in order to reduce the potential for bias (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, p. 395). However, this researcher's research design, prospectus, consent form, application to ACSI's research department and Liberty University's Institutional Review Board, in effect his entire dissertation, clearly stated that only the researcher would have access to participant data. Therefore it was viewed as a potential violation of these conditions to use an independent rater to also code the data. This researcher believed he took other, just as effective measures, to ensure his reflectivity on bias was adequately and extensively examined in several sections above (see pp. 153-154, 181-185). Having dealt with his interpretation of that potential issue, there were six clear limitations as described below.

Experience and Expertise

This researcher's first limitation was his relative lack of experience and expertise in carrying out interviews (Some Strategies for Qualitative Interviews, 2019, p. 2). He noticed his relative inexperience when he listened to his interviews, reviewed various transcripts, and noted where he wished he would have asked a particular follow-up question but did not. A veteran interviewer would likely have been able to uncover greater nuances in participants' experiences

in follow-up questions during the actual interview. As for this researcher, he found it relevant to do a formal follow-up question via email that yielded additional rich, descriptive, phenomenological insights (see Table 12, pp. 151-153). This researcher believes his core findings, implications, and applications would have been the same, regardless of who asked the formal, semi-structured questions.

Confidentiality and Replicability

The second limitation was conceptually tied to the first one. In terms of replicability, repeating any phenomenological research study would have been challenging to conduct if, indeed, it needed to have been done (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 7). Due to confidentiality and anonymity requirements any new researcher who had read this study could not contact the actual participants, nor read participants' bylaws, nor view participants' websites to see if the new researcher's conclusions matched this researcher's conclusions. New researchers could, however, replicate the study in terms of using this researcher's research design and his interviews questions, contacting ACSI, obtaining permission, and interviewing participants in the research population of MAR-ACSI. A new researcher could also look at the raw data sets provided by this researcher and decide if this dissertation's findings, conclusions, implications, and applications were reasonably derived from that data (Seidman, 2013, p. 121).

Also, this researcher's use of EIIP could not be replicated given that only he heard the verbal nuances in interview audio files. But, a new researcher could read the raw data sets, possibly glean a sense of vocal tonality from the emotionality embedded in those transcripts, and make their own subjective determination as to the accuracy of this researcher's interpretations.

Conclusiveness and Transferability

The third limitation was conceptually tied to the second one. In terms of transferability, virtually all phenomenological research studies were difficult to transfer given the nature of

phenomenology (Creswell, 2014, p. 204). When this researcher presented his research conclusions he took care not to suggest that his research conclusively proved anything beyond a shadow of a doubt (Leedy & Ormrod, p. 334). A sample of just ten, however conceptually justifiable when using a phenomenological research design, could not have been said to be fully representative of a research population of 370. However, the sample was diverse enough to include nearly all the possible contextual circumstances likely to have occurred in MAR-ACSI.

Anonymity and Analysis

The fourth limitation was conceptually tied to the third one. In terms of data analysis, any phenomenological research study would have struggled with achieving the correct balance between providing enough data and providing enough analysis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, p. 332). In retrospect, perhaps this researcher erred on the side of caution when he wrote his thick descriptions. For example, he was not able to share some of the participants' more dramatic and impassioned responses (Seidman, 2013, p. 123) because they were tied too closely to their particular schools and thus would have jeopardized their anonymity and confidentiality (Seidman, 2013, pp. 123-125). However, the data that was shared provided a relevant and accurate portrait of their overall experiences and points of view.

Timing and Technique

The fifth limitation was conceptually tied to the fourth one. In terms of establishing interpretive context, any phenomenological research study would have struggled with determining the appropriate amount of time that needed to be spent with the participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, pp. 269-270). This researcher, like any researcher, did not have all the time in the world to research and write his dissertation. Perhaps interviewing each participant for an hour was not enough time. The fact that this researcher could not travel to every participants' school to more fully observe nuances like body language during the interviews was also perceived to

have been a disadvantage when developing contextual clarity. However, given his participants' busy schedules, this researcher believed it would have been unlikely they would have agreed to participate in his sample if the conditions for their participation had been much greater anyway.

