



# GROWING DEEP

Leadership & Formation Framework

A Governance Perspective

# Contents

Contents .....	1
Introduction .....	2
What is <i>Growing Deep</i> ? .....	3
A Governance-Level View of the Elements of <i>Growing Deep</i> .....	4
A Final Word .....	10

*Education is not about information, but about formation  
– about shaping the loves that orient our lives.*

**James K. A. Smith**

# Introduction

*The welfare of a community depends on the education of its youth.*

**Martin Luther<sup>1</sup>**

*Growing Deep* is the leadership and formation framework of Lutheran education. It shapes how Lutheran schools and early childhood services understand leadership, culture, formation and flourishing across their communities.

This document has been developed to support governing bodies to understand *Growing Deep* at a high level, and to discern their governance role in relation to it. It is not an implementation guide and does not direct operational practice. Its purpose is to support governing bodies in setting strategic direction, stewarding identity and shaping the conditions in which leadership and practice can flourish. It's an invitation to awareness, alignment and oversight.

Governing bodies play a significant role in shaping the conditions in which *Growing Deep* can be lived well. That role is real, but it is also carefully bounded. The day-to-day work of *Growing Deep* is lived primarily through principals, leadership teams, staff and learners. The governing body's role is not to do the work, but to foster the culture and provide the resources within which it unfolds.

Responsible and effective governance in Lutheran education involves attentiveness rather than intervention. It calls governing bodies to steward identity, shape culture and build trust, while releasing leadership to lead. In this sense, the governing body's role is less about action and more about orientation; providing clarity of purpose while trusting leadership with implementation. This is an active, future-focused stance grounded in clarity of role, confidence in leadership and commitment to the mission of Lutheran education.

Governing bodies serve generously and often quietly. Their work carries significant responsibility and is offered alongside professional, family and community commitments. Through their stewardship, governing bodies sustain not only the life and strategic direction of individual schools and services, but also the strength, coherence and credibility of Lutheran education across Australia. Lutheran Education Australia acknowledges this service with deep appreciation.

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<sup>1</sup> summary translation: 'Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen of All the Cities of German on Behalf of Christian Schools' (1524)

## What is *Growing Deep*?

*Growing Deep* articulates what it means to participate, work and flourish in a Lutheran education community. It brings together theology, leadership practice, culture and learning into a shared language that connects Lutheran schools and early learning services across Australia.

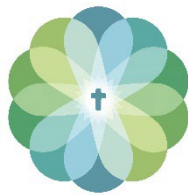
The framework is made up of five elements:

- **Our Foundation:** the Lutheran lens identifies key theological concepts that underpin Lutheran education.
- **Vocational Practices:** the five key areas of work that describe what we do in Lutheran education.
- **Capabilities:** describe how we do what we do in Lutheran education.
- **Our Culture:** describes the atmosphere or climate of the environment we seek to create
- **Free to Flourish:** the story for Lutheran schools and early childhood services, grounded in Christian beliefs and values and a catalyst for ongoing improvement and innovation.

These elements are interconnected. None stands alone, and none is intended to be understood in isolation. At the same time, not all elements belong to the governing body in the same way.

For governing bodies, *Growing Deep* functions primarily as a lens rather than a lever. It shapes what governing bodies notice, how they listen, and the questions they ask, without drawing them into operational leadership.

As with many education-specific frameworks, governing body members' familiarity with *Growing Deep* will usually develop gradually and often through the leadership of the principal and staff, who work most closely with it in daily practice.



## GROWING DEEP

Leadership & Formation Framework

*The full Growing Deep framework is available here: <https://growingdeep.lutheran.edu.au/>, and is commended to governing bodies that choose to explore its theological and educational foundations in greater depth.*

## A Governance-Level View of the Elements of *Growing Deep*

The pages that follow offer a governance-level summary of the five interconnected elements of *Growing Deep*.

Each element is briefly described, with particular attention given to where it primarily lives within a school community and how it intersects with the work of the governing body.

This overview is intentionally high-level. Its purpose is not to equip governing bodies to implement *Growing Deep*, but to help them locate their role with clarity and confidence. In some areas, that role is substantial. In others, it is light. In all cases, the emphasis is on stewardship, trust and alignment, rather than operational involvement.



## Our Foundation (The Lutheran Lens)

### WHAT THIS ELEMENT IS

*Our Foundation* names the theological convictions that underpin Lutheran education. The Lutheran Lens gives language to how the gospel of Jesus Christ shapes how Lutheran communities understand God, humanity, learning, responsibility and hope. It frames how grace and accountability are held together, how vocation is understood, and how forgiveness, justice and restoration are lived.

