

GREVILLEA

November, 2012

Welcome to the twentieth edition of **Grevillea** an e-magazine to stimulate your thinking! So this marks ten years of the biannual magazine Grevillea.

Why "Grevillea"? The Macquarie Dictionary defines "grevillea" as any shrub or tree of the very large, mainly Australian genus Grevillea family. Many are attractive ornamentals and a number are useful trees. It is also worth noting that grevillea can be very toxic.

So Grevillea is an Australian e-magazine which will cover a large range of subjects as time goes on. We trust they will be interesting (not just ornamental), useful and stimulate (not irritate) your thinking. We aim to have articles that will be short, practical and worth your opening them as attachments.

This edition focuses on **Power in Community**.

Several people coming from different positions write on this subject of power. Keith Hamilton of Parramatta Mission is well aware of the importance of good management of its many enterprises and congregations. He writes about different models of management that sometimes conflict in the Uniting Church. Kath Merrifield, the director of Uniting Mission and Education, offers some thoughts on using power arising from her experience of ministry in the NSW/ACT synod. David Barrow of the Sydney Alliance gives an example of the effective use of community power. Writing about power and authority looking especially at the abuse of power, Peter Powel from the Pastoral Counselling Institute writes using a particular approach that draws on the biblical narrative. Finally, David Reichardt provides some thoughts derived from Peter Hartcher a notable journalist from the *Sydney Morning Herald*. You will notice a convergence of approach among the different writers.

Email me if you have some thoughts to share. My email address is chrisw@nat.uca.org.au.

I hope you are stimulated by this edition of Grevillea.

Grace and peace
Chris Walker

Models of Management and their application to the Uniting Church

Keith Hamilton

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Everyone has power. Some have more power than others, but everyone has power. We choose how we use our power. We can use our power for selfish purposes. We can use our power to achieve what we think is best, yet in a way that destroys people. We can use our power to build up community. The choice is ours. During the Sunday morning sermon, people can use their power to listen and engage, or to remain physically present but disengaged and absent. Power is expressed in the way we make decisions. Who we include and who we exclude. Who makes the decisions is an expression of power. The decision making processes in church, the way we manage the church, is an expression of power. It can be 'power over', or it can be 'power with'.

There are at least five models of management. Each expresses a way of using power. Following an exploration of those models, I will make offer some thoughts on how I think the UCA is caught between using two models – the structuralist model and the community management model of management and power, and some implications. Five non-profit or community service models are: the Structuralist or Rationalist model, the Human Relations model, the Cultural or Symbolic model, the Political model, and the Community Management model.

The Structuralist or Rationalist model of management: "Get the job done."

The rational or structuralist model is based upon clear definitions of roles, structure and order. It is an attempt to reduce risk and minimise agents within the organisation taking independent decisions and actions. Rules and procedures predominate. The model has great application to chaotic situations where clear direction and authoritative leadership is required. It is less useful in making decisions in response to new situations and information that does not fit existing procedures.

The shadow side of the structuralist model is that when creative people are bound by procedures and insufficient lateral or vertical flexibility, disempowered people resort to political machinations to gain power. Often in the church the structuralist model and restructuring in particular, is used to resolve interpersonal conflict, and this is rarely if ever successful. By comparison a human relations approach would lead to an outcome in which people are empowered. Jim Collins argued that by building a culture of discipline rather than a bureaucracy

and hierarchy and adding to this an ethic of entrepreneurship, a superior performance and sustained results are obtained.

In the context of a voluntary association like a congregation that has a hierarchical structure and rational model of management, the ability to change in response to changing circumstances is seriously reduced. It is also a model of management that does not 'sit' well with a community management model.

The Human Relations model: "Build a team."

The human relations model is built on the core assumption that organisations exist to serve human need rather than humans are made to serve the organisation in a machine-like manner. Churches tend to favour this model because it connects with the teaching of Jesus that "The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27-28). The model gives greater attention to the personal needs of people within the organisation. Non-profit organisations tend to give great attention to this approach, not the least because people in non-profits are seeking to "give back" to the community. Generally people in non-profits are paid less than in for-profits, but look to receive greater satisfaction from work and have greater involvement in decision making. Often there is greater flexibility of work hours and there can be extra annual leave to offset reduced pay. There is a tendency for people to work more in teams rather than divisions, and the work is described as "client centred."

A strength of the human relations model is that it is people focussed, creates teams, and encourages leadership more like a captain coach than a dictator, and this means a flatter management structure, which helps to build consensus and direction. A shortcoming of the human relations model is the time needed to reach a decision if the decision is time bound.

The Cultural or Symbolic model: "Remember who you are."

The cultural or symbolic model assumes that the organisation is a social construct created by founders and members who continue to influence the organisation through stories, myths, symbols and ritual. Symbols sustain hope and faith, give meaning to life, and bond an organisation. Culture is revealed through the language that is expressed, and the symbols used. The cultural or symbolic model gives rise to vision and mission statements and core values. Core values inspire, inform, drive and influence the organisation. Leadership is more by influence than position.