Expansiveness

In his literature review from Chapter Two this researcher briefly referenced the topic of public funding in K-12 Christian school budgets. Indeed, approximately the last five or so minutes of each interview was spent discussing that issue with the participants. However, this researcher did not include those conversations in his raw data sets or his subsequent analysis. His reasoning for doing so was twofold. First, his dissertation was more focused on the impact of institutional debt and not about establishing tuition rates per se. Second, there seemed to already be abundant literature on the topic of public funding of tuition. Thus this researcher did not believe that a sufficient gap existed that justified its inclusion in this dissertation, despite the time spent on the topic in the interviews. See the "Explore Other Budget Line Items" in the Further Research section below for a concluding discussion of this tangential topic.

<div align="center">

Further Research

</div>

In this section of Chapter Five this researcher presented a description of the further research recommended by this researcher after he conducted his study. This researcher found a potential need for further research in six possible ways, described below.

Longitudinal Study of Sample

Many of the participants had developed and/or implemented plans to pay off their existing institutional debt within a reasonably short amount of time, as measured by the upcoming number of years. Other participants were either considering acquiring institutional debt to fund their upcoming expansion projects or not diametrically opposed to doing so, should the perceived need arise. Therefore, it may be at least of some interest to MAR-ACSI, or ACSI,

to ask this this researcher to conduct a second round of phenomenological interviews to get an update on the participants' fiscal and spiritual developments. This type of second sampling seemed theoretically similar to "confirming and disconfirming cases" (Creswell, 2007, p. 127). Perhaps this researcher could conduct a longer study, especially considering the diversity of the sample in terms of contextual conditions.

Expand Sample Size

The second possibility this researcher considered was the need for a replicated study. By this he did not mean precisely duplicating the study with the same sample. That would be a violation of the norms of confidentiality and anonymity. But perhaps this researcher or another researcher could widen the research population to include all of ACSI member schools in the United States with "stratified purposeful" sampling (Creswell, 2007, p. 127). In this way a researcher could compare and contrast different regions within ACSI, using the same or modified research and interview questions.

Explore State Funding Sources

During the interviews this researcher came across the issue of paying for institutional debt from specifically earmarked revenue streams. For example, some participants would not necessarily use tuition revenue to pay for capital expenses, preferring instead to use fundraising or foundation funds for that purpose. Other participants mentioned that their schools accepted tuition revenue in the form of vouchers from state governments that helped their budgets deal with long-term institutional debt. This researcher felt that this "surprising" (Roberts, 2010, p. 179) funding nuance could have been explored and expanded. But given the time constraints he faced, he decided that the topic drifted outside the scope of his dissertation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, p. 335), especially given the focus of his literature review. Instead, another researcher could possibly consider a more in-depth study of that particular facet of funding K-12 schools.

Expand Research Population Outside ACSI

At the time of this writing ACSI was an organization that reached around the world in terms of their international presence overseas. This researcher suggested that perhaps a study similar to his could have been qualitatively conducted in other parts of the world. Related to that idea was the possibility that this study could be conducted in conjunction with other accrediting organizations, like CSI, AACS, and MNPSAA. This would allow another researcher to engage and expand their validation strategies by comparing and contrasting their results with this researcher's findings and conclusions.

ACSI Institutional Research

When this researcher continued a correspondence via email with Jeff Mattner, the Regional Director of MAR-ACSI, he confirmed that Dr. Mattner was not aware of any study about long-term institutional debt within MAR-ACSI (Mattner, personal communication, October 12-13, 2019). Given the perceived lack of interaction with ACSI on the part of many of the participants, perhaps another possible research need could have been for ACSI to conduct further research studies on the topic of institutional debt. ACSI could have used additional qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research methodologies that expanded, explored, and further explained the phenomena addressed in this dissertation.

Explore Other Budget Line Items

Institutional debt and tuition rates were two of a veritable plethora of finance-related research issues. This researcher could have investigated any number of a variety of factors that potentially influenced a K-12 Christian school's annual and strategic budget. Examples included insurance costs, paying the electric bill, or reimbursement policies for teachers who purchased pencils for their classrooms. In other words, no budget item existed in a vacuum. Although outside the scope of this dissertation, further research could have been done after fully vetting the

available literature on the topic on how each line item in a budget could potentially impact the funding and financing of long-term institutional debt.