This element is a way of seeing ourselves, each other and our community. It is a theological posture that shapes how decisions are made, how people are treated and how growth is understood over time.

### WHERE THIS ELEMENT LIVES

The Lutheran Lens is expressed throughout the life of the school. It is present in worship and Christian Studies, but also in everyday interactions, expectations and decisions. It can be seen in how mistakes are handled, how success is defined, how discipline and care are held together, and how hope is spoken when circumstances are difficult.

The Lutheran Lens is seen in our ways of being, often showing up more clearly in culture but also in some documentation.

### GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

This is where the governing body's role is most significant.

Governing bodies are custodians of identity over time. While principals and staff live this theology daily, governing bodies are responsible for ensuring that Lutheran identity remains clear, coherent and alive across leadership transitions, strategic decisions and changing contexts.

This role is not about theological control or doctrinal policing. Rather, it involves holding the Lutheran Lens as a shared reference point in governance conversations, ensuring that key governing documents reflect Lutheran identity, and support leadership formation that is grounded in Lutheran theology.

### A NECESSARY CAUTION

There is a particular risk for governing bodies in this space: the risk of over-identification.

Over-identification occurs when theological confidence is mistaken for governance wisdom; when personal faith preferences are assumed to represent Lutheran identity as a whole; when faith language is used to close down discernment rather than invite it; or when spiritual maturity is presumed to replace the disciplines of good governance.

Theological depth is a gift to governance, but it does not remove the need for listening, role clarity or shared decision-making. Strong governance holds identity firmly, while remaining open, curious and accountable.

## Vocational Practices

### WHAT THIS ELEMENT IS

The *Vocational Practices* describe what leaders attend to in Lutheran education. They name the core areas of leadership focus that shape learning, identity, improvement, community and effective organisation.

They are not tasks to be completed, but lenses through which leadership work is understood and prioritised.

### WHERE THIS ELEMENT LIVES

The *Vocational Practices* live in leadership practice, staff collaboration, planning, resourcing and everyday decision-making. They are expressed through the rhythms of school life rather than through standalone initiatives.

### GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

Governing bodies do not enact the *Vocational Practices*. They contribute by ensuring these practices are visible in strategic priorities, reflected in the questions they ask, and supported through resourcing and policy decisions.

Governing bodies that govern well create space for these practices to flourish by resisting operational drift and by trusting leadership to lead and manage.

### QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT ASK

How are the vocational practices explicitly reflected within the site's strategic plan?

How might the governing body better support the principal to fulfil the goals of the vocational practices in this context?

In what ways is the Strengthening Lutheran Identity practice visible at this site, and how does it actively contribute to the Lutheran ethos and mission/values of this site?

## Capabilities

### WHAT THIS ELEMENT IS

*Capabilities* describe how leadership and work is exercised. It names the personal and professional qualities that shape how we work together, leadership practice, decision-making and relationships.

### WHERE THIS ELEMENT LIVES

*Capabilities* live in leadership and staff formation, professional learning and daily practice. It is expressed through how we act under pressure, respond to complexity and relate to others.

### GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

The *Capabilities* intersect with governance through the governing body's relationship with the principal. The recruitment, support, development and review of the principal form a primary space where *Growing Deep* is held at governing body level. The quality of this relationship, marked by trust, clarity and accountability, shapes leadership capacity across the school.

The influence of governing body culture is therefore indirect but profound, shaping the leadership conditions within which capabilities are formed and exercised over time.

### QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT ASK

In what ways can we, as a governing body, support and encourage the ongoing development of the principal's/leader's capabilities? What resources, structures, or supports are in place, or could be strengthened, to enable this growth?

How well does the principal's/leader's performance appraisal/review process align with and reinforce growth and development in the capabilities?

How are the capabilities embedded and made explicit within our leadership recruitment and selection processes?

## Our Culture

### WHAT THIS ELEMENT IS

*Our Culture* names the kind of workplace environment Lutheran education seeks to create – one shaped by trust, belonging, courage, responsibility and grace.

Culture is not what is written in policy documents. It is what people experience day-to-day in their working lives. It is shaped by what is rewarded, what is ignored, how conflict is handled and how decisions are explained.

### WHERE THIS ELEMENT LIVES

*Our Culture* lives in the everyday workplace life of the school, particularly in how people interact, communicate, relate, debate and decide. It is transmitted through tone, habits and expectations far more than through formal statements.

### GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

This is where the governing body's influence is deepest and most enduring.

Governing body culture shapes executive culture. Executive culture shapes staff culture. Staff culture, in turn, shapes the learner experience. This flow of influence means that governing bodies influence culture whether they intend to or not.

The way governing body members speak to one another, handle disagreement, exercise authority, and extend trust sends powerful signals about what leadership looks like in the workplace community. Governing bodies that are anxious, defensive or controlling often create cultures of compliance downstream. Governing bodies that are disciplined, curious and relationally healthy create space for courage, innovation and shared responsibility.

Attending to culture therefore requires

governing bodies to attend honestly to themselves. This includes reflecting on meeting tone, decision-making habits, use of power and willingness to listen.

Stewarding culture does not mean preserving the past or resisting change. Lutheran education has always been reforming, responsive and forward-looking. Effective culture-setting anchors innovation in identity, ensuring that change is purposeful rather than reactive and that growth remains aligned with mission.

### QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT ASK

*How does the culture of our group reflect the culture of Lutheran education in Growing Deep?*

Clarity of direction: Are we clear about the vision and direction of Lutheran education **and** what is required of us in our role and context?

Loving service: Do we embrace high expectations and standards of behaviour **and** are loving and forgiving in our relationships?

Positive recognition: Are we continuing to grow in spiritual practice and professional expertise **and** acknowledging and celebrating our contributions?

Professional ownership: Are we empowered and supported to make decisions within our area of responsibility **and** also accountable for our behaviours, actions and decisions?

Creative focus: Do we encourage working creatively to deliver the best possible outcomes **and** are aware of the boundaries and structures that guide the focus of work?

Purpose and meaning: Do we have a deep sense of purpose and vocation **and** demonstrate passion and commitment as we serve?

## Free to Flourish

### WHAT THIS ELEMENT IS

*Free to Flourish* describes the story Lutheran education holds for its learners, learning and its community. It names the qualities schools seek to nurture, particularly in young people as they grow to be adventurous, compassionate, purposeful and relational. *Free to Flourish* is the story for Lutheran schools and early childhood services, grounded in Christian beliefs and values and a catalyst for ongoing improvement and innovation. Our learning story inspires a deep understanding of who we are, and how we are created for relationship with God and all creation.

### WHERE THIS ELEMENT LIVES

This element lives in classrooms, relationships, opportunities and learning experiences. It is expressed through pedagogy, care, challenge and belonging for all.

### GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

Governing bodies do not operationally ensure that learners flourish. Their role is to shape the conditions in which flourishing is possible.

This includes making decisions that support environments of trust and belonging, allocating resources in ways that reflect purpose, and holding risk wisely rather than avoiding it. Governing bodies may also reflect on how their own culture embodies the qualities they hope to see in learners. When governing bodies act with courage, compassion, purpose and relational integrity, they model the very dispositions Lutheran education seeks to cultivate.

### QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT ASK

*How do we, as a governing body, embody the dispositions of adventurous, compassionate, relational, purposeful?*

Adventurous - Do we invite courageous exploration, delving into big ideas, and hold a space of curiosity rather than judgement?

Compassionate - Is our dialogue open and respectful in a space where we can critically reflect on our ways of seeing, thinking, and doing.

Purposeful - Have we identified and acknowledged our individual gifts and strengths so that we all contribute to the flourishing of this school/service?

Relational - How do we pursue interdependent relationships that embrace the future with hope and confidence?

## A Final Word

Mature and effective governance in Lutheran education is not about doing more. It is about attending well: attending well to identity, to culture, to trust and to the future being shaped.

Clarity of identity does not mean resistance to change. It means holding identity firmly enough to move forward freely. It means stewarding what is distinctive while enabling innovation, growth and responsiveness. It means trusting leadership to lead while remaining attentive to the deeper currents shaping the community.

Through their sustained attention to identity, culture and trust, governing bodies make possible the long, patient work of leadership and learning within Lutheran education. Their service creates stability across seasons of change and enables principals and leadership teams to lead with confidence and clarity.

Governing bodies need to know *Growing Deep* well enough to recognise it, use it as a reference point, and protect space for it to be lived. When governing bodies are humbly and confidently grounded in Lutheran identity, attend carefully to their own culture, and trust leadership with implementation, the conditions are created for leadership and learning to be shaped in Christ-centred ways, and *Growing Deep* is free to serve its intended purpose.