The UCA church community is shaped by ritual and symbols in which culture is paramount. The core activity of the congregations is the assembly, usually on Sunday, which defines the church. The central things of the assembly are the gathered people who are formed by baptism around the Word, celebrate a meal, and are sent to be the salt and light and to provide food for those for whom nothing is prepared. The Uniting Church further articulates this assembly “as built upon the one Lord Jesus Christ” (*Basis of Union*, par 3). The Uniting Church expresses its own particularity in the one Biblical text explicitly quoted in its *Basis of Union*, when it says “In Jesus Christ ‘God was reconciling the world to himself’ (2 Corinthians 5:19 RSV)” (*BU*, par 3) The context of that Biblical text is that the church has been given the ministry of reconciliation, and this is spelt out in the subsequent section and paragraphs of the Basis (*BU*, par 3, 13), and inspires the name “Uniting.” Here are all the elements of a cultural or symbolic management model. The recent decision to reaffirm that the leader of Parramatta Mission is a Minister of the Uniting Church in Australia is a decision to give greater attention to values, culture and symbols for the whole of Parramatta Mission, and is an expression of this model of management.

The first thirty years of the Uniting Church have been characterized by conflict, as much as great initiatives in social welfare and justice. The models of management can help to map this conflict that has often been between people whose formation in the church was in the Methodist church. The Methodist church began as a social movement in eighteenth century England, but became a structured organisation by 1977, the year of Church Union. The rationalist hierarchical authoritarian and political approach of an earlier generation clashes with the communal approach to management of the developing Uniting Church, influenced as it has been by the feminist perspective of the late nineteen sixties and seventies. Some members have the capacity to change; others struggle or are unwilling to do so.

The great strength of the cultural or symbolic model is that people know who they are and what their organisation stands for and where it is heading. A short coming is the need to constantly reaffirm the culture and values, and this requires both a sophisticated communication strategy in a complex organisation, and constant attention. Like the community management model, the cultural or symbolic model can become inward focussed and closed to external influences. The artistry of leadership is needed to keep the community future focussed.

The Political model: “Whatever it takes.”

The political model has similarities to the cultural or symbolic model. However the focus is different. The cultural model gives attention to the similarities and seeks to build common ground. The political model, by contrast, gives attention to the differences. Power is used to caucus and form coalitions within the organisation so to advance a particular decision. The political manager uses four skills: agenda-setting, mapping the political terrain, networking and forming coalitions, and bargaining and negotiating.

Mapping the political terrain has particular application for a manager even in a community services model, as a way to ensure people are empowered, and to attend to power imbalances before this leads to destructive conflict. Paul Tillich argued that power that leads to justice comes from love that is defined as “the drive for reunion” which simply put, the more one works towards reunion with all people, the more power is given away and, in large measure, the more power one has to influence the drive for reunion (love) and justice.

In some areas of the UCA the political model has been partnering the rational model for decades, harbouring divisions that come to the surface when a community management approach is used.

The political model tends towards a win/lose use of power that excludes minority or less vocal groups, but it can be used to work for compromises to obtain a way forward when an imminent decision is required and consensus is not attainable. The downside of the political model is that power is used as ‘power over’ rather than ‘power to’ or ‘power with’; thus people are disempowered, the organisation’s values are trampled, vision and mission is lost and client centred activity diminished.

The political model can provide a way to map congregational conflict caused by a clash of expectations between members formed in a structural model of church prior to church union in 1977 and the community management model of the Uniting Church. It can also be used to address and work to prevent intra and inter-departmental conflict.

The political model has a clear advantage when an organisation is dysfunctional and rent with division, and a decision is required. It arises in organisations where there are differences in values, perceptions of reality, and coalitions of individuals rather than community. A short

coming is that people may be manipulated and people obtain power through disempowering others leading to winners and losers, and ultimately if some lose all lose.

The Community Management model: “The journey is as important as the goal.”

The Community Management model endeavours to empower people so all may engage in decision making. No one has the right to dominate or assert power over others. Decisions are by consensus. Leaders are elected by rotation, leadership is more by influence and collaborative in nature, and a person may lack formal control over members and their actions.

While some have argued that there is lack of clarity or agreement on what community management is, Bordt (Bordt, 1990, 4) identified eight characteristics of feminists collectives.

These are:

- (1) Authority is distributed among all members,
- (2) Leadership is a temporary role assumed by each member through rotation of chair or facilitator position,
- (3) Decision making is participatory,
- (4) Division of labour is minimal and specific tasks are rotated among individuals,
- (5) Information, resources, and rewards are equally shared among all,
- (6) Power is conceptualised as empowerment rather than domination,
- (7) The process of organisation is as valuable as the outcome, and
- (8) Social relations are based on personal, communal, and holistic ideals.

These characteristics resonate with the community management model and correlate with characteristics expressed in the Uniting Church *Manual for Meetings* (Manual for meetings, Constitution and Regulations of the Uniting Church in Australia, 2008), introduced in 1995.

The consensus model requires extensive community building prior to decision making. The Uniting Church *Manual for Meetings* recommends at least 20% of total time for community building (Manual for Meetings, 1.4). When decisions are rushed, the community management model is corrupted, and the model of management becomes more akin to the political model.

The Uniting Church is more a movement than a denomination, whose founding document, the *Basis of Union*, describes rather than prescribes the church. Lay people and people in specified

ministries (i.e. ministry agents) can be elected to leadership in the church. The Councils of the Uniting Church have requirements for minimum membership of lay people and people in specified ministries, gender, cultural background and age. Congregations elect a chairperson and people to roles on an annual basis. Decision making is by consensus. All members are to be engaged in the ministry of reconciliation. Power is exercised more by influence rather than by position.