Conclusion

The reader may recall that Chapter One of this dissertation presented this researcher's research concerns. Chapter Two presented his literature review. Chapter Three explained his research methodology. Chapter Four analyzed his findings. Finally, Chapter Five described his conclusions. As this dissertation drew to a close, this researcher offered his final observation.

This researcher concluded that, despite national trends of growing indebtedness and the perceived conventional wisdom that suggested borrowing produced prosperity, long-term debt undermined the long-term sustainability of bricks and mortar K-12 Christian schools. This conclusion was not this researcher's opinion. Rather, this final thought was derived from phenomenological interaction with Christian leaders in education from the Mid-America Region of the Association of Christian Schools International. Present and future Christian leaders in education may do well to pause and reflect upon this observation. Now this researcher has come to the end of the matter (Ecclesiastes 12:11-14, NKJV); to God be the glory!

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APPENDIX A

Table 13: Codebook

Research Question	Interview Question	Sub-codes	Codes	Thematic Essence	Theory/Theology
RQ 1	1-1	Comfortable / Uncomfortable	Debt	Views	Christian Leadership in Education
	1-2	Supportive / Unsupportive	Parent's POV		
	1-3	Cautious / Opposed	Governing Board		
	1-4	Sympathetic / Indifferent	Stakeholder's POV	Values	
	1-5	None / Influential	Control/Oversight		
RQ 2	2-1	Minimal / Wise/Foolish	OT Views	Stewardship	
	2-2	Parables / Practical	NT Views		
	2-3	Generalized / Specific	Overall Views		
	2-4	Commandment / Irrelevant	Christian Liberty	Discernment	
	2-5	Opposed / Understanding	Consistent Practice		
RQ 3	3-1	A Little / A lot	Stakeholder Influence	Oversight	
	3-2	Slight / Determinative	ACSI Guidelines		
	3-3	Marginal / Important	ACSI Compliance		
	3-4	Negligible / Unknown	ACSI Interaction	Accreditation	
	3-5	Disregarded / Well regarded	ACSI Intentionality		
RQ 4	4-1	Accounted for / Ever present	Strategic Planning	Fiscal Impact	
	4-2	Reduced/strained / Minimal impact	Annual Budget		
	4-3	Comforted / Wonderful	God's Faithfulness		
	4-4	Pressured / Peaceful	Prayer life	Spiritual Impact	
	4-5	Sleepless / Ever-present	Stress		
RQ 5	5-1	Absent / Peripheral	Documents	Board Governance	
	5-2	Non-existent / Influential	Document Guidance		
	5-3	Accountability / Oversight	Finance Committee		
	5-4	Conversational / Controversial	Conflict Resolution	Bylaws Governance	
	5-5	Insignificant / Significant	Significance		

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

A Phenomenological Study of the Role of Institutional Debt in the Mid-America Region of the
Association of Christian Schools International
John R. Beck
Liberty University
Rawlings School of Divinity, Christian Leadership in Education Program

You are invited to be in a research study on the impact of long-term institutional debt on the success of your school. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a principal and/or administrator of an ACSI school within the Mid-America region. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

John R. Beck, a doctoral candidate in the Christian Leadership in Education Program of the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of institutional debt on K-12 Christian Schools.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
1. Participate in a recorded interview, either in person, or online (50-60 minutes).
2. Be available for a follow-up interview and/or email if needed (20 minutes).

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include greater insight into how to help K-12 Christian schools financially survive and thrive.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in 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.
- All participants will be assigned pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in locations where others will not be able to easily overhear our conversations.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

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. If you

decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is John R. Beck. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at jbeck8@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. John Cartwright, at jbcartwright@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information 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.

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

_____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Signature of Investigator   Date

APPENDIX C

RESEARCH PERMISSION REQUEST

__/__/2019

Sheri Tesar
Research Department
Association of Christian Schools International
731 Chapel Hills, Dr.
Colorado Springs, CO 80920

Dear Sheri Tesar:

As a graduate student in the Christian Leadership in Education Program of the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The proposed title of my research project is "A Phenomenological Study of the Role of Institutional Debt in the Mid-America Region of the Association of Christian Schools International" and the purpose of my research is to explore and understand how school leadership's views on institutional debt impact its use at Christian kindergarten-twelfth grade (K-12) schools.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research with the Mid-America Region of the Association of Christian Schools International and utilize your membership list of principals to recruit participants for my research.

