



Christian Meditation in Schools

$p < .001$ ($z = +/- 3.29$)

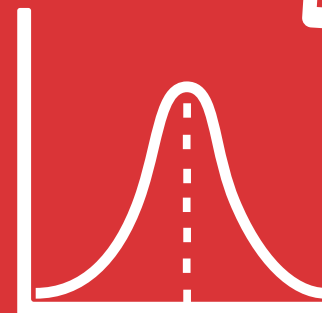


($M = 3.37$, $SD = 1.42$),

$t(54.39) = 3.0$



$B = -.41$, $SE = .12$, $\beta = -.30$



Interim Project Report: Final Student Survey 2016

This report presents the final survey data from the last year of a longitudinal study investigating the impact of Christian Meditation in schools upon children's religious and spiritual development.

The research was led by Professor Anne Graham, Director of the Centre for Children and Young People at Southern Cross University in partnership with Catholic Schools Office in the Lismore Diocese and Sydney Catholic Schools, along with the World Community for Christian Meditation.

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The views expressed in this publication do not represent any official position on the part of Southern Cross University or the partner organisations, but the views of the individual authors based on the research findings.

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Introduction

There has been growing international interest in the potential of meditation type programs for improving student wellbeing in schools, including the use of Christian Meditation in Australian Catholic schools (Campion & Rocco, 2009). Christian Meditation is similar to the spiritual wisdom and practice at the core of other forms of meditation. It involves sitting still, with eyes closed, and focusing the mind by silently repeating the ancient Christian prayer word, Maranatha (Come Lord), gently returning the consciousness to the word when the mind drifts. Christian Meditation is described as offering the opportunity to simply sit in God's presence, through the stillness and silence of body and mind; to discover the true self through 'real participation in the reality of God' (WCCM, 2013). In contrast with the tendency for young people to drift away from religion in adolescence (Büssing, Föller-Mancini, Gidley, & Heusser, 2010; Engebretson, 2006; Fisher, 2006a; Rymarz & Graham, 2006), the small body of research on Christian Meditation available at the outset of this study indicated that this form of personal, silent prayer is popular with children and young people (Campion & Rocco, 2009; Keating, 2017a,b).

The Catholic School Offices of Lismore Diocese and the Archdiocese of Sydney (now Sydney Catholic Schools) approached the Centre for Children and Young People at Southern Cross University to undertake longitudinal research on the Christian Meditation program in schools in their Dioceses. The research aimed to identify the impact, over time, of Christian Meditation on the religious and spiritual development of children and young people in the context of Catholic education. The Director of the World Community for Christian Meditation provided advice on the project and confirmed the need for such a study. The research was conducted over three school years from 2014-16.

The final, full project report is now available entitled, 'Christian Meditation in Schools Consolidated Research Findings 2014 – 2016.' In addition, throughout the study, interim progress reports were prepared. Collectively, these form a suite of documents, as listed below. These can be located from the CCYP website (www.scu.edu.au/research-centres/centre-for-children-and-young-people/).

- 2014 Baseline Student Survey Report
- 2014 Report of Interview Findings from Year 4 Teachers

- 2015 Report of Interview Findings from Year 5 Teachers and Year 5 Student Focus Groups
- 2016 Final Student Survey Report

This document is the last interim report. It presents the results and full analyses from the final student survey conducted at the end of the study.



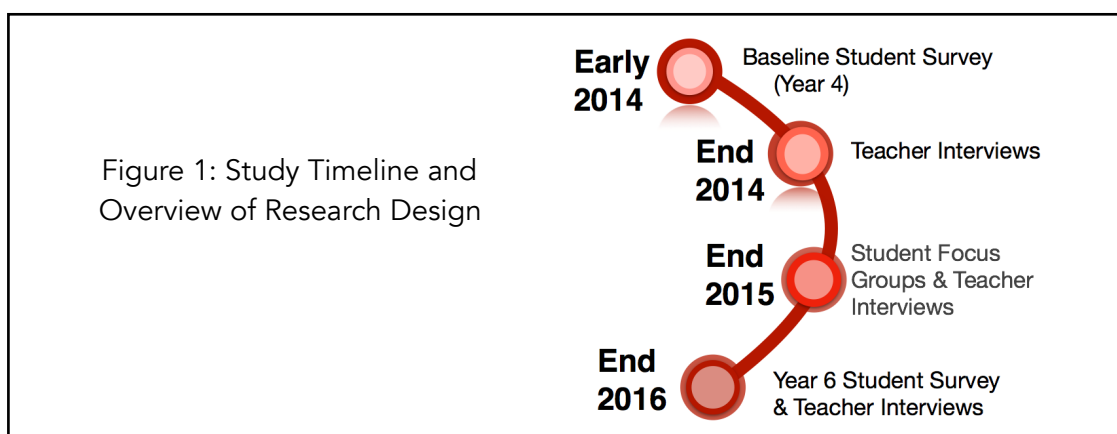


Research Design

The aim of the research was to identify the impact, over time, of Christian Meditation on the religious and spiritual development of children and young people in the context of Catholic education. Religious and spiritual development in this study was understood broadly, in line with contemporary notions of children's spirituality. This was reflected in the framework of four overarching research questions that guided the study. These were:

1. In what ways does Christian Meditation shape children and young people's relationship with, and understanding of, God;
2. In what ways does Christian Meditation shape children and young people's understanding of, and relationship with, self;
3. In what ways does Christian Meditation shape children and young people's understanding of, and relationships with, others;
4. In what ways does Christian Meditation shape children and young people's understanding of, and relationship with, the Catholic Church.

A mixed-methods approach was adopted to investigate the research questions. This comprised a pre- and post-program student survey, mid-way student focus groups and annual teacher interviews. The research began in 2014 with a cohort of Year 4 students (mean age 9 years) from 12 Catholic schools across the two Dioceses. The study then followed a substantial proportion of these students until the end of Year 6 (December 2016). The research design involved data collection at key milestones over the three school years, as indicated in Figure 1.



For further details on the overall research design please see the final report. This report focuses on the final student survey data only, collected in late 2016.





Method

Materials

The online survey measured young peoples' relationship with (a) God, (b) themselves, (3) others, and (4) the Catholic Church, in addition to several demographic characteristics. The survey questions were answered using tick-box, Likert type, and open-ended response formats. The survey was administered using Qualtrics online survey platform. Details of the development of the survey content are reported in the 2014 Baseline Survey Report (Anderson & Graham, 2014). The full content of the Year 6 online survey is presented in Appendix A.

Procedure and Ethical Considerations

The research project was approved by the university human research ethics committee (ECN 14-133; ECN- 15-303). At the beginning of the study, schools were recruited in each Diocese via key staff members from the Catholic Schools Offices. Prior to each aspect of the research a researcher from the university sent an email to the school principals (Appendix B) to formally invite them to take part in that wave of data collection. Eight schools (five schools in the Lismore Diocese and three schools from the Sydney Archdiocese) were available to take part in the 2016 student survey (and 2016 teacher interviews). The university researcher sent each Year 6 teacher in the schools an information letter (Appendix C) and instructions for facilitating the online survey with their Year 6 students (Appendix D). Teachers were also sent the parent information letters and opt-out consent forms (Appendix E) as well as the student information letters and opt-out consent forms (Appendix F). Opt-out forms were utilised at this stage as most parents and students had already consented to involvement in previous aspects of the study and been informed of its longitudinal nature.

Students took part in the survey if neither they nor their parent 'opted-out'. However, students retained the right to stop the survey at any point if they became uncomfortable or no longer wished to continue for whatever reason. Those students who did not have parental consent, or did not want to take part, did some of their own work in the classroom / or on the computer.

Schools were given funding support by their Dioceses to allow teachers to have time away from their classes for both the interviews and to administer the surveys. Participation was voluntary, anonymous, confidential and no inducements were

offered. On average it took the Year 6 students just under 15 minutes to complete the survey (SD = 12 mins 30 seconds).

Participants

In total, 250 Year 6 students from across the eight schools took part in the online survey. Table 1 reports the number of students from each Diocese across several demographic variables. The percentages in Table 1 show the following key points:

- Somewhat more males than females in each Diocese completed the survey in 2016.
- Most participants were aged 12 years old (71.6% of the total sample).
- There were similar percentage of students who reported being an Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander in the Lismore Diocese (5.8%) and the Sydney Archdiocese (5.1%).
- In Sydney Archdiocese there were many more students who spoke English and another language at home (39.2%) compared to the Lismore Diocese (10.5%).
- The most frequently reported religion in each area was Catholic (65.2% of the total sample).
- A greater proportion of students in the Lismore area (20.5%) reported having no religion compared to the Sydney area (2.5%).
- In both Dioceses the most frequently reported attendance pattern at church was 'a few times a year' (25.6% of the whole sample).

Table 1: Frequency of Survey Participants in Demographic Categories.

Variable	Categories	Sydney		Lismore	
Gender		N	%	N	%
	Male	42	53.2	100	58.8
	Female	37	46.8	70	40.9
Age					
	11	30	38.0	39	22.8
	12	48	60.8	131	76.6
	13	1	1.3	1	0.6
ATSI					

Variable	Categories	Sydney		Lismore	
	Yes	4	5.1	10	5.8
	No	73	92.4	149	87.1
	Not sure	2	2.5	12	7.0
Language at home					
	English only	47	59.5	153	89.5
	English and another language	31	39.2	18	10.5
	A language other than English	1	1.3	0	0
Religion					
	Catholic	60	75.9	103	60.2
	Other religion	16	20.3	20	11.7
	No religion	2	2.5	35	20.5
	Not sure	1	1.3	13	7.6
Church attendance on weekends					
	Every weekend	15	19.0	13	7.6
	Every second weekend	10	12.7	4	2.3
	Once a month	9	11.4	18	10.5
	A few times a year	30	38.0	34	19.9

Variable	Categories	Sydney		Lismore	
	Once a year or less	6	7.6	13	7.6
	Never	9	11.4	89	52.0

Note. One student in Lismore Diocese did not indicate their gender, therefore the Lismore sample was 171 students, bringing the total sample size to 250 students.

Comparison of the 2016 Sample to the 2014 Sample

In 2014, 206 Year 4 students completed the online survey (89 boys and 117 girls, most frequent age 9 years) from 6 primary schools in Lismore Diocese and another 6 primary schools in Sydney Archdiocese. In comparison, in 2016, the survey was completed by 250 students in total (142 males and 107 females) from five schools in the Lismore Diocese and three schools from Sydney Archdiocese. Originally, matching the data across 2014-2016 waves was anticipated, but due to more students completing the survey in 2016 than 2014, some students who completed the survey in 2014 no longer attending the same schools, and identification via birthdates being problematic due to inconsistencies across the two waves of data it was not possible to match each participant over time. Thus, instead of using within group comparison analyses, independent samples methods were used.





Results

This section reports details of the participant responses to the survey in 2016, and where relevant, compares these responses to those reported in 2014.

Practising Christian Meditation

Prayer When Not at School

Overall, just over half the Year 6 students ($n = 135$, 54%) said they prayed when they were not at school. In comparison, in 2014, 70.9% of the Year 4 students said they prayed when not at school. In 2016, a greater proportion of students from Sydney schools ($n = 50$, 63.3%) than Lismore schools ($n = 85$, 49.7%) said they prayed when not at school. Similarly, in 2014, more Sydney students (74.4%) said they prayed when not at school compared to Lismore students (68.5%).

Enjoyment of Christian Meditation at School

Overall, half the Year 6 students ($n = 129$, 51.6%) reported enjoying Christian Meditation at school. A slightly greater proportion of Year 6 students from Sydney schools ($n = 44$, 55.7%) said they enjoyed Christian Meditation than those from Lismore schools ($n = 85$, 49.7%). This question was not asked in 2014.

Meditation When Not at School

More often than not the Year 6 students said they had not tried to meditate when not at school ($n = 135$, 54%). Of those who had tried to meditate when not at school ($n = 108$), more than half ($n = 62$, 57.4%) had attempted Christian Meditation. Of these 62 students, 49 (81.7%) had attempted Christian Meditation at home. Overall, this represents 19.6% of the total sample of Year 6 students. That is, approximately one fifth of students had tried using Christian Meditation at home.