The Uniting Church has sought to use the community management model but often falls into rationalist or structuralist and political models. A clash has ensued. Members often fall into rationalist or structuralist's ways of framing the church and decision making, using 'power over' rather than 'power with.' Exclusive sub-groups have developed across the church and some use political manoeuvring to attempt to achieve desired outcomes. When this occurs, the church culture is violated and people are disempowered. By contrast, when the church is "managed" using a combination of community management, cultural or symbolic models, and human resources models of management, when leaders are embedded in the culture and cultural values are at the core of their being, when people keep on with the hard work of building relationships, collaborating and working for consensus and a movement of people, then people flourish.

The community model of management has strength in empowering all people, and gathering people together. When a decision is made, the consensus model means all are supporting and working for the decision. A shortcoming is that decisions can take longer to reach, requiring great patience from people anxious to move forward, and external goals can be subsumed by internal group processes. The Uniting Church's *Manual for Meetings* does have provision to make faster decisions if two thirds majority decide a decision needs to be made. A shortcoming is that the model of management and decision making requires capable leaders able to understand and lead the community management approach, or else people can be disempowered and disenfranchised.

The Uniting Church needs visionary leaders who understand the destructive nature of 'power over' and the influence of 'power with' to build the church. The quick fix resort to 'power over' using the structuralist model of management in our context trashes the collaborative values built around reconciliation. The urge to use power in such an abusive way should be resisted.

Leadership that uses ‘power with’ aligns with our values and will contribute to building momentum as a movement of God’s people, which is the essence of the Uniting Church.

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Using Power Appropriately in the UCA – some reflections

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As a Minister in a congregational placement, and now in a role with the Synod, I have reflected often on the way power is used – usually after an encounter, sometimes exciting and sometimes unpleasant, that has left me wondering, “what just happened?!”. I offer some personal reflections – they are in no way an academic exploration and in some ways they are a scattered collection of thoughts. I should say also, that mostly the lessons I have learned about power have been learned the hard way! I hope these thoughts contribute to your own reflections.

There is no doubt that power can be an extremely effective tool for positive change, but at the same time, there is a fine line between positive uses of power and abuses of power. What makes the difference? I would like to say the difference lies simply in the motivation of the perpetrator but the reality is that it is far more complex than that.

"Power" is a word that the Church treats very suspiciously. Over time, the idea of power has attracted more negative connotations than positive (often justifiably through negative experiences) and as a result we are very hesitant when asked to exercise power or to work with it. While we are sometimes enthusiastic about the power of God's Spirit, we are rightly suspicious when someone asserts that they did something or someone else should do something because "God told them". Further, we are much less convinced about our own power than the power of people around us – we always seem to think that others have the power to change things or to make things happen, but we don't.

Power comes in many forms. There is "power" in the sense of energy, or influence, or even inspiration (in the sense of being guided by God's Spirit). There is power that comes through a person's position (positional power - appointed or inherited). There is power that is earned through a person's being (personal power, earned respect). In many ways, how power is come by is not so important, rather it is how power is used. This is because, primarily, power is about relationship - relationship with God and our relationships with each other.

Fundamentally, there is power in an individual knowing who they are and whose they are. The assurance in one's self in knowing that you are in the place to which God has called you is empowering of itself. There is power in the assurance of a strong relationship that allows for robust conversation and discussion and an agreed method for making a decision. If we can be confident in who we are, we can be confident in the relationships we find ourselves in, which generates personal power.

Another way to think about power comes to me from the Sydney Alliance leadership training (see www.sydneyalliance.org.au). “Power over” is the kind of power where “I will tell you what to do”. The alternate is “power with” where we work together to come to a shared outcome. Community engagement is about "power with" and I would suggest that it is "power with" that most resonates with the way in which the UCA operates. It is the commitment to work with others to explore options, discern common themes and common interests and to work for the betterment of the community out of what we have in common and the gifts and skills that each person brings to the group. Assets-based

community development (ABCD) engages similar principles when working with groups for community betterment.

I believe that the "power with" model ought to be the default position of our work and ministry together in the UCA. However, we also need to acknowledge that there is a place for "power over". Think about the ministry of Jesus. In the first part of his Sermon on the Mount, according to the writer of Matthew, Jesus outlines a vision for the world, much of which is based on what happens when we work with one another and care for the most vulnerable in the community. As Jesus heals the woman who has been bleeding for years, as he heals the crippled man, as he heals those who are deaf and blind, one of the greatest gifts he gives them is to return to their families and communities no longer excluded from the life of the community because of their disability. However, at the same time, Jesus often exercises "power over" - when he names demons and expels them, when he calms the storm, when he names the shortcomings of the Pharisaic system, and most strikingly when he stands risen amongst the disciples in the upper room having defeated the power of death.

In this sense, it is an essential part of our life together that we are prepared to listen to those who are called to name the darkness and brokenness and invite us to change – to name the spaces where we need to exercise “power over”. And this is where we are most reluctant in the UCA. We hate the idea of demanding that someone joins in or the idea of having to leave someone behind if they don't want to go where the group has decided to go. We can name what needs to change, we can even demand change, but we are very hesitant to move on if someone decides not to. It is the rich young man who comes to Jesus having done all that the law said he had to do. Jesus puts the bar up a little higher, and the man goes away saddened (Matthew 19:16-22). In the UCA, we want to chase after him and lower the bar so that he still fits in!

The NCLS figures tell us that if someone in our congregation wanted to start a new worship service, only 1% would say "no" and dig their heels in, another 3% wouldn't be so keen, but 94% would either be neutral, positive or enthusiastic (NCLS 2011). So why are we not starting new services every week? Often, because we don't want to offend the 1%! That 1% is holding "power". The task, then, becomes how to challenge that power.