Participants will be asked to participate in a recorded interview with me. My formal research questions will be provided to them in advance of our first meeting. The data will be used to explore and understand the impact of debt on school operations. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by email to jbeck8@liberty.edu. A permission letter is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely in Christ,

John R. Beck
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

APPENDIX D

RESEARCH PERMISSION LETTER

ACSI
STRONGER TOGETHER
Association of Christian Schools International

Headquarters
Phone 719.528.6906 | Fax 719.531.0631 | www.acsi.org
731 Chapel Hills Drive, Colorado Springs CO, 80920

August, 12, 2019

John R. Beck
10235 Stadium Drive
Kalamazoo, MI 49009

Dear John R. Beck

After careful review of your doctoral research proposal from Liberty University entitled "A Phenomenological Study of the Role of Institutional Debt in ACSI Mid-America," we have granted you permission to conduct your research through ACSI member schools. The research department will invite administrators and principals in the Mid-America region to participate in your study.

I have checked the following boxes, as applicable:

X☐ The requested data WILL NOT BE STRIPPED of identifying information before it is provided to the researcher.

X☐ I am requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

APPENDIX E

PRINCIPAL RECRUITMENT LETTER

__/__/2019

[Recipient]
[Principal]
[School Name]
[School Address]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the Christian Leadership in Education Program of the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The proposed title of my research project is "A Phenomenological Study of the Role of Institutional Debt in the Mid-America Region of the Association of Christian Schools International." The purpose of my research is to explore and understand how school leadership's views on institutional debt impact its use at K-12 Christian schools. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

As the current principal of [Name of K-12 Christian School in ACSI Mid-America], please consider participating in this study. If you are willing to participate, you will be asked to participate in a recorded interview. It should take approximately 60 minutes to complete the procedure listed above with an additional follow-up phone call of about 20 minutes as needed. My formal research questions will be provided to you in advance of our first meeting. Your name and other identifying information will be collected as part of your participation, but this information will remain confidential.

To participate, please email me at jbeck8@liberty.edu to schedule an interview at your earliest possible convenience.

A consent document is attached to this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely in Christ,

John R. Beck
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

APPENDIX F

RECRUITMENT FOLLOW-UP LETTER

September 9, 2019

[Recipient]
[Principal]
[School Name]
[School Address]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the Christian Leadership in Education Program of the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. A week ago, you received an email inviting you to participate in a research study involving ASCI Mid-America schools. This follow-up email / phone call is being sent to remind you to respond if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The deadline for participation is September 20, 2019.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to be interviewed. It should take approximately 60 minutes for you to complete the procedure listed with an additional 20 minutes for a follow-up phone call as needed. My formal research questions will be provided to you in advance of our first meeting. Your name and other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please email me at jbeck8@liberty.edu to schedule an interview at your earliest possible convenience.

A consent document is attached to this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely in Christ,

John R. Beck
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FEEDBACK LETTER

__/__/2019

[Recipient]
[Principal]
[School Name]
[School Address]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the Christian Leadership in Education Program of the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The proposed title of my research project is "A Phenomenological Study of the Role of Institutional Debt in the Mid-America Region of the Association of Christian Schools International." The purpose of my research is to explore and understand how school leadership's views on institutional debt impact its use at K-12 Christian schools. I am writing to invite you to participate in the pilot test of my study.

As the former principal of K-12 Christian school in the Mid-America region who is not currently a member of ACSI, please consider participating in this pilot study. If you are willing to participate, you will be asked to review the questions that will guide the interviews and provide feedback regarding the questions. It should take approximately 20 minutes to complete the procedure listed above. I will then contact you to discuss your feedback as needed. This conversation will take an additional 20 minutes. Your participation will remain confidential, and no identifying information or personal data will be used in the dissertation itself.