It was more common for Year 6 students from Sydney schools ($n = 42$, 53.2%) to have tried to meditate when not at school than Lismore students ($n = 66$, 38.6%), and far more common for this to be Christian Meditation in Sydney ($n = 30$ out of 42, 71.4%) than Lismore ($n = 32$ of 66, 48.5%). Similar proportions of Year 6 students from Sydney ($n = 23$ of 30, 79.3%) and Lismore ($n = 26$ of 32, 83.9%) who had practised Christian Meditation when not at school had done so at home.

The Impact of Christian Meditation

The next sections of the survey asked students to respond to statements about (1) being still and silent, (2) how they feel about God, (3) themselves, (4) others and (5) church using a 5-point scale where 1 represented 'Not at all', 2 represented 'Every now and then', 3 represented 'Sometimes', 4 represented 'Most of the time', and 5 represented 'All the time'.

Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations across Sydney and Lismore school students. Asterisks in the notes column show items with significant differences between Sydney and Lismore in 2016. The hash (#) symbol signifies that mean scores of the total sample were significantly lower in 2016 than those of 2014.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Sydney and Lismore Year 6 Students

Notes	Survey Item	Sydney			Lismore		
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
	I like being silent	2.79	1.01	78	2.74	0.85	163
**	I find it hard to be still	3.00	1.23	75	2.59	1.04	163
#	When I am still I feel more relaxed	3.08	1.23	76	3.13	1.22	166
	I like it when the whole class is silent with me	3.55	1.39	76	3.40	1.28	161
***	I feel close to God when I meditate	3.37	1.31	78	2.87	1.34	147
***	I feel close to God when I am in nature	3.47	1.32	78	2.94	1.28	153
****	I believe in God	4.58	0.89	79	3.94	1.35	157
#*	I know God loves me	4.41	1.11	78	3.99	1.36	160
	I like being me	4.58	0.75	78	4.48	0.86	170
	I am thankful for my life	4.65	0.58	79	4.54	0.87	170
#	I know I am loved	4.58	0.67	78	4.45	0.93	169
	I am a peaceful person	3.36	0.97	77	3.54	0.91	168
	I make good decisions	3.57	0.71	79	3.76	0.70	170
#	I forgive people who have hurt me	3.90	0.97	78	3.85	1.00	170

*	I am kind to my friends	4.44	0.52	79	4.59	0.50	169
	I am kind to my family	4.23	0.58	78	4.29	0.70	171
	I am kind to my teacher	4.59	0.65	78	4.52	0.72	170
	I feel like I belong at school	4.16	0.94	76	3.89	1.05	166
	Other people are kind to me	3.82	0.79	78	3.86	0.79	170
#*	I like going to Mass	2.92	1.24	77	2.51	1.16	154
**	I feel closer to God when I visit the church	3.80	1.29	79	3.24	1.43	156
***	I am happy to go to church	3.31	1.22	78	2.76	1.24	157
***	Going to church helps me to be kind to others	3.24	1.38	79	2.69	1.28	157
#	I like being with other people at church	3.46	1.13	79	3.16	1.35	157

Notes:

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001 for differences between Lismore and Sydney mean scores in 2016.

2016 mean scores from the total sample were significantly lower than those of 2014 at p < .002 (that is, Bonferonni adjusted alpha for 24 comparisons = .05/24 = .0021).

Being Still and Silent

There were no significant differences ($p > .05$) across Sydney and Lismore students for most statements about being silent, thus total sample results are reported for all items in Figure 1a, and also split by region for "I find it hard to be still".

As seen in Figure 1a, most students selected that they like being silent 'Sometimes', they find it hard to be still 'Every now and then'. However, 'most of the time' when they are still they feel more relaxed, and said they liked it 'All the time' when the class is silent with them. In Figure 1b it can be seen that Sydney students were more likely than Lismore students to respond "All of the time" or "Most of the time" for the statement "I find it hard to be still", while Lismore students were more likely to respond 'Every now and then' or 'Sometimes'.

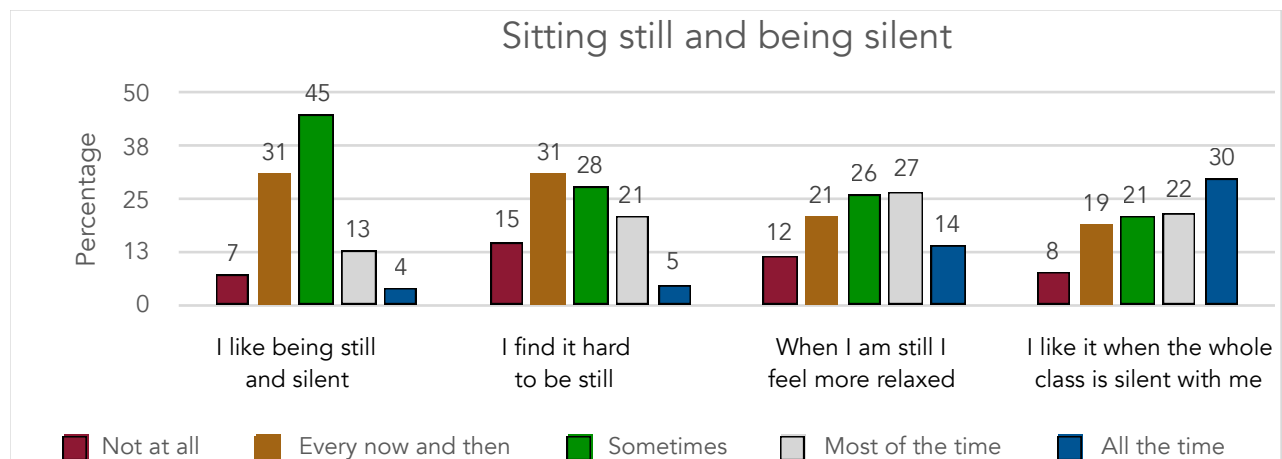


Figure 1a. Total Sample Responses to Items Relating to Being Still and Silent

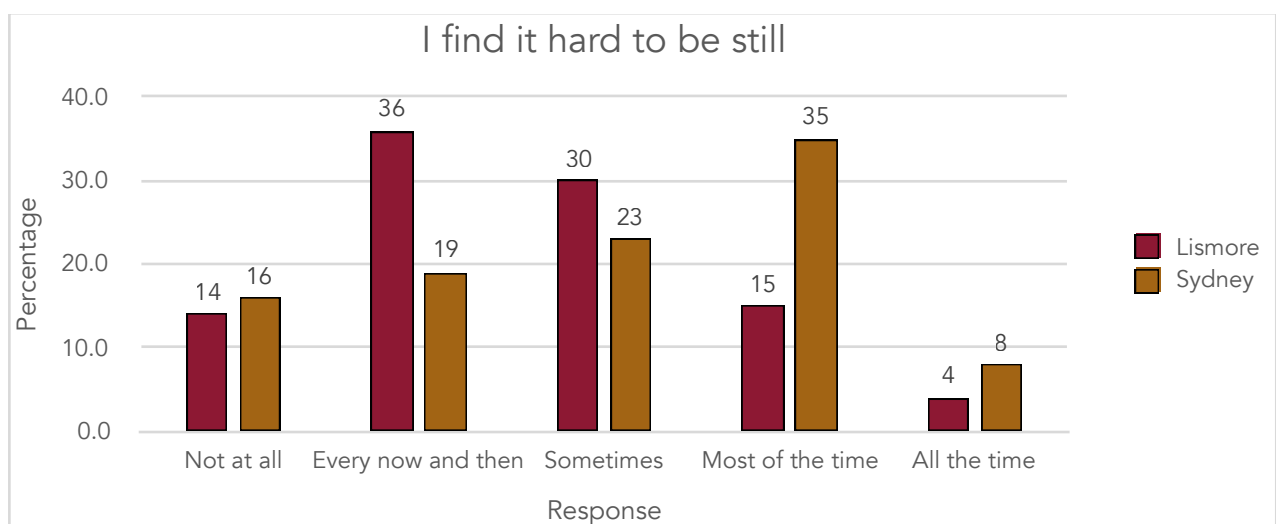


Figure 1b. Responses By Diocese to Item 'I Find it Hard To Be Still'.

How You Feel About God

For the four statements relating to how students feel about God, the students in Sydney scored significantly higher than students in Lismore (Table 2). Thus, these results are presented by Diocese in Figure 2.

In Figure 2a it can be seen that a larger percentage of students in Sydney said they felt close to God "Most of the time" and "All of the time" when they meditate compared to Lismore students, who were more likely than Sydney students to say "Not at all".

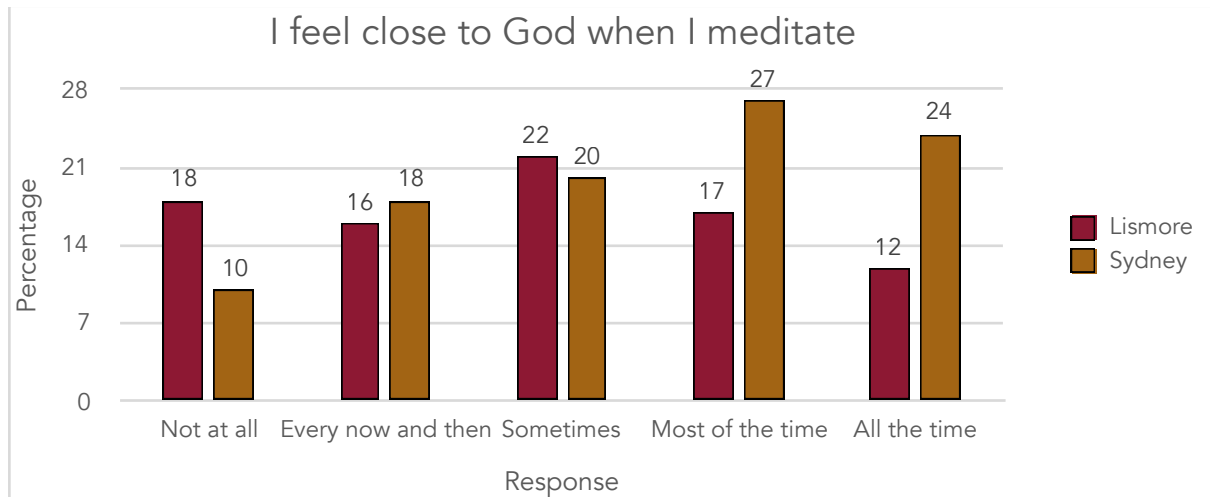


Figure 2a. Responses By Diocese to Item 'I Feel Close to God When I Meditate'.

In Figure 2b it can be seen that a greater percentage of students in Sydney schools were more likely to say they felt closer to God "Most of the time" or "All of the time" when they were in nature than Lismore students, while Lismore students were more likely to say "Not at all", "Every now and then" or "Sometimes".

A greater percentage of students in Sydney believed in God "All the time", as shown in Figure 2c. Figure 2d shows that a larger percentage of Year 6 students in Sydney schools said they know God loves them "All the time" compared to Lismore students.

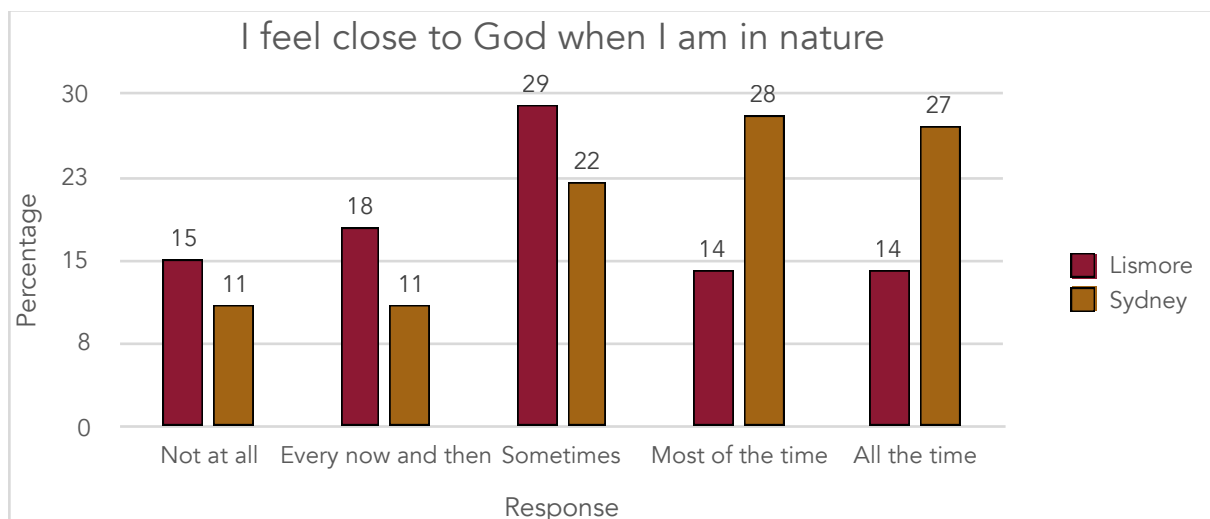


Figure 2b. Responses By Diocese to Item 'I Feel Close to God When I am in Nature'.