The Uniting Church uses the consensus method to make decisions. At the risk of sparking a debate I don't intend, consensus is sometimes a double-edged sword. While it allows quieter voices space to be heard, it can also give far too much space for loud voices to dominate. However, used well, it is an effective tool for moderating power. The visual image of a room full of orange cards with a single blue may indeed be the voice of the Spirit calling us to consider something we've missed; it may also be a voice that has been heard and now we need to move on. We underestimate the importance of the question, “Do we need to make a decision now?” It is the question that enables the group to move on and not allow the 1% to hold us up. Consensus does not mean we all have to agree – we don't. Consensus allows us to hear all the voices and then to discern where the Spirit is leading us – used well, it distributes power.

As a Minister in placement, I have sometimes needed to make space for the voices who don't get heard so often to not only be heard but begin to direct where we are going and what we are doing. I have deliberately used my positional and personal power at times to silence voices that have had their go and to invite others to speak. I have tried to

name where we are in disagreement but also point out the choice we all have to either come to agreement (we don't have to like it) for the sake of moving on, or be stuck in the same place until we all agree (not always possible when we have divergent views).

The way in which power is exercised is always a choice – and I hope, one that is made in prayer and held in check by the community of faith surrounding us on our journey. My preferred method is to use gentleness, grace and patience in hearing the views of others and working towards a common understanding, “power with”. And while “power over” is often tempting (especially when I don’t get my own way immediately!) and even sometimes necessary (particularly when acting on behalf of others), my experience has been that the patient “power with” approach, while perhaps taking longer, usually has a much better outcome in the long run.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).

Community Power and the Sydney Alliance

David Barrow

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The Sydney Alliance brings together diverse community organisations, unions and religious organisations to advance the common good and achieve a fair, just and sustainable city.
www.sydneyalliance.org.au

It was a cool Penrith night and roughly sixty people had gathered in the St Marys' Catholic church hall. There was an air of expectation. Ten of the candidates running in the upcoming local government election had been asked to attend the assembly. Two weeks earlier they had been sent letters from the Sydney Alliance Nepean Valley District inviting them to speak for three minutes each and to respond to the call for a specific safety upgrade to a local train station car park.



The chairs were arranged in concentric semicircles facing two lecterns and the two co-chairs seated at the front, one was a softly spoken four-foot nun from the Parramatta Diocese, the other a Uniting Church congregant and regional organiser for the Cancer Council. The candidates were shown to their seats on one side of the semicircle, the Alliance leaders of the local churches, community organisations and unions sat on the other side.

Most of the candidates seemed a little too comfortable, over-confident, fraternal with each other. Pre-election community forums are not frequent, but are easy to manage. Don't bugger it up, and you can usually get away without any firm commitments. A litany of grievances will be raised and disagreements will usually emerge amongst the community itself.

At exactly the time stated, the assembly begins. A local elder from the UAICC gives a welcome to country, and then an influential local Catholic priest in full white cassock rises to give his welcome to 'people of good will'. The co-chairs introduce the order of business. Roll call, stories and then negotiations with the candidates. Some of the candidates are starting to twig that this event is not going to follow the usual script.

The roll call begins; each of the leaders is seated next to each other. They rise one after the other, eye balling the candidates. “I am Rev. David Reithmuller of St Marys Uniting Church, and I will be reporting back your commitments to our congregation on Sunday and in the bulletin”. “I am Father Robert Riedling of Glenmore Park Catholic Church and I will be reporting back to our masses on Sunday,” says another. Again and again, until fifteen leaders in relationship with over 8000 local voters have said their name, the organisation they lead and how they will report back the commitments made on the evening.

The faces of the councillors start to change. They straighten their backs; they focus their eyes, a suited councillor’s smirk turns into an authentic grimace of attention. They are experiencing the effects of a well-organised community.

The Nepean Valley team had spent many months building strong relationships with each other to work across their differing ethnicities, ages, theologies, organisations and political backgrounds. Finding common ground is the foundation of action in public life. They ran a listening campaign amongst their union members, their congregants and their parishes around transport. It became clear that safety around the Coles car park next to the St Marys train station was a key issue. There were uneven and broken footpaths and unlit alleyways. A place that felt unsafe after dark and discouraged people from using the local bus interchange.

The team was made up of Catholic and Uniting lay folk, local union members, people from a local transport action group and a few staff from Sydney Alliance partner organisations. They worked with a professional Alliance organiser through the process. After discerning the issue, they set about researching the costs, visiting the site and doing a power analysis to work out who could deliver a tangible outcome. During that process they identified people who could tell their story at the assembly.

The first was a volunteer from St Clare Catholic Parish, who had lived all her life in St Marys and had seen the area degraded over the last few years and the poor folks of the area left to fend for themselves. The second was a young man from the youth group who had been mugged not at the station itself, but in the badly lit local surrounds. Powerful stories that make the call for change undisputable.

Community organising places a high value on the experience and value of each individual. Through story we connect abstract ideas about justice and power to the lived experience of everyday people. The recounting of one’s own story can be a powerful experience of public recognition. A personal story with a public dimension also catalyses a reaction in the listener creating a moment of interrelationship in a political climate where statistics, slur and rhetoric can dehumanise our public life.