To participate, please respond to this request via jbeck8@liberty.edu. I will then provide you with a document containing the proposed questions and a feedback form. I will also arrange a 20-minute telephone interview with you to review your feedback. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely in Christ,

John R. Beck
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

APPENDIX H

OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS INSTRUMENT

1. How long have you been a principal/administrator at _____?

2. What prior experience, if any, do you have as a principal at previous schools?

3. What is your current student body count? What is your current trend in enrollment?

4. What is your current faculty/staff/administration count?

5. What is your annual budget roughly speaking?

6. Does your school have a school-related mortgage? If so, how much is it?

7. What percentage of your annual budget is assigned to debt service?

8. How many years will it take to pay it off?

9. What role did you have, if any, in the decision making process of acquiring the current school-related mortgage?

Open-Ended Interview Questions

RQ1. What were the views, values and attitudes of MAR-ACSI school principals toward the use of long-term debt to fund school expansion projects?

    1-1. How do you view the use of debt in your school?

    1-2. How do the parents of your students view the use of debt in your school?

    1-3. How does your school's governing board view the use of debt in your school?

    1-4. How do you navigate the various points of view about debt in your school?

    1-5. How much social/systemic control do you have over the use of debt at your school?

RQ2. For those MAR-ACSI school leaders that supported debt acquisition for school expansion projects, how was this position biblically understood or supported?

    2-1. How would you characterize the Old Testament's views on debt?

    2-2. How would you characterize the New Testament's views on debt?

2-3. How would you explain your views on the use of debt from a scriptural perspective?

2-4. How do you view the use of debt in terms of Christian liberty?

2-5. If needed, how do you balance your personal beliefs with your professional views about the use of debt?

RQ3. To what extent, if any, did MAR-ACSI oversight and accrediting requirements relating to fiscal policy influence debt related decisions of MAR-ACSI member schools?

3-1. How do your school's stakeholders (parents, board, donors, etc.) influence your decision making process about the use of debt?

3-2. How do ACSI guidelines influence your decision making process about the use of debt?

3-3. How important to you is complying with ACSI guidelines about the use of debt?

3-4. How does ACSI staff/programs/initiatives interact with you regarding the use of debt?

3-5. How should ACSI interact with you about the use of debt in your K-12 school?

RQ4. To what extent, if any, did long-term institutional debt impact the decision making process of MAR-ACSI school principal's long-term plans for their schools?

4-1. How does the mortgage, if any, affect your school's strategic planning?

4-2. How does the mortgage, if any, affect your school's annual budget planning process?

4-3. How does the mortgage, if any, affect your faith in God's faithfulness?

4-4. How does the mortgage, if any, affect your prayer life?

4-5. How does the mortgage, if any, affect your work life in terms of stress?

RQ5. To what extent, if any, did MAR-ACSI schools have institutional guidelines regarding the use of debt in their founding documents such as their charters and bylaws and follow them?

5-1. How do your school's governing documents (constitution/bylaws, etc.) address the use of debt?

5-2. How do your school's governing documents influence your use of debt?

5-3. How does your school's finance committee, if any, affect your use of debt?

5-4. How do you resolve possible conflicts that arise, if any, between your fiscal policies and the fiscal culture of your school?

5-5. How do you characterize the value of your school's institutional guidelines in terms of practical and spiritual significance?

APPENDIX I

OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS PILOT TEST FORM

Feedback Form

1. Which questions, if any, were confusing? How so?

2. Which questions, if any, appeared to be biased? How so?

3. What are your suggestions about the wording of the existing questions?

4. Which questions should be added or deleted?

APPENDIX J

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
LETTER OF EXEMPTION

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

August 19, 2019

John R. Beck
IRB Exemption 3890.081919: A Phenomenological Study of the Role of Institutional Debt in the
Mid-America Region of the Association of Christian Schools International

Dear John R. Beck,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance
with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration
(FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you
may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved
application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in
which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

> (2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude,
> achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual
> or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
>
>> (iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of
>> the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects,
>> and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any
changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued
exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a
new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether
possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at
irb@liberty.edu.