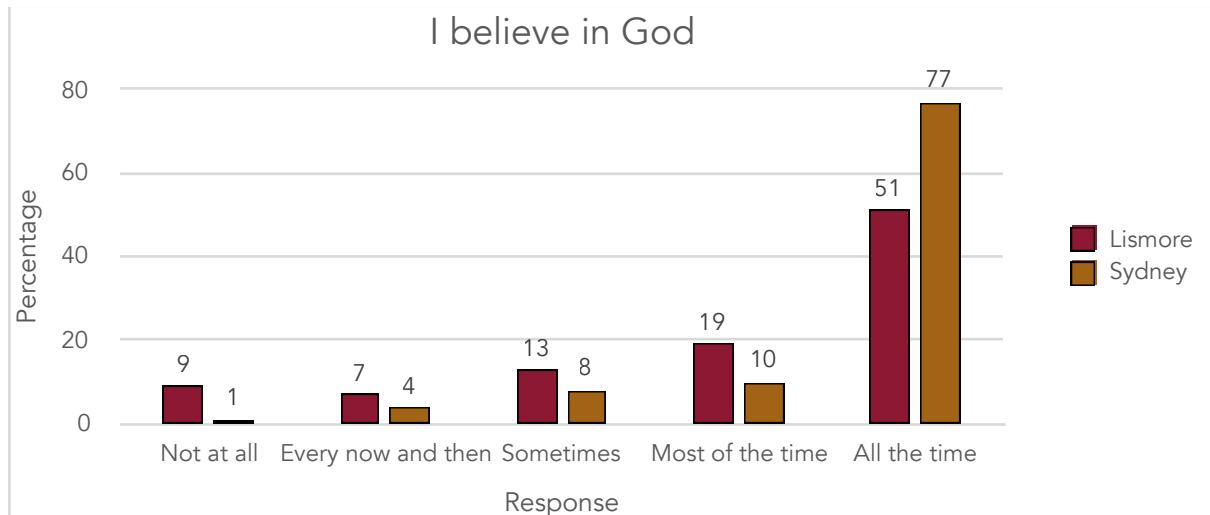


Figure 2c. Responses By Diocese to Item 'I believe in God'.

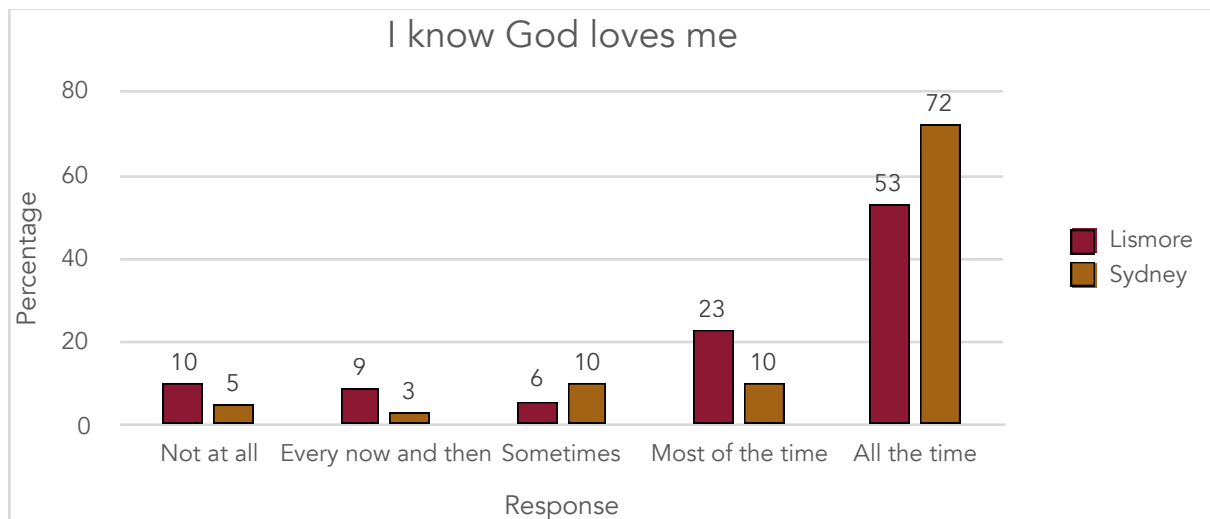


Figure 2d. Responses By Diocese to Item 'I Know God Loves Me'.

How You Feel About Yourself

There were no significant differences (at $p > .05$) between students' responses to the statements regarding how they feel about themselves across Diocese, thus the responses are presented as a total sample. Figure 3 shows 66% of Year 6 students said they 'like being me' "All the time", 70% said they are thankful for their life "All the time", and 65% said they know they are loved "All the time". The most frequent response to the statements 'I am a peaceful person' and 'I make good decisions' was 'Most of the time'. These responses show that overall the Year 6 students have a close relationship with themselves.

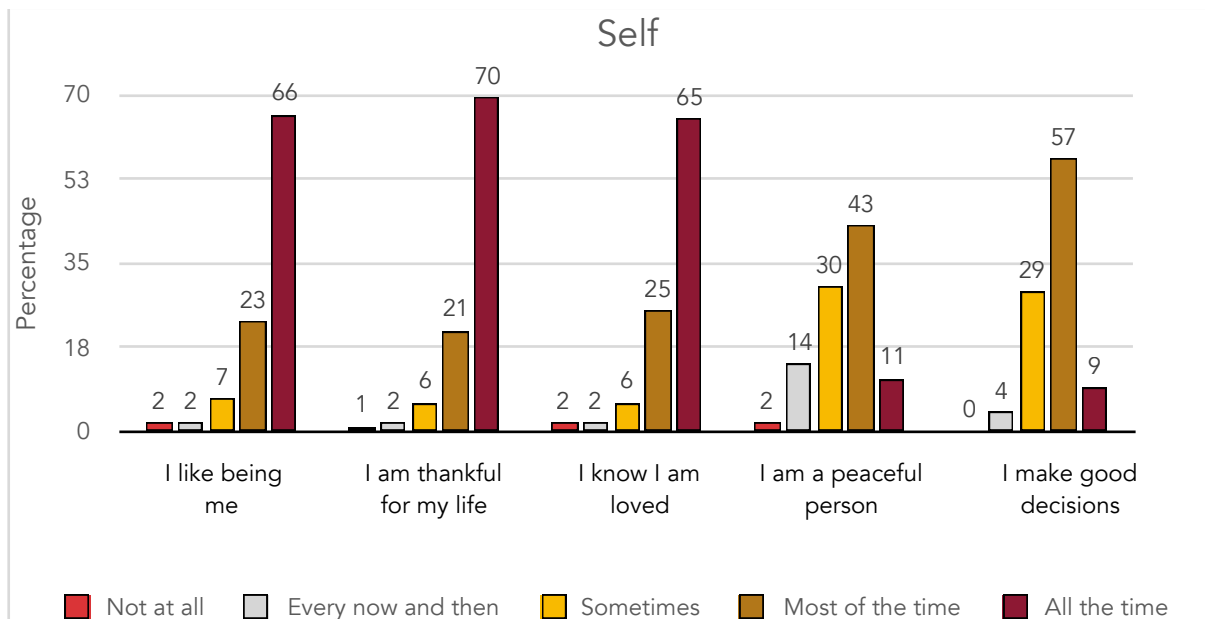


Figure 3. Total Sample Responses to Items Relating to Relationships with Self.

How You Feel About Others

There were no significant differences (at $p > .05$) between students' responses to the statements regarding how they feel about others across Diocese, thus the responses are presented as a total sample. Figure 4 shows that Year 6 students most frequently responded "All the time" to the statements 'I am kind to my friends', 'I am kind to my teacher' and 'I feel like I belong at school'. The most frequent response to 'I forgive people who have hurt me', 'I am kind to my family' and 'Other people are kind to me' was "Most of the time".

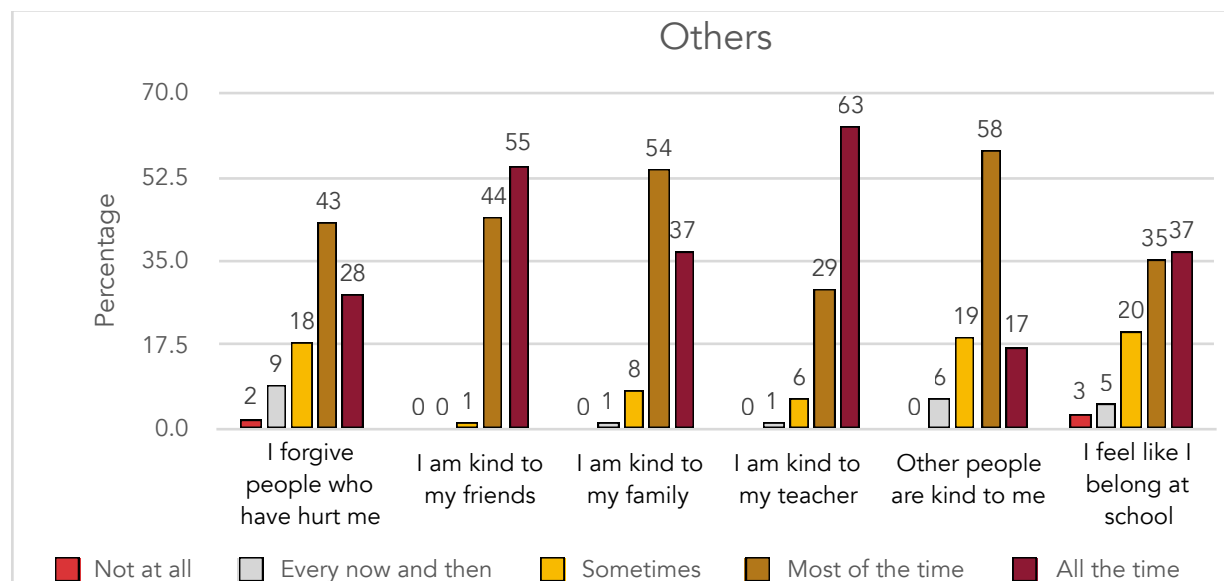


Figure 4. Total Sample Responses to Items Relating to Relations with Others.

How You Feel About Church

As there were statistically significant differences across Diocese to the statements regarding church, the results are presented by Diocese. Sydney students were more likely to report they like going to Mass “All the time” than Lismore students, while Lismore students were more likely than Sydney students to select “Not at all” (Figure 5a).