The co-chairs invite each of the councillors to the microphone. In the invitation each is told they have three minutes only. The first candidate reaches time without having started substantively on his policies. The Alliance timekeeper is a manger from a local neighbourhood centre. With a good-sized bell from the church belfry she rings at time. He goes on, she rings again, until promptly the co-chair steps in to politely ask him to stop – his time is finished. It is a re-assertion that tonight the councillors are on civil society’s turf and therefore must play by organised civil society’s rules.

Something as simple as keeping to time, and yet the atmosphere shifts as the assembled community leaders take in the subtle shift in power towards their Alliance.

At a parallel lectern, the co-chair goes on to ask the candidate if he will commit to implementing the safety upgrade, and if he will do it at his first council meeting. His answer is vague, not a clear yes. On the board opposite the leader of the youth group notes a ‘no’ next to his name. The other candidates’ eyes widen at the audacity. Certainly not the usual community forum! They await their turn at the microphone. You could cut the air with a knife.

‘Pinning’ is the process during an assembly where organised civil society asserts its power and asks for a clear commitment from the elected officials. This is a moment of transition, when the status quo is challenged. People are rightfully demanding accountability of their politicians and corporate leaders. At worst, when those in power refuse the respectful asks of the people, the very courage of asking in such a forum is a reminder to whom the powerful serve in public life – at best it is a hopeful breaking in of the ‘world as it should be’, an empowering moment for the everyday citizen and the locking in of a major policy or budgetary shift that serves the marginalised and the poor.

When the second candidate rises, she certainly doesn’t make the same mistake. She finishes in the allotted time and when asked by the four-foot nun she answers yes, yes, yes to the asks. The crowd gives appreciative applause and a big YES goes next to her name on the board. The rest of the councillors follow suit and the councillor who went first, modifies his position by the end of the evening. Ten candidates give a commitment to implement the safety upgrade at their first meeting.

There is no demonization here, no cat calling, no booing or heckling. This is a non-partisan space of everyday people asking more from their elected officials. When they respond positively, pre-planned cheering or ovation may take place. When they refuse, pointed silence.

Before the end of the evening, the assembled civil society leaders are asked if they too will come to the first business meeting of the new council to make sure the councillors follow suit. A resounding affirmative. The councillors cannot ignore the message. In a political climate where ‘honesty’ is of paramount importance, they will make sure not to go back on their commitments made so publically, recorded by media and in parish bulletins and community newsletters across the Nepean.

Martin Luther King Jr. drawing on Paul Tillich said that “power without love is reckless and abusive...and love without power is sentimental and anemic”. Too many times we see social justice initiatives in our local churches remain unspecific, unwinnable, detached from people’s lived experience, and tokenistic. It is not good enough simply to suggest policy, pray and hope for the best – we must organize ourselves locally to effect real change. We must do it well and do it often. Our Christian faith behooves us to put our best foot forward in public life.

Community organising is a way of holding love and power in tension. Living, strategising and organising in the ‘world as it is’, but striving for the ‘world, as it should be’. If we live in a world of hope and justice but remain naive to the real world, power will smash our hopes for justice. Likewise, if we remain only in the world as it is, we lose our hope for the breaking in of God’s kingdom.

Power is the ability to act. We are wrong to think that all power corrupts. Power *tends* to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. In the Alliance, we teach the difference between ‘power over’ and ‘power with’. We express our Christian love through the process of building power by honoring and respecting people and their interests, building relationships and solidarity with our neighbors. Peace-building in a broken world is honest, messy and necessarily confrontational.

The Sydney Alliance has used community organising over the last year to rack up an impressive number of wins since launching in September 2012.

- Two thousand citizens have been trained in community organising.
- Bringing unions, Christian denominations and communities together to maintain the restriction on Boxing Day trading hours so retail workers can enjoy Christmas. This was achieved by exercising power on Treasurer Mike Baird and Christian Democrats leader Rev. Fred Nile (who holds the balance of power in New South Wales).
- Community policing initiatives were won by exercising power on the Police Commissioner Andrew Scipione.
- A commitment to budgeted safety upgrades at Granville Train Station as well as parking zones, station lights and many smaller local wins inside organisations and suburbs across Sydney.

The NSW Synod of the Uniting Church helped establish the Sydney Alliance. In order to organise publically, our own communities need to work well by having trusting relationships, strong discipleship and a culture of action. Community organising goes hand in hand with church renewal, and far from being a distraction from growing and deepening the church, community organising can be a tool for both.

I love the Uniting Church and became a member in my early twenties. I joined out of deep faith in Jesus and in the knowledge that despite the theological diversity within the church, all have a vision for a just world. Community organising is a tool that can help us all realise effective ministries in the real world and confront the public pressures that can oppress our members.

Whether your church is in the country dealing with urban-centred governments ignorant of your local concerns; or in urban working class communities facing the erosion of family time by an unbridled market; or a part of our Indigenous and Islander communities facing racism and economic and cultural inequality; community organising is a way for us to engage our lay membership in confronting power for the common good – not simply outsourcing that role to our various agencies.

On demographics alone, our church will get smaller before it gets bigger. We may be small now, but if we can become powerful and organised, we will see the influence of our Christian values multiplied many times in public life.

At the end of the evening at St Marys, the leaders gather to evaluate. Community organising is a disciplined process. Their faces are aglow with pride. Young leaders speak of “never being proud of being from St Marys... until now”. They are united across their diverse faiths, organisations, ages and ethnicities by a feeling of confidence and power.