APPENDIX K

The Christian School Leadership Framework
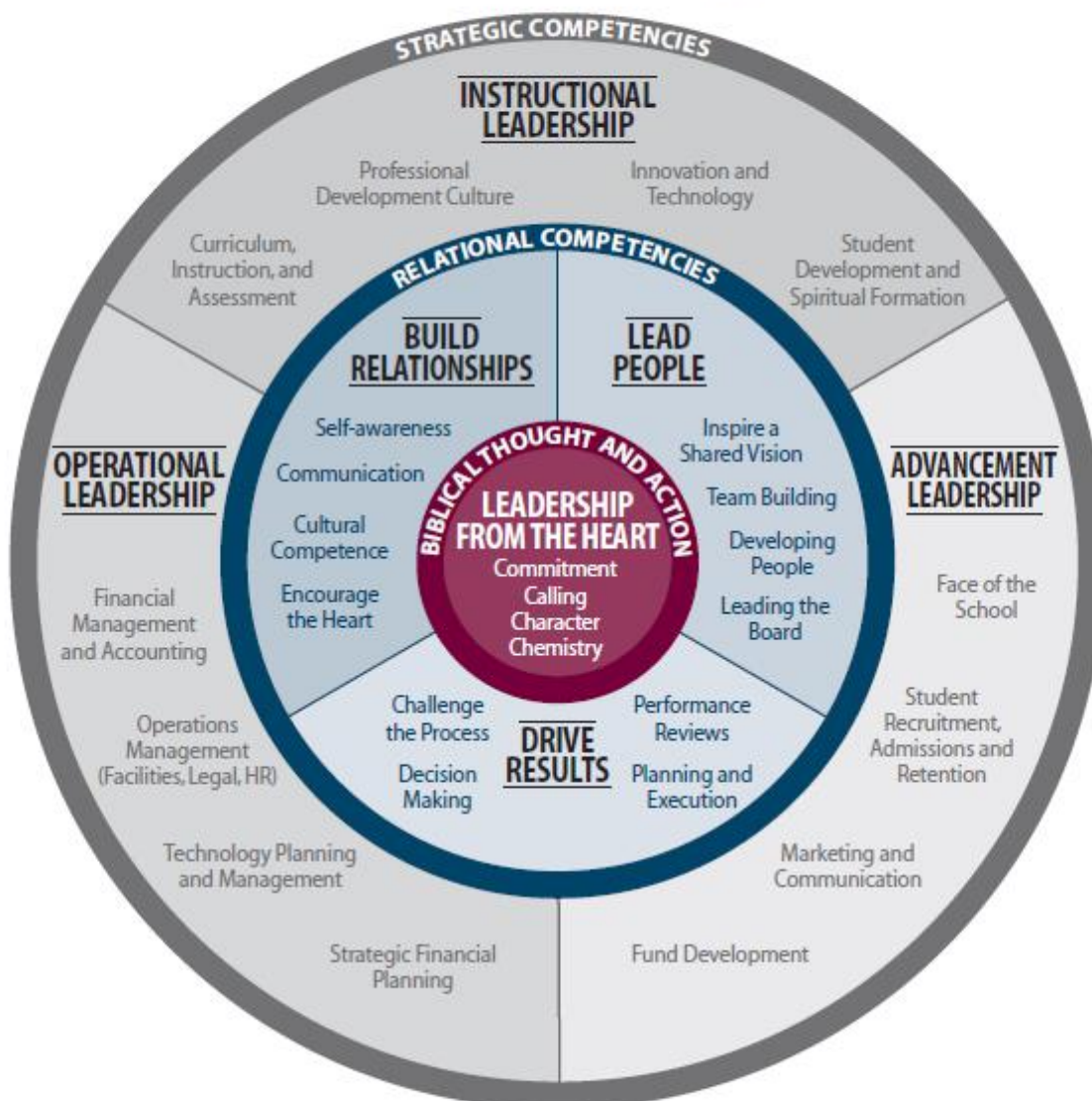
The Christian School Leadership Framework (CSLF) describes the competencies and behaviors considered most important to the performance of heads of Christian schools. The CSLF is built on three major categories: (1) Leadership from the Heart, (2) Relational Competencies – essential personal skills or processes, and (3) Strategic Competencies – key content areas.

The architecture of the CSLF is modeled after KIPP Leadership Framework and Competency Model. "Our leadership framework is the high-level category architecture that assists in organizing our competencies and showing how those competencies relate to one another. A competency can be defined as *a cluster of related knowledge, skills and attitudes that affects a major part of one's job.*" KIPP Leadership Framework and Competency Model, p.2, www.kipp.org.

