

A Story of Board Governance

The Waters in Which We Swim

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For years, I have been dreaming of how to better partner with each of our 75 local churches. I chose my Van Lunen project *Initiating Win-Win Relationships with Churches* to force myself to chase this dream with an expert consultant. Our school vision for the project was penned, key leaders were educated and inspired (the Admissions Director was to take the lead under the supervision of the Development Director), meetings were held, and Don Distelberg was a great coach. However, I immediately started running into classic leadership struggles and I was not doing very well building the bridge as I walked on it. First, with no connection to our new project, our Development Director resigned, and then a few months later our Admissions Director resigned. Though we made great hires to replace them, the church partnership project was not on my high priority list for them to tackle in their first few months on the job. This all delayed the launch of our mission. Finally, our church board started changing directions, causing school board/church board conflict, and I was caught in the middle.

As the year unfolded, we eventually realized the church board did not trust the school board or me and wanted to take the school in a different direction, even though the Bylaws that had governed us well for seventeen years and which the church board had re-approved just a couple years earlier severely limited the church's power to over-ride the school board. The school board and I were faced with the dilemma of either honoring our current elders' requests (though outside the Bylaws) or using the Bylaws as our anchor to weather the storm of the current elders. Though I had enjoyed a thriving relationship with my school board, many elders, my administrators, staff, students, and parents for seventeen years, had consistently reached out to the church board to build relationship with transparency and trust, and was following all the governing documents, somehow the church relationship fell apart. For me, it became clear that God was moving us either toward greater resolution through a fiery crucible or toward a great rescue for me. At just the right time, God lovingly and obviously provided a way of escape for me through a different school that had just made me aware of an opening, asking me to network applicants for them. The school board and church board continue to work through several issues and I pray for them often. Though it felt all wrong and was heart-breaking for my family and friends and I, we also felt God's presence more than ever through the pain and He has once again proven Himself so faithful.

My story highlights not only the faithfulness of God, but also the waters in which each headmaster swims. I was approved by Van Lunen to change my project to discuss Board Governance rather than my initial project of improving Church Partnerships. Christian schools are generally organized under one of three governance models: 1) a church-led governance model, 2) a church-school 2-boards model, or 3) an independent school model. Each model can be a biblical model and an effective model, though each model has its own advantages and disadvantages. The eventual and sustainable success of any governance model to produce a thriving Christian school is dependent on Christ-centered relationships and Divine leadership, where everyone involved is humbly and prayerfully serving each other in kindness and truth. Wherever prayer, humility, service, kindness, or truth is lost, there it is that you will find tension and conflict. If the conflict is then not addressed with prayer, humility, service, kindness, and truth, then the conflict takes root and starts to grow until it begins destroying people and, unless checked, can destroy the school, no matter how grand the history of its ministry (Rev. 2,3).