The greatest win in community organising, beyond the concrete – budgets, policies and infrastructure – is this new understanding from the participants, now leaders. Together we have the power to change public life for the better, according to their values. Power is in our own hands.

Power and Authority in Ministry: its use and abuse a biblical-narrative approach

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Misuse of power and authority has been present in the life of the Christian community from its very beginnings. Church history is littered with both individual and community abuses of power and authority; everything from Crusades, the Inquisition and church corruption. History, theology and psychology teach us that people given power and authority will often abuse that trust. Knowing that abusive use of power is an inevitable consequence of human failure does not make the abuse of authority in ministry any more palatable. The sexual abuse scandal currently rocking the Roman Catholic Church is the predictable outcome emerging from an institution shrouded in secrecy, where the power and authority of individuals and institutions are not open or responsive to reform and critique. Inevitably, further examination would uncover a whole range of abusive acts beyond those of a sexual nature. This would be true, not only in the Roman Catholic Church, but in any institution, religious or otherwise, lacking appropriate checks and balances to its power, as well as being closed and unresponsive to critique.

A paper of this length cannot cover all the complex reasons for abuse of power and authority; however there are three key issues that give insight as to why this dilemma continues to occur.

Personality disorders

While outright antisocial personalities do not usually last long in church leadership, there are many examples of narcissistic (need for admiration for supposed talents and lack of empathy) and histrionic personalities (excessive emotionality and attention seeking) who can 'flower' for long periods, particularly when they create their own 'faith communities' full of obedient and adoring followers. When these personality characteristics in people are not intense and noticeable enough to make a disorder diagnosis, they still become very problematical in the church. Such people can function compassionately for long periods, but are subject to intense and unpredictable mood swings and reactions to those who are presumptuous enough to challenge their authority.

Attachment disorders

These are very common in church leaders, particularly males. Such people have had disturbing early childhood experiences where they feel abandoned and abused. Experiences of being fostered or adopted, even within very caring families, can make it difficult for some

people to develop a sense of safe attachment. Fearing rejection and not being acceptable can lead these people to attach to the church as a form of surrogate family. As leaders they are often given great respect, due to their hard work and attention to the needs of others; however, their partners and children often find them distant and emotionally unreachable. They are at constant risk of depression, anxiety and burnout. They will also gravitate to the use of power as a way of protecting themselves from rejection and keeping them in a position where people look up to them and rely upon them; consequently, developing dependency in people around them is quite common.

Lack of accountability

Assuming there are no personality or attachment disorders present, there still remains the critical issue of accountability. I am appalled when I discover how many church leaders do not undertake regular supervision, nor do they develop any process of accountability. This can often occur despite such accountability being a requirement of their calling. It says a lot about their understanding of power and authority that they continue to resist this accountability, which is a requirement of other helping professions. Other professions not only demand this accountability of their practitioners, they can and do cancel registration for non-compliance. It provides insight into the Christian community that such authority is rarely exercised in relation to recalcitrant ministry leaders. Without the regular checks and balances of supervision and collegial critique, even those without any particular attachment or personality problems put themselves at risk of focusing on their own perceptions of stories. Once ministry leaders develop this into a habit, it becomes easier to use the power of personal perceptions to dismiss the views of others.

A Biblical-Narrative response to abuse of power and authority

A dilemma in interpersonal relationships in the Christian community is how to create and maintain respectful dialogue grounded in love (1 Cor. 13) while still challenging distortions in the language and behaviour of others; that is, how to be loving *and* prophetic at the same time. Rarely does respect for a person behaving in a very difficult way in the church include respect for the narrative developed by that person. Within our western culture this narrative is usually viewed as being distorted and therefore untrustworthy; however, to understand how power and authority is used, either wisely or abusively, requires a paradigm shift of thinking by placing the wisdom being sought within *all* stories encountered, *including* the stories of those acting in ways that are harmful for others. Even if the story being presented contradicts observable data and the perceptions of many others, it is still the story that person is able to tell, at that particular time, for whatever reason; consequently, it provides critical information about the way that person is currently living out the power and authority issues in ministry leadership. People who act in unhelpful and even abusive ways as leaders and then fail to understand what they are doing, are not lying about their leadership they are just telling the 'truth' differently.

As long as the dominant story in the wider Christian community neglects the wisdom contained in the story of the person being difficult, even abusive; resistance to change will

increase. When we whisper stories with the ones who are difficult - rather than developing pastoral strategies into which their stories must fit - we not only increase the possibility of facilitating alternative personal narratives, but we also help reduce the level of resistance and increase the possibility of also creating more effective narratives within the Christian community (Luke 19:1-9)

To state that we should treat all people with respect would appear to be obvious and self-evident for people who follow the way of Jesus. In addition, the influence of various humanistic psychological and spiritual approaches emphasising the dignity and worth of persons has been present for a long time. How is it then, that it is quite easy to find examples in churches where such ideals are absent? Not only that, such examples often involve ministry leaders of the highest integrity, with enormous compassion for others.

The answer to such questions can be found by paying attention to dominant cultural beliefs and values compared to the eccentricity of 'prophetic' persons who think and act, both within and beyond those beliefs and values. The re-working of this concept can be seen in contemporary Narrative Therapy (Epston and White, 1992); however, like all ideas about human behaviour, such ideas have been embedded in various cultural stories and literature, including the Bible, for thousands of years.