Inspire a Shared Vision, Encourage the Heart, and Challenge the Process come from Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 2012. Model the Way and Enable Others to Act are also built into this framework without those labels.

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APPENDIX L

ACSI The Formative to Flourishing School Continuum: Growing Stronger   Version 1.0; July, 2015

This model provides a high level summary for school improvement. Few schools are likely to fit every category within a level: this is a continuum from formative levels of school characteristics to a flourishing level. Schools may meet flourishing strands in some areas while operate in a formative stage in other areas. All schools should strive to reach effective or higher. The red line down the middle of the chart separates formative and maturing schools from those who have achieved accreditation.

Domains	Elements	Formative Level	Maturing Level	Effective Level	Flourishing Level
Board Governance	Foundations	Undocumented mission, vision, values, or philosophy	Developing vision and mission, core values, and philosophy	Clear statements and full alignment of mission, vision, values, and philosophy	Clear statements, alignment, with regular review and refinement.
	Policies	Little or no written board policy; functioning on by-laws	Basic board policies in place	Clear and written board governance policy; consistent implementation	Board policies systematically reviewed and revised; policy guides key decisions
	Board Development	Board directly involved in management decisions, little review of board function, future planning or board profiling.	Board is growing in their understanding of proper role; some future planning in place; general board profile in place	Board has clear recruitment & nomination processes; some board PD, strategic plan and profile in place.	Functioning strategic board reflecting board profile, ongoing board PD, annual board evaluation (of the board), and ongoing planning processes.
	Roles & HOS	No clear delineation of board and HOS roles	Clear definition of board and HOS roles; clear HOS job description	Stable, positive board- HOS relation-ship; clear HOS evaluation process	Ongoing Board-HOS communication & positive relationship; comprehensive and systematic HOS evaluation process
Executive Leadership	Framework	Limited expertise in the *Christian School Leadership Framework (CSLF)**	Qualified/credentialed HOS; utilizing the CSLF to build the school and governance culture	HOS demonstrates many "heart, relational and strategic competencies" of the CSLF; keeps board informed	HOS embodies the CSLF; contributor to the Christian school movement; supports board; regular strategic plan reporting to board and community
	Personnel	Limited capacity or support in recruitment and evaluation of school personnel.	Some recruitment, support (coaching or mentoring), and inconsistent evaluation processes	Developing recruitment strategies, employee support, annual performance reviews	Intentional recruitment strategies, robust formative and summative performance reviews, linked to professional development
	Stability and Engagement	High turnover in HOS position	Reasonable stability of HOS; engaged with some stakeholders; effective board engagement.	Stability in HOS position; strong engagement with all stakeholders; engagement with external communities	Consistent HOS leadership; inspires the community, high levels of respect by stakeholders; networks and blesses other schools; vision for kingdom support
School Viability	Operating Systems	Lax financial controls; no external reviews; no attention to risk management; little to no tuition assistance	Feasible financial plans in place; some external financial review; limited risk management; tuition assistance available	Review/audit by external CPA; clear budgeting, reporting, attention to risk man; tuition assistance implemented & assessed; strategic financial plan	Hard income driven; regular audits; meet ECFA standards; significant funding for tuition assistance; thorough risk management process; rolling strategic financial planning process
	Advancement	No formal admissions or dev-elopment processes or staffing; use of fund raising sales/events	Beginning donor cultivation; written admissions process;	Some advancement staff in place; some successful fund raising efforts; mission driven admissions policies	Mature development/admissions functions; successful annual fund, capital campaigns, endowment
	Financial Resources	Financial viability in question; cash flow and debt concerns; no formal budget process	Formal budgeting process; debt manageable;	Financially viable; balanced budget evident; growing cash reserve; debt reduction plan in place	Cash reserves >5% of budget; debt service < 5% of budget; long term financial viability evident
	Facilities	Inadequate, insufficient facilities; low level functionality	Adequate facilities; developing educationally usable spaces	Well developed and appealing physical plant; branding is evident	Physical plant supports all programs; distinctive presence and branding

Note: *Executive Leadership: ACSI endorses the Christian School Leadership Framework (CSLF); a summary of essential leadership components for Christian school heads.)