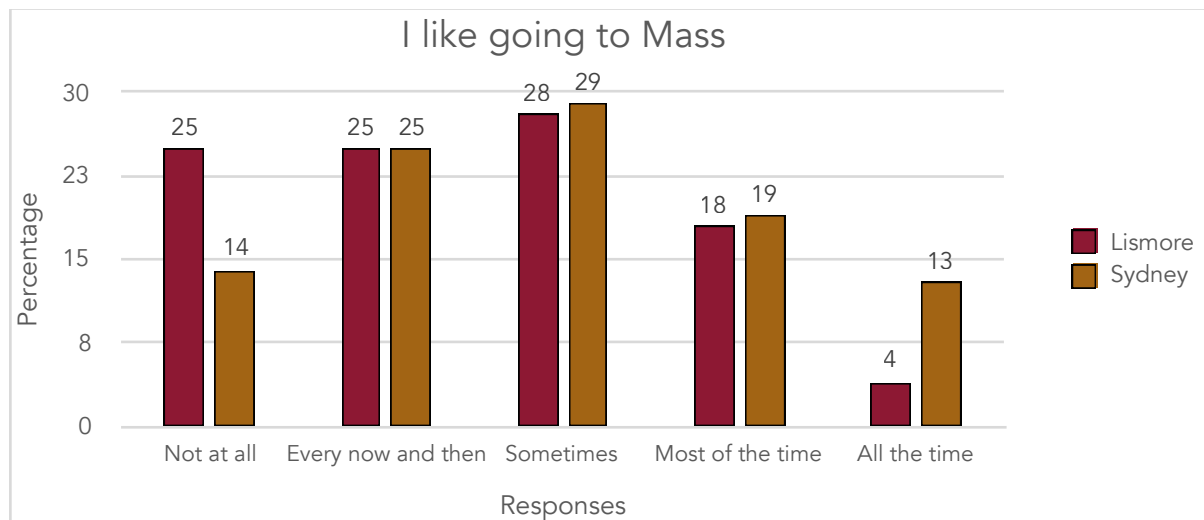


Figure 5a. Responses by Diocese to Item 'I Like Going to Mass'.

Similarly, Sydney students were more likely to report they feel closer to God when they visit the church “All the time” than Lismore students, while Lismore students were more likely than Sydney students to select “Not at all” (Figure 5b).

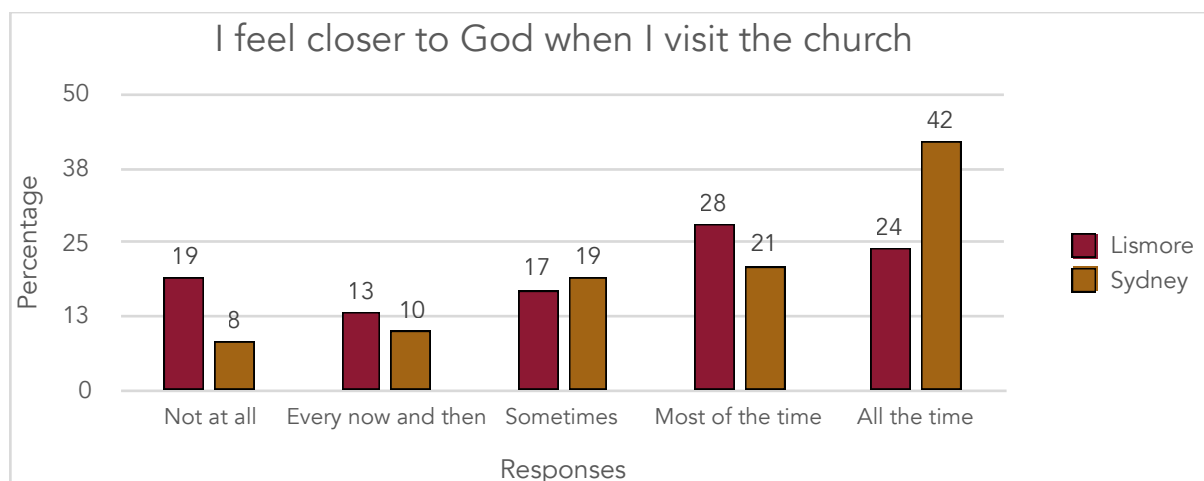


Figure 5b. Responses by Diocese to Item 'I Feel Closer to God When I Visit the Church'.

Sydney students were more likely to response “All the time” or “Most of the time” to the statement ‘I am happy to go to church’, while Lismore students were more likely to select “None of the time” or “Sometimes’ (Figure 5c).



Figure 5c. Responses by Diocese to Item ‘I am Happy To Go To Church’.

Sydney students were more likely to select “All the time” or “Most of the time” to the statement ‘Going to church helps me be kind to others’, while Lismore students were more likely to select “Not at all”, “Every now and then” or “Sometimes” (Figure 5d).

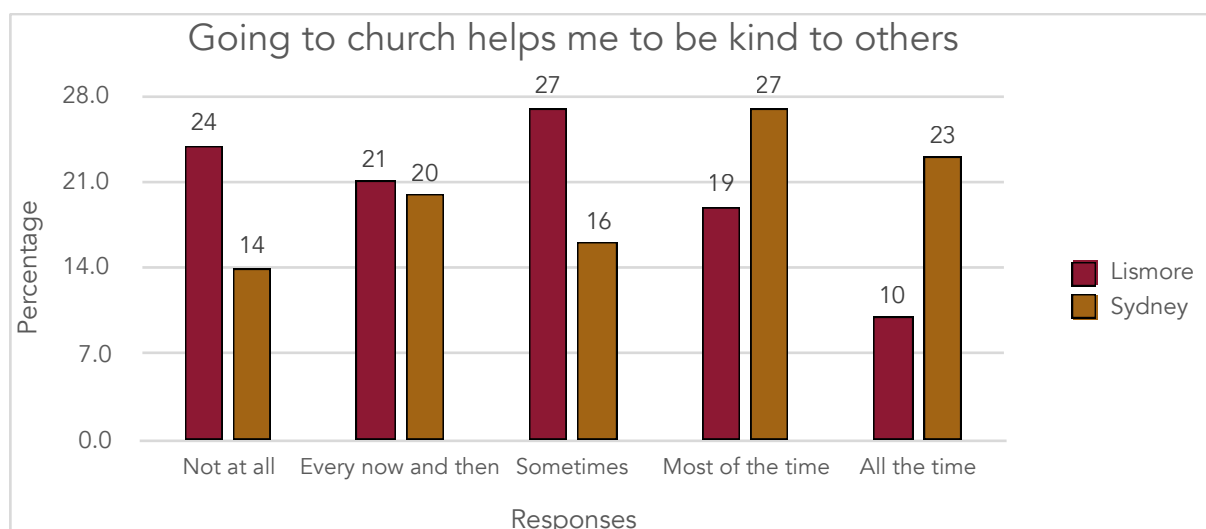


Figure 5d. Responses by Diocese to Item ‘Going to Church Helps me be Kind to Others’.

Sydney students were more likely to select “All the time” or “Most of the time” to the statement ‘I like being with other people at church’ while Lismore students were more likely to select “Not at all”, “Every now and then” or “Sometimes” (Figure 5e).

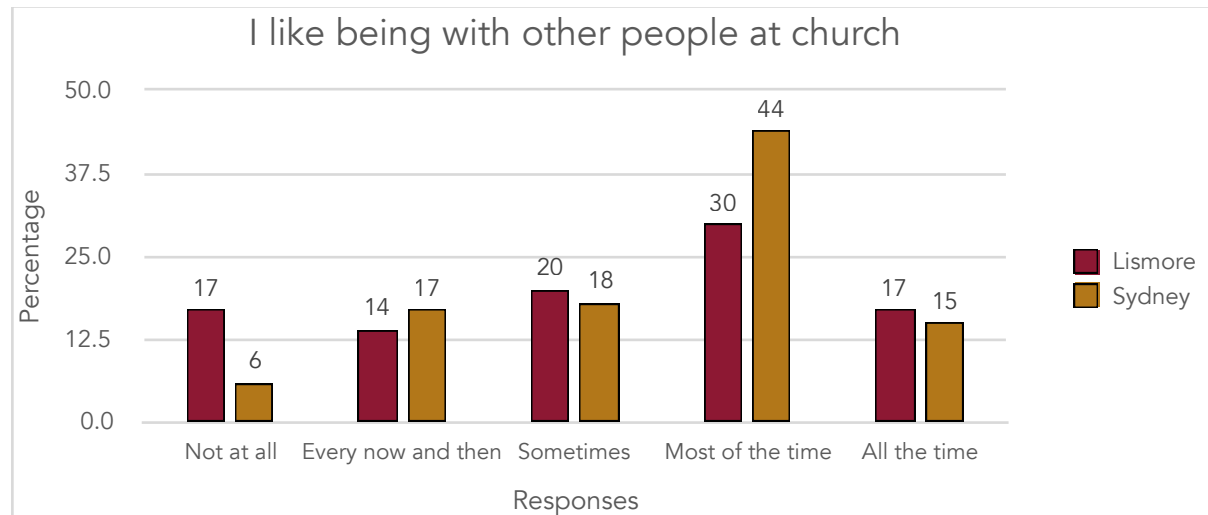


Figure 5e. Responses by Diocese to Item ‘I Like Being with Other People at Church’.

Student Views About How Christian Meditation Has Helped Them Since Year 4

Year 6 students were asked to rate six statements regarding how doing Christian Meditation since Year 4 may have helped them. The students were asked to rate each statement on a 5-point scale, where 1 meant 'No, I strongly disagree'; 2 meant 'No, I disagree', 3 meant 'I'm not sure', 4 meant 'Yes, I agree', and 5 meant 'Yes, I strongly agree'. Note that these survey items were not used in 2014.

The mean scores are presented below in Table 3. Independent t-tests with Bonferroni adjusted alpha of .008 for six comparisons ($.05/6 = .008$) showed that Sydney students scored significantly higher on ‘Christian Meditation has helped me to feel closer to God’, ($t(178.39) = 3.55, p < .001, \eta^2 = 5.0\%$), and on ‘I will do Christian Meditation later on my life’ ($t(163.47) = 2.81, p = .004, \eta^2 = 3.40\%$). Note that Levene’s tests were significant in both cases ($p = .031$ and $p = .046$, respectively) and indicated the assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated. There were no other significant differences between Lismore and Sydney schools.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Questions about how Christian Meditation Has Helped Since Year 4

Statement	Lismore			Sydney		
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n
Christian Meditation has helped me to be a happier person	3.02	1.15	161	3.25	0.92	77
Christian Meditation has helped me to be a kinder person	2.96	1.14	160	3.14	0.94	77
Christian Meditation has helped me to feel closer to God***	3.11	1.29	158	3.72	1.09	78
Christian Meditation has helped me concentrate on my school work	3.11	1.31	159	3.14	1.12	79
I prefer doing other kinds of prayer instead of Christian Meditation	2.97	1.27	156	3.04	1.26	76
I will do Christian Meditation later on in my life**	2.64	1.21	148	3.11	1.09	75

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

To enable a more detailed look at the way in which students responded to these six statements, the percentage of students from Lismore and Sydney schools selecting each response are shown in Figure 6 (a – f).

Christian Meditation Has Helped Me To Be A Happier Person

There were no significant differences between Sydney and Lismore student responses to the item 'Christian Meditation has helped me be a happier person'. Figure 6a shows that only a relatively small number of students from both Sydney and Lismore schools said they strongly agreed with the statement. Students from both school regions were more likely to respond "Yes, I agree" or "I'm not sure".

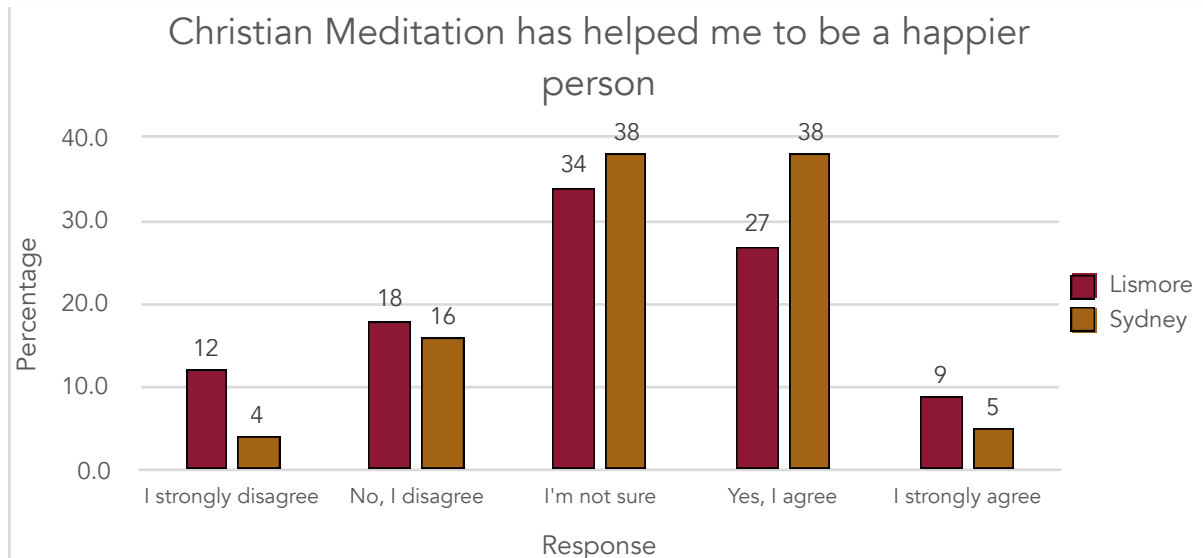


Figure 6a. Responses by Diocese to Item 'Christian Meditation Has Helped Me To Be A Happier Person.'