When dominant cultural rules and norms become abusive it is the 'eccentric', the 'prophet', the 'clown', the 'Court Jester', who stands outside the dominant and controlling story in order to draw attention to the existence of injustice and evil. This is inevitably a dangerous task, often leading to the exclusion and killing of the messenger who brings the challenge. Jesus was one such 'cultural clown' and prophet who lived and acted within this discipline.

By entering the 'madness' of the other person as Jesus did, we become *Story Whisperers*; finding alternative ways to facilitate positive change; however, there are a number of significant issues to be overcome before people can act that way. Compassion towards others is of little value if dominant cultural stories and personal prejudices hinder us from demonstrating that compassion. Gone, hopefully, is the naive idea that we can be value-neutral when interacting with others. Better for us to know the dominant stories we live within, as well as our own prejudices, than to innocently and naively do our work as if we think we are above such pettiness.

This theme is wonderfully portrayed by Mozart in his opera, the Magic Flute. Tamino, the hero, bravely and boldly accepts the challenge to walk into the darkness and terror of uncertainty in order to be worthy of the love of the heroine, Tamina. Papagano, on the other hand, is clearly not as convinced of the wisdom of such action, even though he desperately wants to gain the love of Papagana. Here, Mozart reminds us of the tension between those who can live by faith and uncertainty (alternative cultural story) and those who need to live within a more certain process (the dominant cultural story). The first leads to wholeness which leads to personal and community creativity, whereas the second leads to a reduction of human and community potential. The worst case scenario for those needing certainty is abusive fundamentalism that can justify the use of power and the destruction of others (see P. Powell, *Narcissistic Religion*, 2009).

Now lest we become too critical of people like Papagano, we need to remember that his fear is not without foundation. He is only all too aware that once a person dares to enter the mysterious and terrifying nature of uncertainty, there is the likely possibility of coming back quite changed and therefore very different. That change, in and of itself, can be frightening enough (Matthew 19:16-22). What if those who loved me before do not now accept the person I have become? This insight is based on common-sense awareness, borne out by the struggle of many who have made significant changes affecting those closest to them. If you are still brave enough to enter the mystery and madness of the many stories told by very difficult people, such as abusive church members and leaders, you will be changed; not just the other people. Very difficult people literally force us work with them with curiosity rather than irritation; that is, using the alternative cultural story of Jesus, rather than imposing our dominant cultural narrative. It means that rather than developing ways to change such people (convert them), we become willing to sit quietly and whisper stories with them. Whispering - rather than shouting the story - leads to the creation of safe places of wonder and awe where difficult people may begin to tentatively explore with us who they are. By whispering, we hush the noise of our 'diagnostic assessment', in order to prepare for the possibility that this person might open up for us some new insight and hopeful pathway for positive change (John 8:3-11).

To create this safe place I have to shift into a different mode of thinking: I must shift from what I know and would like to achieve with this person, to what I don't know. In the space of not knowing (informed ignorance) I become more curious as to the meaning of the language and behaviour of the person with whom I am sharing this safe place. It also means believing that the very person telling me what sounds like a cognitively distorted social story is actually, at the same time, revealing how we together might develop a safer place for her/him in the community and, as a result, helping the community to be more loving and creative (Matthew 9:9-13)

Summary of the Biblical-Narrative approach relevant to this paper

- Human relationships are ethically and community focused; consequently, relationships are not person-centred but Christ-centred and can become quite challenging (prophetic) for the individual and the community
- We must give up the 'arrogance' of knowing to enter the mystery of the story of the other (informed ignorance)
- We welcome 'ignorance' as a gift that leads to curiosity, rather than as a threat
- We maintain the discipline of being more *curious* about the story than *irritated* by it
- We recognise the complex interplay of cultural, gender and personal stories
- We go where the story invites us, in terms of time and place; consequently, it will not always be conducted within the comfort zone of the church
- The human rights of all persons are a priority; even those who abuse
- We are personally committed to living and modeling the biblical narrative. For those without a particular spiritual/religious affiliation this still means modeling the moral and ethical values contained within the biblical narrative

I have presented the idea of *Story Whispering, Informed Ignorance, Curiosity versus Irritation* and allowing the distorted anti-social story to become our main source of information; that is, *the Wisdom is In the Story*, on a number of occasions and in a number of contexts, from churches, gaols, hospitals, community agencies, to working with difficult children in schools. There is a consistent response along the lines of, *there is nothing new in this idea and in fact this is exactly what we do anyway*. Sometimes the responses can even be quite dismissive; yet, in the very context in which I am teaching, the evidence that this is *not happening* is right in front of me. It is a powerful reminder that the dominant story can cloud the judgments of even the most compassionate and caring person.

Conclusion

As long as the dominant cultural story neglects the narratives of people who miss-use power and authority, resistance to change will increase. When we whisper stories with the ones who have abused, rather than developing change processes into which their stories must fit, we not only increase the possibility of facilitating alternative personal narratives, but also creating alternative cultural narratives. In so doing we also help reduce the level of resistance and increase the level of community harmony.

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Peter Hartcher on “How power could be better used in Public Life”

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The English language includes some wildly over-used words. For example, the Dictionary app on my iPhone lists 28 kinds of uses for the word “love”, and still doesn’t include definitions for the Greek words *philo*, *sturge* or *agape* (nor yet the brand of dogfood once named by the great word!).