Christian Meditation Has Helped Me To Be A Kinder Person

Similarly, there were no significant differences between Sydney and Lismore schools on their responses to the statement 'Christian Meditation has helped me to be a kinder person'. As shown in Figure 6b only a relatively small number of students from both Sydney and Lismore schools said they strongly agreed with the statement 'Christian Meditation has helped me be a kinder person'. Students from both school regions were more likely to respond "Yes, I agree" or "I'm not sure".

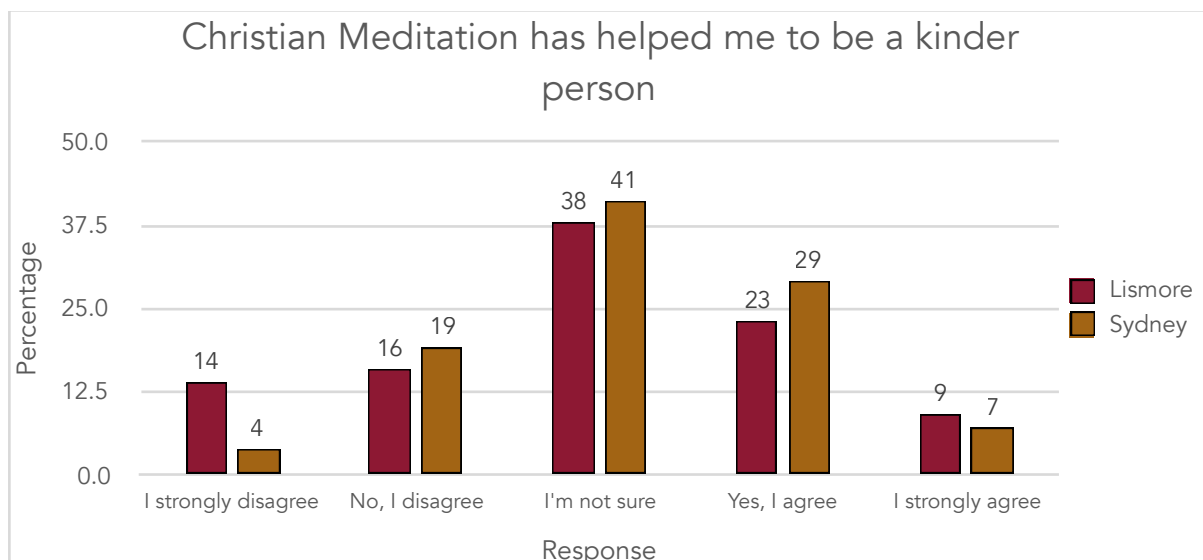


Figure 6b. Responses by Diocese to Item 'Christian Meditation Has Helped Me To Be A Kinder Person'.

Christian Meditation Has Helped Me To Feel Closer to God

Sydney students scored significantly higher than Lismore students in their responses to the statement 'Christian Meditation has helped me feel closer to God'. As seen in Figure 6c, Sydney students were more likely to respond "I'm not sure", "Yes, I agree" or "Yes, I strongly agree" compared to Lismore students, who were more likely to respond "No I strongly disagree" or "No, I disagree".

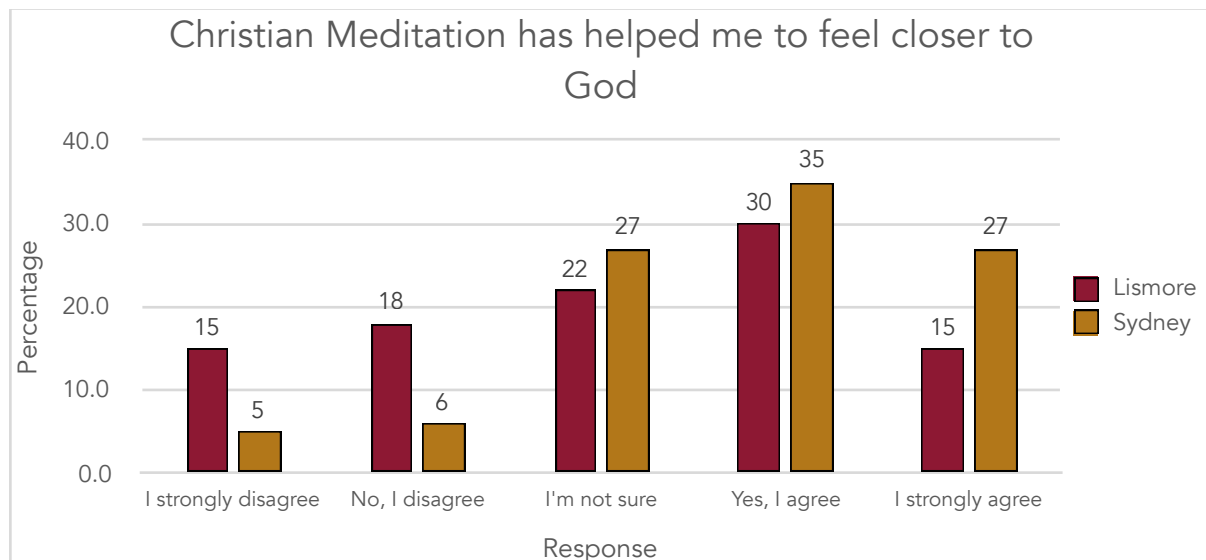


Figure 6c. Responses by Diocese to Item 'Christian Meditation Has Helped Me to Feel Closer To God'.

Christian Meditation Has Helped Me Concentrate on my School Work

There were no significant differences between Sydney and Lismore students on their responses to the statement 'Christian Meditation has helped me concentrate on my school work' (see Figure 6d). Interestingly though, Figure 6d shows that Sydney students were more likely to respond "No, I disagree", while Lismore students were more likely to respond "No, I strongly disagree".

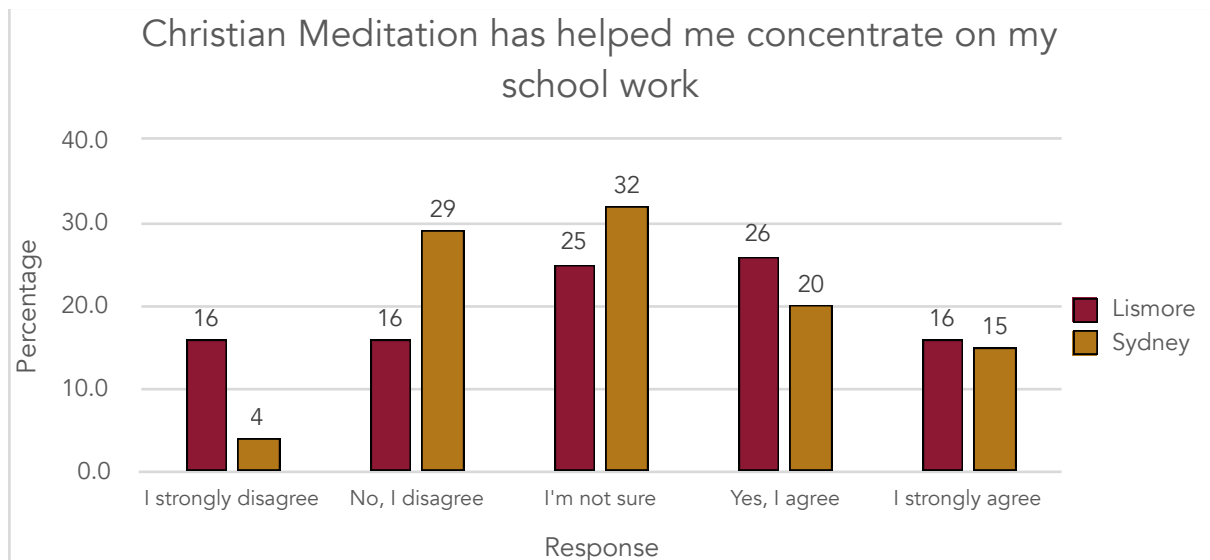


Figure 6d. Responses by Diocese to Item 'Christian Meditation Has Helped Me Concentrate on my School Work'.

I Prefer Doing Other Kinds of Prayer Instead of Christian Meditation

There were no significant differences between Sydney and Lismore students on their responses to the statement 'I prefer doing other kinds of prayer instead of Christian Meditation'. Figure 6e shows a fairly even distribution across the range of responses, with a slight peak on the centre option "I'm not sure".

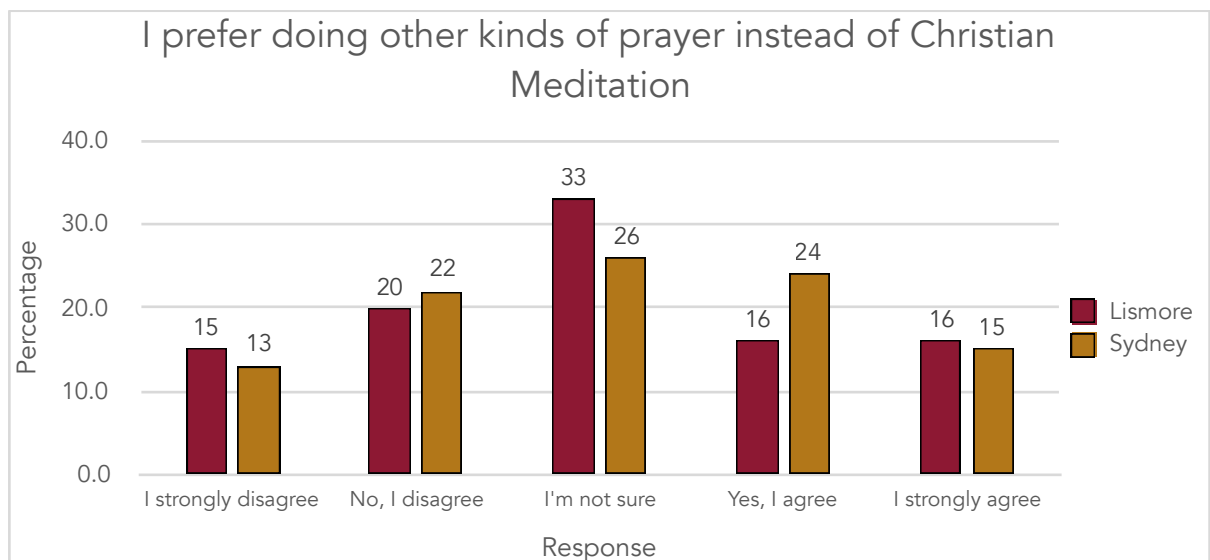


Figure 6e. Student Prayer Preferences by Diocese

I Will Do Christian Meditation Later On In My Life

Sydney students were significantly more likely to agree with the statement 'I will do Christian Meditation later on in my life' compared to Lismore students (see Figure 6 f).