The word “power”, though derived from a simple Latin term “posse”, meaning “to be able”, carries 32, ranging from the generic - “ability to do or act; capability of doing or accomplishing something” - via the definition most people understand the word to mean - “the possession of control or command over others; authority; ascendancy” - to applications of power in political, economic, legal, military, material, spiritual and still other contexts.

The theme for this issue of *Grevillea*, “Power in Community”, takes us first to political and economic power. The thinking behind this has been influenced by Sydney Alliance’s view of power, which has to do with developing communitarian, relational forms of power-sharing as ways of working towards “the good life” rather than the hierarchies of self-interest that all too often dominate the world’s political and economic systems, even in liberal democracies such as Australia.

My task is to view this through the eyes of the award-winning journalist and author Peter Hartcher. Hartcher is the political editor and international editor for *The Sydney Morning Herald*. He has worked as a foreign correspondent in Tokyo and Washington, and won both the Gold Walkley award for journalism and the Citibank award for business reporting. His books include *Bubble Man: Alan Greenspan and the Missing 7 Trillion Dollars*, *To the Bitter End: The Dramatic Story Behind the Fall of John Howard and the Rise of Kevin Rudd* and most recently *The Sweet Spot: How Australia Made its own luck - and could now throw it all away*. It would have been wonderful to have persuaded Hartcher to write us an article, but he proved difficult to reach. One suspects, in any case, that he is beyond Grevillea’s capacity to pay! So I shall attempt to draw out some of the threads in Hartcher’s thinking in a book review format.

As a reader of the Sydney Morning Herald’s online edition I have known of Hartcher for some time. My interest in him was piqued further when *The Sweet Spot* was published last year. In this book he developed one of the themes of his 2007 essay *To the Bitter End*, and analysed why the UN’s¹ most recent Human Development Index and OECD’s² Better Life Index that both rate Australia as having the overall best living conditions of any country on earth. We are now a decidedly richer, and certainly a more equitable society than the United States, and we have even overtaken the Scandinavian countries on many of the scales that together measure liveability.

Australia has, argued Hartcher, developed a society and social system that sit somewhere between those of the Americans and the Europeans, and that, contrary to our notorious self-criticism, combines efficiency and equity better than anyone else’s. He cited Donald Horne, author of the famous, sardonically titled 1960s book, *The Lucky Country*, but who no longer believes that

¹ United Nations

² Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

Australia was simply lucky. There are many things that our society has done really well. As Hartcher put it, we have “made our own luck”.

This is all the more remarkable given our beginnings:

“...Australia seemed destined to fail as a European settlement... It was peopled by Britain’s criminal outcasts. It was set up as the world’s biggest prison. A rapacious army staged a successful military coup on the colony’s twelfth birthday. The colony was set in the world’s most fragile natural environment, with less rain than any continent except Antarctica. The country was founded on principles of racial discrimination and exclusion. And it was far from the centres of commerce. If a successful country can be crafted from these ingredients, it must give hope to others. A poor beginning does not fate a country to a bad ending.” [*Sweet Spot*, 56]

Seemingly a pragmatist rather than an ideologue, (he paid no attention to religion at all) Hartcher described the story of Australia’s development from these inauspicious beginnings to today’s success story, not explicitly in terms of power, but of the twin poles of economic efficiency and social equity.

His thesis is that until about Federation the Australian colonies developed economically until they were some of the most prosperous societies in the world. (By the way, for Hartcher and other economic writers such as the Christian Ross Gittins, wealth is an important, but far from the only factor in a society’s well-being. Lack of wealth is certainly an important factor in decreased well-being.) From Federation until 1983 our society focussed upon protecting social equity, but the price was economic stagnation. Between 1983 and 2007 federal governments of both political persuasions have focussed upon reforming our economic system and its legal framework to aid in producing wealth efficiently. It is this fine balance between the two poles that has given Australia such success at a time when our traditional role models, the US and various European states, have failed those severe economic and social stress tests, the Global Financial Crisis of 2008-9, and the huge debt burdens of today.

Hartcher ends the book suggesting three things. First, since 2007 Australia seems to have entered a period of greater focus upon equity. Second he is concerned lest we thereby throw away the advantage we have accrued by too great an emphasis upon this. And third, with the rise of the Chinese command economy now being feted among the world’s nations, while the US³ and Europe are widely seen to be in decline, “the Australian model”, which combines a democratic mode of distributing power in society with an economic system that delivers strong benefits relatively equitably to its citizens is a vital counterexample.

Hartcher has not explicitly analysed power in *The Sweet Spot*. No doubt he does more of that in his more politically-focussed writings. Nor has he paid any attention to the place of religion in the Australian story. However, I have found his simple analytical tool, the poles of economic efficiency and social equity, to be useful. There are now a number of helpful ways of measuring the well-being of societies. As an Australian it feels good that our country fares well in these. However, as the enthusiasm over the founding and development of the Sydney Alliance suggests, our society is still far from where we would have it be. And whether we see the Christian “story” in terms of social justice in the here and now, or eschewing mammon in favour of eternal salvation, we would probably agree that this country, of which we are proud citizens, is nevertheless still a long way from living out the values of God’s Kingdom.

³ Hartcher’s book *Bubble Man*, which amounts to caustic criticism of former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan, gives graphic evidence of the US’s economic decline.

Some Books and Articles by Peter Hartcher

Bubble Man: Alan Greenspan and the missing 7 trillion dollars Melbourne: Black Inc.
2005

Bipolar Nation: How to win the 2007 election in Quarterly Essay Issue 25 Melbourne:
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