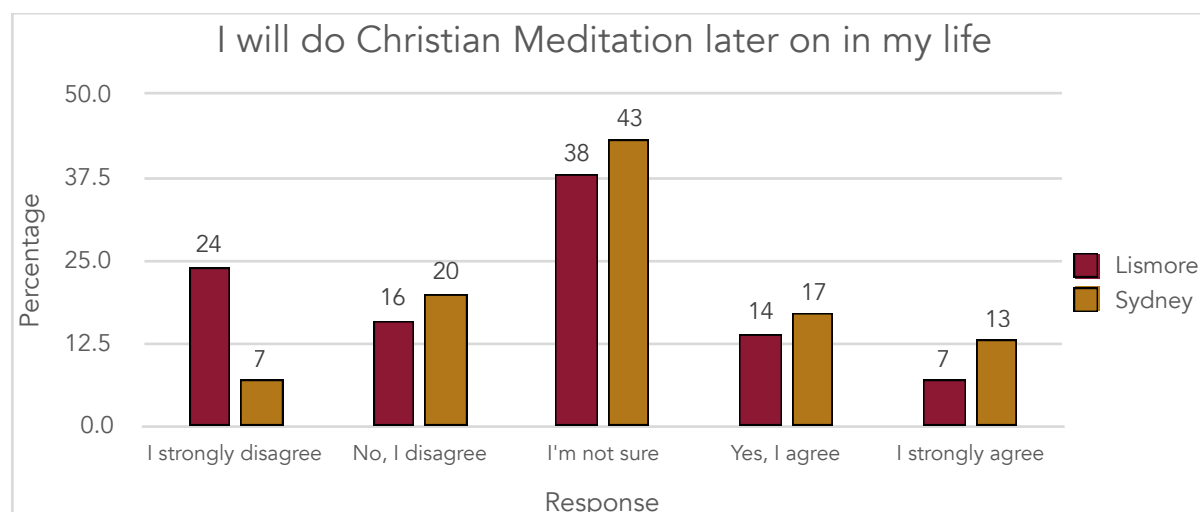


Figure 6f. Responses by Diocese to Item 'I Will Do Christian Meditation Later On In My Life'.

Students' Important Messages about Christian Meditation

At the end of the online survey students were given the opportunity to write an open-ended response to the question: 'What is the most important message you would like others to know about your experience of doing Christian Meditation at school since Year 4?' The majority of students took to opportunity to respond, many writing quite long comments about their views and experiences or offering advice to others about the practice. The students' comments illustrate Year 6 children's capacity to articulate their opinions regarding their spiritual experiences and their agency in making choices about their religious practices. As discussed below, the Year 6 children's comments underline the importance of pedagogical practices that engage children. Several themes emerged from the Year 6 students' comments that are instructive for moving forward with implementing Christian Meditation in schools.

Outcomes of Christian Meditation

Christian Meditation helps students to reflect, relax and monitor their moods

Many students commented that doing Christian Meditation at school assisted them to take time out from their busy school lives and to relax and to reflect on the events of the day so far. Sitting quietly in meditation appears to have a calming

impact on many students with some of them commenting that meditation was a way to monitor their own moods and regain a sense of peacefulness and calmness. The following quotes from students express these ideas:

Doing Christian Meditation helps you to relieve and relax yourself, once I was angry and I did Christian Meditation to relieve myself and make me calm. (Boy, aged 12 Sydney)

It has helped me to calm down when I am too energetic, which is pretty much all the time. (Girl, aged 11, Lismore)

I really like doing Christian meditation because it helps me relax when I am stressed or frustrated. (Boy, aged 12, Sydney)

Christian Meditation makes you calm and relaxes you. Sometimes you close your eyes and think about God and what has been happy in your day that you had today. We should all do meditation sometimes when you are angry, sad or even happy... (Girl, aged 12, Lismore)

Christian meditation has help me become more relaxed and when I'm angry it makes my mood change. (Boy, aged 12, Sydney)

A girl's comment noted that although Christian Meditation does help evoke a sense of calmness, it can be more or less difficult to enter a meditative state depending on her initial mood, and that sometimes she struggled to keep her mind off whatever was troubling her:

I would like others to know that when you do Christian Meditation it helps you to become calm and peaceful. I find that if you are in an angry mood when you do the meditation, you will not really do the meditation properly, you will just brood over what had just been happening, you don't really feel like doing the meditation and like you are being forced to do it. I find that if you are in a happy mood before you do the Meditation, it is easier for you to slip into the meditation and be more peaceful when you finish... (Girl, age 12, Lismore)

Linked to the idea of relaxing and self-reflection, one boy's comment emphasised how the reflective process that is facilitated during Christian Meditation offered him not only a sense of calmness, but a sense of gratitude for the people in his life:

I like the fact that it is just a time were you get to sit down, relax and reflect on my great mates, great teacher, great relatives and my kind, caring and loving family.(Boy, aged 12, Lismore)

Similarly, a girl commented that reflection during Christian Meditation was a way to connect with others and offer kindness:

It is a way where you can calm down by having a silent moment to yourself and think about your day - how it can be fixed, what you can do to fix it, the best thing that has happened in your day and how can you make good things happen more or make someone else's day better. (Girl, age 11, Lismore)

Christian Meditation helps students to concentrate on their school work

A second key theme to emerge from the Year 6 student comments was that Christian Meditation not only calmed them down after being in the playground, but also had beneficial flow-on effects of helping them to concentrate on their school work later on. The following quotes capture this theme in the children's own words:

Christian Meditation helps me to be calm and concentrate on my school work even when I don't use the Maranatha. (Girl, aged 12, Sydney)

It helps you to concentrate so even if you don't want to try to close your eyes because it will help you later in the day!! (Girl, aged 11, Sydney)

Christian Meditation is a good way to calm down and focus more on your work....it helps you a lot and you feel like you are in a dream. (Girl, aged 12, Lismore)

It helps students like me to concentrate more on their school work and also things at home as well. (Boy, aged 11, Sydney)

Christian Meditation helps students feel close to God

Students frequently commented that doing Christian Meditation gave them an opportunity to be in God's presence. This was particularly commented on by children who stated that they believed in God and who attended church more regularly. The children's detailed comments illustrate their ability to articulate the spiritual experiences elicited during Christian Meditation, as the following examples demonstrate:

...Christian Meditation brings you closer to God like when you say the word 'Ma-ra-na-tha' as you breath in and out its almost like God is entering you and talking to you... (Boy, aged 12, Lismore)

Christian Meditation is something all Catholic people should experience. Christian Meditation is one of the most empowering

things a person can do to feel closer to God. Christian Meditation has never failed to help me concentrate and be a better person.... (Boy, aged 12, Sydney)

My message is enjoy Christian Meditation because it helps me to become closer to God, peaceful and it is one on one time with god. (Girl, aged 12, Lismore)

Christian Meditation has helped me focus on God, my school work, praying and being relaxed. Meditation definitely makes me feel better, it calms me when I am stressed, and it's also a silent and nice time to pray. (Girl, aged 11, Sydney)

One girl's comments urged other children to cherish their meditation time as an opportunity to experience the presence of God, even if other children in the class were not as focused and engaged with meditation was much as she was:

Do not get distracted by others around you while you are having your time with God. Even if you think its silly God will be there with you. God will be in your heart and he will listen to your prayers. (Girl, aged 12, Lismore)

Another girl's comment illustrated the sense gratitude for God that she experienced during Christian Meditation and how this experience led to her self-development and a strengthening of her beliefs:

Be you. Believe in God because he will strengthen you and guide you in the tough times. Christian Meditation strengthens you and builds and fixes your connection with God and his creations. It helps you appreciate what God has given you. (Girl, aged 12, Sydney)

The following quote extends upon these ideas to also include a sense of unity and togetherness when the whole class meditates together:

...When we do Christian Meditation, it's like a little bit of down time for us all and we can become closer to God, or just take the time to think about the day we just had. It is the one time a day that our classroom can be completely silent with no distractions or noises... (Girl, aged 12, Lismore)

Barriers to Practising Christian Meditation

Individual differences need to be taken into account when practising Christian Meditation

Several Year 6 students' comments conveyed their understanding that other students may have different experiences and views about doing Christian Meditation than they did, and that such diversity needs to be catered for in class. The following comments demonstrate examples of children who do not enjoy Christian Meditation themselves, but they acknowledge that other students may enjoy it:

For me I don't think Christian Meditation helps me and it doesn't do anything for me. I feel it is great for people who like this kind of stuff. Personally I don't like Christian Meditation. (Girl, aged 12, Sydney)

Christian Meditation is only for those that have learnt how to sit still or want to learn to sit still, those who want to be closer to God and for those that want to escape their busy lives. None of these are me therefore this must be the re-occurring reason for my dislike of Christian Meditation. Meditation is about being at peace with yourself so should be an option, not something forced upon you. ...Christian meditation is not an enjoyable experience for me but, for some unknown reason maybe other children like it? (Boy, aged 12, Lismore)

Other children who did like doing Christian Meditation themselves also acknowledged that other students might not enjoy it, therefore demonstrating the ability of Year 6 students to empathise with others and understand other students' preferences:

Christian Meditation has different effects on people and it depends on how close you are to God, I personally believe that Christian Meditation can bring you closer to God. (Girl, aged 12, Sydney)

Some children were not engaged with Christian Meditation

As indicated above, there were diverse comments provided by the Year 6 students, and it was clear that some students were not engaged with the practice. These students often said they didn't like it because they felt they were not benefitting in any way:

I am not a fan of Christian Meditation because I feel like it doesn't help me at all. I just feel like I am sitting doing nothing. (Girl, aged 11, Sydney)

Well I learnt nothing, my opinion of Christian Meditation is that it is boring and I hate it. I think the school shouldn't do meditation. (Boy, aged 12, Lismore)

Another student commented about his observations of his whole class, and noted how he felt the time was wasted as it could be used to do more academic work:

...There is up to five people in my grade who actually focus during meditation and of those five people only one of them actually slightly likes it. Overall I believe that Christian Meditation is a waste of valuable learning time. If you wasted five minutes a day during class time that could add up from every day to a long amount of wasted time doing meditation while we could be getting heaps of schoolwork done. I believe we shouldn't do meditation. (Boy, aged 11, Lismore)

One boy did not want to do Christian Meditation because he felt that it was not aligned with Catholicism. His comment below shows that it is important that Christian Meditation be embraced across the school and Church life and that teachers continue to educate and remind students and their parents about the origins of Christian Meditation and the meaning of the mantra 'Maranatha':

Personally I do not think Meditation is a part of the Christian belief, we are not Buddhist or Hindus. Our parish priest did not approve of the ways and strongly disapproved, and so do I. Maranatha means Come Lord, but what Lord, the Devil, or Buddha? Thank you for this opportunity to express my opinion hope you consider it... (Boy, age 12, Sydney)

During Christian Meditation it can be difficult to sit still

A frequent comment by Year 6 students was that they found it difficult to sit still for long periods of time and to keep their eyes closed. The following quotes are typical examples of children who made these comments:

Doing Christian Meditation is just a time to relax and sit but from my personal experience I do not enjoy sitting still having my eyes closed and remaining quiet for more than 2 minutes. (Girl, aged 11, Sydney)

Christian Meditation is ok sometimes but it's really hard to stay put for a long time and it hurts my back to sit up straight for 10 or 11 minutes. (Girl 11 Sydney)

Other children commented that they didn't like being forced to close their eyes: *"That you shouldn't have to close your eyes because it's a choice you should have"* (Girl 12 Lismore).

Children who have experienced trauma may find it harmful to close their eyes

A couple of the Year 6 children who expressed negative attitudes regarding Christian Meditation wrote long responses explaining why they disliked it so much. Two of these children's comments indicated that closing their eyes during meditation was extremely difficult as they did not feel safe and found it impossible to stop unwanted traumatic thoughts arising. For example, one girl commented that she could not stop ruminating on negative thoughts:

I am not sure if meditation helps me, I am always thinking about things that trouble me rather than peaceful and happy things. (Girl, aged 12, Lismore)

A boy's comments took the role of a parent trying to protect and advocate for their child not to have to do Christian Meditation because having to close their eyes during meditation was evoking negative emotions associated with the child's difficult life experiences. This student's comment articulately conveys his sensed lack of agency and frustration. It underlines the importance of a child's circumstances being taken into account when implementing Christian Meditation in the classroom so as to do no harm:

If I send my kids to a school where they do Christian Meditation I will swap schools and I will tell every school that my son/daughter hates it and they don't have to do it. If you do Christian Meditation it reminds you of all the bad things in your life and you get really emotional. I can't close my eyes for 5 minutes. Are you crazy? I've had to deal with enough in my life so you shouldn't make it harder for kids after they've dealt with so much their whole life. If you watched everyone do meditation you could see that almost no one wanted to do it. (Boy, aged 12, Lismore)

This boy's comment implies that professional development for teachers is required so that they are alert to detecting children who may have emotional and/or developmental reasons for not being able to close their eyes and meditate. Teachers need training in how to identify, monitor and support such children so that further harm is not inadvertently inflicted. A practical solution might be to allow the child to choose a pleasant image to look at while meditating instead of closing their eyes. The child's choice of the image to look at may help the child feel empowered and safe. Alternatively, they may prefer to watch the flicker of a candle flame

(battery operated candles are safe as they have no flame and still convey a flickering light). Additionally, it is important that the students experience success in being able to meditate, and this may mean that meditation sessions need to be very short to begin with.

Practising Christian Meditation in the Classroom

Christian Meditation takes frequent and regular practice

Another key theme to emerge from the Year 6 student comments was that Christian Meditation takes lots of practice, underlining that it is normal for children (and adults!) to struggle at first to sit still, be silent and focus on the mantra, 'Maranatha'. The students commented that it was only with regular practice over the two to three years from Year 4 to Year 6 that they learned to meditate with ease, as the following quotes show:

At first it is hard to keep still but when you do it everyday in class you will get used to doing it and it will become naturally easy. (Girl, aged 12, Lismore)

When you do Christian Meditation at first it is really hard when you have never meditated before but after a while you will get used to it so you just try your best to stay still and you will gradually get better at it and find it a lot more easy to do. (Boy, aged 12, Lismore)

I would like others to know that when I started I sometimes got distracted from laying/sitting still for a while but now I can lie or sit for the whole time of meditation now... (Boy, aged 11, Lismore)

...Year 4 I struggled a bit to close my eyes but I now I can. (Girl, aged 11, Lismore)

Don't give up on meditating and don't try disturb others whilst they're meditating because if you keep trying to meditate God WILL speak to you, you WILL relax and you WILL improve at being a proper person. (Boy, aged 12, Lismore)

Since Year 4, I have learned to control my body and being silent is now much easier. (Girl, aged 12, Lismore)

The longer you practise Christian Meditation, the easier it will be to withstand being still for longer periods of time, all the while focusing on a mantra. If you get distracted easily, a mantra helps heaps. (Girl, aged 12, Sydney)

The time of day to practise Christian Meditation matters – adapt to suit your class' preferences

Some students made comments about their preferences for what time of day is best to practise Christian Meditation. Many students commented that Christian Meditation was good to practise just after recess or lunch break, when they had been running around in the playground and the practice helped them to slow down and focus again on their school work (see above themes of relaxation and concentration). However, others commented that they found it difficult to meditate after such physical activity, as demonstrated by the following quote:

Christian Meditation is great and helps me relax but it's sometimes hard to do straight after recess. Especially if you have been playing a fun game that involves running around with your friend. (Girl, aged 12, Sydney)

Another student agreed and commented that it was easier to focus on meditation early in the day:

...I also think it is easier for you to do Christian Meditation in the morning rather than just after lunch because you are already relaxed and haven't done much yet. If you do meditation after lunch you are more hot and bothered so it is harder for you to do the meditation. (Girl, aged 12, Lismore)

One student commented that it was important to do Christian Meditation at a time of day when students were not hungry.

The length of time spent meditating matters

Year 6 students also commented that the length of time spent meditating was very important. If the meditation practice was too long they found it difficult to concentrate, they became bored and frustrated and then did not enjoy the practice. The following comments represent this theme and underline just how important it is to keep the length of the meditation practice at a level at which the students remain positive and confident about their ability to meditate:

I find this meditation very boring and I believe five minutes is too long. (Boy, aged 11, Lismore)

I have always been good at meditating so I don't really mind doing it. I can't tell whether it helps me to be a better person but I do know that it's nice to relax after a busy day at school. I find that meditation goes really quick if it is for under 5 minutes but any more and I can lose concentration. (Girl, aged 12, Lismore)

I enjoyed it a tiny bit. Not to be rude but after a while it gets really boring, the 5-7 minutes were fine but when we get to 10 the rest of the class starts to get fidgety and they ruin the silence which is why I said I don't really like doing meditation with my class... (Girl, aged 11, Sydney)

It is important for teachers to implement Christian Meditation in a manner consistent with the training

Some of the Year 6 students whose comments indicated they were not engaged with Christian Meditation suggested how important it is for teachers to facilitate the practice in a manner consistent with the guidelines provided during professional development workshops. For example, a student commented that he was distracted by others children in the class, suggesting that this class may be meditating for too long for their concentration span, and that his teacher read out cards, which he also found distracting:

It's boring and I just don't see the point in it you can't even close your eyes because there always someone there to distract you and my teacher annoys me because she reads out these weird little cards while I'm trying to meditate so yeah, there is no point in doing it unless your alone or your extremely stressed out. (Boy, aged 11, Lismore)

Another student made a similar comment with regard to being distracted by other students during Christian Meditation. This student also commented that it is important for teachers to remain flexible with regard to the time children are asked to meditate for, and that this may fluctuate from day to day depending on the class' level of concentration:

Meditation is about being at peace with yourself so should be an option, not something forced upon you. Also when other students misbehave in Christian Meditation all the students must pay the price for just one child in the class misbehaving. Teachers force a time that children must sit still for instead of giving the children free choice of if they want to meditate for 1 minute or 5 minutes... (Boy, aged 12, Lismore)

Another boy commented that he had a lot of trouble trying to close his eyes in class, and indicated that in some classes students could be punished for not engaging with the meditation practice, creating a very unpleasant experience and negative attitude towards the practice:

...kids shouldn't have to deal with teachers screaming at them telling them to close their eyes and some teachers even keep their students in to practise meditation in their lunch time so I think that no one should have to do it... (Boy, aged 12, Lismore)

These qualitative results are synthesised with the quantitative results and summarised into key findings in the section below.





Summary

The key results from the 2016 online survey of Year 6 students can be summarised as follows:

- In total, 250 Year 6 students from eight schools (five schools in the Lismore Diocese and three schools from Sydney Archdiocese) took part in the online survey to measure children's experience of practising Christian Meditation at school.
- Just over half the Year 6 students prayed when not at school, and this had decreased from 71% when the students were in Year 4
- Approximately half the Year 6 students said they enjoyed Christian Meditation
- One fifth of Year 6 students had tried Christian Meditation at home.

The Impact of Christian Meditation

- Compared to students in Year 4, students in Year 6 scored significantly lower on survey questions asking about their closeness to God and the church, and feeling relaxed when being still.
- Most Year 6 students selected that they liked being silent 'sometimes', they found it hard to be still 'every now and then', however when they are still they feel more relaxed 'most of the time', and they said they liked it 'all the time' then the class is silent with them.
- In general, a high proportion of students said they believe in God and they know that God loves them. Overall the students said they felt close to God when they meditate. However, students in Sydney schools scored significantly higher on the survey questions about closeness to God compared to Lismore students, reflecting cultural differences across the two school areas.
- The majority of Year 6 students said they liked being themselves, they were thankful for their life, and said they know they are loved 'all the time'. Most Year 6 students said they were a peaceful person and made good decisions 'most of the time'.
- Most Year 6 students said they were kind to their friends and teachers, and felt like they belong at school 'all the time'. Most Year 6 students said they

forgive people who have hurt them, are kind to their family and other people are kind to them 'most of the time'.

- In general, Year 6 students didn't like going to Mass, however most felt closer to God when they visited the church. There were diverse responses to the question of whether going to church helped them be kind to others. Many students agreed that they liked being with other people at church. Sydney students scored significantly higher than Lismore students on the questions regarding their relationship with church.
- Most students were not sure whether Christian Meditation had helped them to be a happier person, although students in Sydney schools were more likely to 'agree' than Lismore students, where a sub-sample of students responded that they strongly disagreed.
- The most frequent response to the statement 'Christian Meditation has helped me to be a kinder person' was 'I'm not sure'. Again, Sydney students were more inclined to agree with this statement than their Lismore peers.
- Generally, students were most likely to agree with the statement 'Christian Meditation has helped me to feel closer to God', however Sydney students were more inclined to agree or strongly agree than Lismore students.
- The most frequent response to the statement 'Christian Meditation has helped me to concentrate on my school work' was 'I'm not sure', although many students also chose 'No I disagree' (Sydney students in particular) or 'Yes, I agree' (Lismore students in particular) as well.
- The most frequent response to the statement 'I prefer to do other types of prayer instead of Christian Meditation' was 'I'm not sure', however many students also either disagreed (both Sydney and Lismore students) or agreed (Sydney students) with this statement.
- The most frequent response to the statement 'I will do Christian Meditation later on in my life' was 'I'm not sure', however a sub-sample of Lismore students were more inclined than Sydney students to respond 'No, I strongly disagree'.

Student responses to the open ended question, 'What is the most important message you would like others to know about your experience of doing Christian Meditation at school since Year 4?' were prolific, with many students writing a long paragraph in response. Themes emerging from this qualitative data concerned beneficial outcomes from practising Christian Meditation at school, barriers to practising meditation at school, and practical recommendations for classroom teachers and school administrators. These themes are summarised below:

Beneficial Outcomes of Christian Meditation

1. Christian Meditation helps students to reflect, relax, and monitor their moods

2. Christian Meditation helps students to concentrate on their school work
3. Christian Meditation helps students feel close to God

Barriers to Practising Christian Meditation

1. Individual differences need to be taken into account when practising Christian Meditation at school
2. Some children were not engaged with Christian Meditation
3. During Christian Meditation it can be difficult to sit still
4. Children who have experienced trauma may find it harmful to close their eyes

Practical Recommendations for Practising Christian Meditation at School

1. Christian Meditation takes frequent and regular practice
2. The time of day to practise Christian Meditation may matter
3. The length of time spent meditating matters – keep it short so that students experience a sense of accomplishment
4. It is important for teachers to implement Christian Meditation in a manner consistent with the training provided

Overall, the quantitative results offer little conclusive evidence for the benefits of Christian Meditation at school. Students' responses to questions about their relationships with themselves and others largely remained the same as in Year 4, and those relating to their stillness and religiosity decreased slightly over the time frame of the study. However, the students' qualitative responses here (and in the focus groups in 2015) offer a richer picture. While there were a sub-group of students, particularly in Lismore Diocese, who strongly disliked the practice, many students discussed a wide range of benefits they experienced, expressed recognition of the perseverance and improvements they had made, appreciation for the opportunity to take some quiet time during the school day, and shared rich depictions of their spiritual experiences during the practice. It is possible therefore that the survey was not tapping into how students might articulate the experience, or that without the opportunity for wider discussion or thinking (as in the focus groups and open-ended response question) the students were missing the opportunity to consider connections between the practice and personal changes. Most likely though, the inconclusive survey data highlights the complexity of identifying causality, and particularly any longitudinal impact of a small intervention amongst the broad educational experiences and rapid growth and change that occurs during childhood and adolescence. What should not be overlooked then, are the highly reverent experiences many students describe that they are having and the concurrent opportunity the stillness and silence offers to help students feel calm and relaxed. Both of these offer immediate and perhaps short-lived benefits, but

hold considerable potential to accumulate, as a part of their wider Catholic education, to offer spiritual and wellbeing benefits over the longer term.

For further exploration of these findings, their consideration alongside other aspects of the study, and for fuller recommendations for improving the practice of Christian Meditation in schools, please access the final project report.

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Appendix A: Online Survey Content

2016 (Year 6)

Hello!

We are going to ask you some questions about yourself, how you get along with other people, and how you feel about God and church.

There are no right or wrong answers. Only the researchers will know your answers. We will only tell people what all the students together told us.

If you don't want to answer a question that is OK! You can move to the next page by clicking the forwards arrow button at the bottom of the page. Try it now!

If you want to move back a page, you can click on the backwards arrow button at the bottom of each page. Can you see it?

Would you like to answer the rest of the questions?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

What date is your birthday? Please type your answer in the space below:

Are you a:

- ☐ boy
- ☐ girl

How old are you?

- ☐ 11
- ☐ 12
- ☐ 13

Is your school closer to:

- ☐ Lismore
- ☐ Sydney

Display This Question:

If Is your school closer to: Lismore Is Selected

Which school do you go to?

- ☐ [School Name A]
- ☐ [School Name B]
- ☐ [School Name C]
- ☐ [School Name D]
- ☐ [School Name E]
- ☐ [School Name F]

Display This Question:

If Is your school closer to: Sydney Is Selected

Which school do you go to?

- ☐ [School Name A]
- ☐ [School Name B]
- ☐ [School Name C]
- ☐ [School Name D]
- ☐ [School Name E]
- ☐ [School Name F]

Are you Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

Which language do you speak at home?

- ☐ English only
- ☐ English and another language
- ☐ A language other than English

What is your religion?

- ☐ Catholic
- ☐ Other religion
- ☐ No religion
- ☐ Not sure

How often do you go to church on weekends?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Every weekend
- ☐ Every second weekend
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ Once a year or less

Do you pray when you are not at school?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

Do you enjoy Christian Meditation at school?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

Have you ever tried to meditate when you are not at school?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Block. If Not sure Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Block

Was it Christian Meditation? (Where you sit still and silently say a word such as 'Ma-ra-na-tha')

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Block. If Not sure Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Block

Where did you do Christian Meditation when away from school?

- ☐ At home
- ☐ Somewhere else

The next questions look like the one below. To answer them you read the sentence at the side first. Then use the mouse to slide the little bar to a number on the line to choose your answer. The little bar turns blue once you have chosen your answer. You can choose any number from 1 to 5: 1 means 'Not at all' 2 means 'Every now and then' 3 means 'Sometimes' 4 means 'Most of the time' 5 means 'All the time'

This is a practice question. Have a go at answering it now.

_____ I like hanging out with my friends

THESE QUESTIONS ASK YOU ABOUT BEING STILL AND SILENT

_____ I like being silent

_____ I find it hard to be still

_____ When I am still I feel more relaxed

_____ I like it when the whole class is silent with me

THESE QUESTIONS ASK YOU HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT GOD

- _____ I feel close to God when I meditate
- _____ I feel close to God when I am in nature
- _____ I believe in God
- _____ I know God loves me

THESE QUESTIONS ASK YOU ABOUT YOURSELF

- _____ I like being me
- _____ I am thankful for my life
- _____ I know I am loved
- _____ I am a peaceful person
- _____ I make good decisions

THESE QUESTIONS ASK YOU HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT OTHERS

- _____ I forgive people who have hurt me
- _____ I am kind to my friends
- _____ I am kind to my family
- _____ I am kind to my teacher
- _____ I feel like I belong at school
- _____ Other people are kind to me

THESE QUESTIONS ASK YOU HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT CHURCH

- _____ I like going to Mass
- _____ I feel closer to God when I visit the church
- _____ I am happy to go to church
- _____ Going to church helps me be kind to others
- _____ I like being with other people at church

THESE QUESTIONS ASK YOU TO THINK ABOUT HOW DOING CHRISTIAN MEDITATION IN CLASS SINCE YEAR 4 MIGHT HAVE HELPED YOU.

Please read each sentence and slide the little bar to a number on the line to choose your answer. You can choose any number from 1 to 5. 1 means 'No, I strongly disagree' 2 means 'No, I disagree' 3 means 'I'm not sure' 4 means 'Yes, I agree' 5 means 'Yes, I strongly agree'.

_____ Christian Meditation has helped me to be a happier person

_____ Christian Meditation has helped me to be a kinder person

_____ Christian Meditation has helped me to feel closer to God

_____ Christian Meditation has helped me concentrate on my school work

_____ I prefer doing other kinds of prayer instead of Christian Meditation

_____ I will do Christian Meditation later on in my life

THIS IS THE LAST QUESTION

What is the most important message you would like others to know about your experience of doing Christian Meditation at school since Year 4? Please type your answer in the box below:

Appendix B: Email to Principals – Post Survey and Teacher Interview Invitation

Dear [.....]

I am writing in relation to your school's ongoing involvement in the Christian Meditation research project conducted by the Centre for Children and Young People (CCYP) at Southern Cross University in partnership with the Catholic Schools Office, Lismore and Sydney Catholic Schools.

You might recall that in 2014 we conducted an online survey with your Year 4 students who have been engaging in Christian Meditation in their classes, and we also interviewed the Year 4 teachers.

We would now like to invite these same students, who are now in Year 6, to complete the online survey again.

The survey will be open for completion from Monday 14th November and closes Friday 25th November. Students can complete the online survey anytime during this fortnight (please see instructions for teachers attached).

We would also like to invite your Year 6 teachers to take part in a separate 30-40 minute interview during the period Monday 28th November to Friday 9th December. Similar to the interviews we conducted at your school with Year 4 teachers in 2014 and Year 5 teachers in 2015, we would like to learn about their experiences of facilitating Christian Meditation with their Year 6 students. The interview can either be conducted as a face to face, via video (using Zoom), or by telephone, depending on the teacher's preference. Please note that Zoom is a very easy platform to use teachers simply click on a meeting link to the researcher for the online interview. Funding for a casual teacher to cover teacher release time to participate in an interview is available.

Once you've had a moment to consult with the Year 6 teachers involved – about both the survey and interview - I'd be grateful if you could let me know so that we can email them to firm up the arrangements (we will cc you in, of course).

Thanks so much for your assistance with this. We are aware that this is a busy time of the year for schools and therefore very grateful for your support in this final 'follow up' phase of the research. We look forward to sharing the results with you and your school in early 2017.

Appendix C: Email to Year 6 Teachers

– Post Survey and Interview Invitation

Dear

Your school Principal, provided me with your email address so that I could contact you in relation to your participation in a research project on Christian Meditation in schools.

In 2014 some of the students in your Year 6 class took part in an online survey reporting their views and experiences with Christian Meditation. Their Year 4 teachers also participated in an interview.

This year, we'd like to survey the Year 6 students – two years after completing the survey in 2014. The survey will be opened for completion on Monday 14th November and closes on Friday 25th November. Students can complete the online survey anytime during this fortnight. Please see 'instructions for teachers' document and related information letters attached.

We will need your help to facilitate the survey with students in your class – which involves administering 'opt-out' forms to students and their parents – this means they only need to return these forms if they do NOT want to participate in the survey. I have attached the:

- Instructions for teachers about facilitating the survey and distributing the opt-out forms
- Parent information letter and opt-out form
- Student information letter and opt-out form

I am very happy to discuss any questions that you may have about the survey process.

We will be back in touch soon to invite you to participate in an individual interviews about your experiences of facilitating Christian Meditation with your class over the past year. This can be conducted either face to face, online via Zoom or over the phone). Your participation in the interview is voluntary.

Thank you again for your involvement in this important project.

Appendix D: Instructions For Facilitating Teachers

Student Engagement in Christian Meditation Project

Checklist for Teachers Facilitating the Year 6 Online Survey with their class

THANK YOU FOR AGREEING TO ASSIST US WITH THIS IMPORTANT ONLINE SURVEY

If you have any questions at all about this process, please talk with your

Principal or call Anne Graham on 0409 990 653 or Catharine Simmons on 0432 952 997

'Opt-out' Consent Forms:

- 1) For this final student survey we are using an 'opt out' process. This means only parents who DON'T want their child to participate in the survey (or students who do not wish to take part) need return signed forms. Prior to conducting the survey, please send a copy of the student information letter and 'opt-out' form and the parental information letter and 'opt-out' form home with each student in your class (see these documents attached to your email).
- 2) Please make sure each child has read the invitation or, if they need help, please organise for their parents, yourself or teacher assistant to read it to them.
- 3) Please collect any signed opt-out forms and mail them back to the Centre for Children and Young People – PO Box 157 Lismore NSW 2480. Please find a suitable activity for students who don't want to participate in the survey during class time.

Survey facilitation:

- 1) The online survey can be undertaken in class anytime between Monday 14th November, 9am until Friday 25th November, 5pm 2016 and will take approximately 20 minutes for students to complete.
- 2) Each student will require access to a computer that provides them with privacy to complete the survey.

- 3) The front page of the survey provides students with the choice again to opt-out of the survey entirely or to skip questions at any time during the survey.
- 4) In the case where a student normally requires a teacher or teacher assistant to support their learning (such as students with special needs), then we acknowledge that they may need similar assistance to complete the survey.
- 5) You may copy the following link to the survey on your internal school webpage such as a 'Moodle' page. Ask the students to click the link, or type the following URL into their web browser: XXXX
- 6) Please ask the students to commence the survey and to complete it privately without talking to others during this time.

THANKS!

Appendix E: Information Letter and Consent Form – Parent/Carer

Dear Parent/Carer,

Student engagement with Christian Meditation at school

You may be aware that your child has been engaged over the past couple of years in Christian Meditation as a form of prayer at school. The meditation program aims to provide students and teachers with a short period of quiet time each day where they sit in silence and focus on a prayer word or 'mantra'. Children in schools all over the world are practising the same Christian Meditation program and studies have found it can improve their mental health and wellbeing.

Since 2014 your school has been participating in important new research that is looking at whether and how Christian Meditation helps with children's spiritual wellbeing over time. This research is still underway. It is being conducted by the Centre for Children & Young People (CCYP) at Southern Cross University, in conjunction with the Catholic Schools Office, Lismore and the Catholic Education Office, Sydney. It is possible, with your consent, that your son/daughter may have completed an online survey when they were in Year 4 (in 2014) and/or participated in a focus group discussion when in Year 5 (2015).

Because the research is interested in whether Christian Meditation is helping students over time, we are now inviting all students in Year 6 to complete the same survey again. This will allow us to see whether their views and experiences have changed between Year 4 and Year 6.

What will be involved?

If you agree, your child will be invited to complete a 20 minute online survey at school during November 2016. The survey asks your child their views on Christian Meditation, their views on sitting still and being silent, and their views on their relationship with God, themselves and others.

The findings from the study will inform Catholic schools about whether Christian Meditation helps children's religious and spiritual development. No individual children, teachers, families, schools or researchers will be identified in any data gathered or publications. All information will be stored securely at the University - in password-protected computer files, which only the researchers will be able to access. If your child agrees to do the online survey, s/he may withdraw from it at any time.

The ethical aspects and evaluation of this study have been approved by the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number: ECN-14-133). If you have complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Ethics Complaints Officer by email: ethics@scu.edu.au. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree for your child to participate in the online survey, you do not need to do anything! If you do not want your child to participate in the survey, please return the attached 'opt-out form' to your child's school, which indicates that you do not want them to take part.

If you have any further questions about this invitation please feel free to contact me. My details are below.



Professor Anne Graham

Director, Centre for Children & Young People

Parent/Carer – Opt-out form

I,, have read and understood the attached information. I decline for my child,, to take part in this follow-up survey. I understand that the teacher will find an alternative activity for my son/daughter at the time the survey is being completed by other students.

Your child's name:.....

Your name:.....

Your signature:.....

Date:.....

Could you please ensure your child promptly returns this form to his/her teacher if you DON'T want them to participate in the survey – thank you!

Appendix F: Information Letter and Consent Form – Students

Dear Year 6 student,

Christian Meditation at school: Have your say!

My name is Anne Graham and I have been working with your school to do some research on Christian Meditation. We want to find out whether students like this kind of prayer and if they think it is helpful.

You might remember doing a survey on the computer when you were in Year 4 that asked you some questions about Christian Meditation. Now that you are in Year 6 we would like you to do the survey again. Your teacher will help you during class to find the questions on the computer.

What you tell us will help people who run schools decide whether Christian meditation is helpful for you and other students.

On the day, if you change your mind and don't want to answer the questions, that is OK. Just tell the teacher. You can also stop at any time or skip questions you don't want to answer.

Only the researchers will know what your answers are and we will keep these answers safe. We will tell you and your teachers about the important things we find out from all the students who do the survey, but we will not use your name or the name of your school.

If you have any questions about the research please email me at: anne.graham@scu.edu.au

If you have any concerns or troubles about the research project please email: ethics@scu.edu.au

If you would like to participate in the survey, you do not need to do anything, just turn up to class! If you do not wish to participate in the survey, please sign the attached form and give it to your teacher and they will find another activity for you to do when the class do the survey. The letter to your parent asks them whether they are OK with you participating in the survey.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Anne Graham
Director - Centre for Children & Young People

Student – Opt-out form

My name is and I don't want to take part in the research project on Christian Meditation at school. I understand the teacher will find me something else to do while other students fill out the survey.

Your signature:

Date:

Please give this page to your teacher if you DON'T want to participate in the survey.



This report is part of a larger mixed method study led by Professor Anne Graham, Director of the Centre for Children and Young People, Southern Cross University:

Anderson, D. (2016). *Christian Meditation in Schools Interim Project Report: Final Student Survey 2016*. Charles Sturt University, Port Macquarie, NSW, Australia.