

Power in Congregations

Is That God Speaking?

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Based on a paper of the same title published by Roy Oswald, Senior
Consultant, The Alban Institute, copyright 1981, 2002

Available at www.albaninstitute.org

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Introduction to Section D



Introduction to Section D

- Purpose - serve congregations by:
 - Strengthening bonds of covenant
 - Healing broken covenants
- Types of services
 - Preventative
 - Listening w/ Feedback
 - Diagnostic
 - Healing



Introduction to Section D

- Conduct listening sessions and provide support to congregations and pastors
- Lead Covenant Check-ins
 - Review of mutual ministries
 - 12-18 months after start of new ministry
- Offer both education and resources:
 - Pastor Parish Committees
 - Codes of Behavior/Ethics
 - Power in congregations
 - Problematic bylaw provisions



Introduction to Section D

- Prior workshops at Asilomar
 - Pastor Parish Relations
 - Codes of Conduct
 - Power in Congregations



Power in Congregations

- Why is understanding power in congregations important?
- What types of power exist in congregations?



Why is an understanding of power important?

“The issue of power needs to be taken seriously by church leaders. If our church leaders are to lead us in effective decision-making, resulting in a relevant and vital church, they need to come to grips with power and authority issues. When they confront power issues, I find both clergy and lay leaders tending to shrink back into the safety of indecision” – Roy Oswald



Why is discussion of power difficult?

- *When they confront power issues, I find both clergy and lay leaders tending to shrink back into the safety of indecision" – Roy Oswald*
- Group discussion - WHY?



Power is inherently neutral

- Power is the ability to get what you want
- Power is the ability to mobilize resources
- In and of itself, it is inherently neutral
- Can become good or evil, depending upon:
 - Ends to which it is employed
 - Means used to obtain those desired goals



When is an understanding of power important?

- Any time change in status quo is being considered:
 - Change(s) in worship
 - Music
 - Active vs. passive participation
 - Changes in expressed values of congregation
 - Open and Affirming
 - Politically active vs. inactive members
 - Change in roles, especially long-held
 - Whenever “turf” is being challenged
 - Kitchen, library, nursery, sanctuary
 - Newer vs. older members
- When there are significant changes in membership (in numbers, make-up)



Use of Power can Build or Harm

Build the Body

- Create community
- Create a vision
- Invoke Holy Spirit
- Welcome participation

Examples

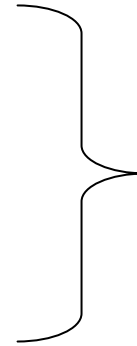
Harm the Body

- Intimidate
- Create division
- Undermine reputation
- Withhold support

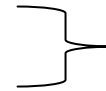


Types of Power

- Reputation
- Coalition-building
- Communications
- Position



Informal power



Formal power



Power by Reputation

- Held by people with high credibility in the congregation
- Natural leaders in the congregation
- May be based upon outside source of authority; e.g., professional standing, position in another organization
- Includes people that “possess the power of the unexpected”
 - Erratic or bizarre behavior
 - Throw “temper tantrums”

Reminder: Power is inherently neutral



Power to Communicate

- Power to retrieve and disseminate accurate information
- Formal channels
 - Who controls flow? Do others have access?
 - How effective are formal channels?
- Informal channels
 - Who has whose ear?
 - Who is in what informal network?
 - Who gets left out?
 - Does information get distorted as it flows?

Reminder: Power is inherently neutral



Structural Power

- Significant roles or positions in the congregation
- Official positions

Reminder: Power is inherently neutral



Power Analysis

By a Pastor

Analysis of Power by a Pastor

Example

	Types of Power				Total Score	Strength of	Weighted Score
	Reputation	Coalition-Building	Communications	Position		Pastor's Relationship	
Person 1	1		1		2	1	2
Person 2		1	1		2	-1	-2
Person 3				1	2	0	0
Person 4	1	1	1	1	4	-1	-4
							-4



Power Analysis

Power Among Groups in a
Congregation



Applying Analysis of Power to Scenarios

- As used by a pastor:
 - To assess power dynamics in a congregation
 - Perhaps in anticipation of initiating a change
- As used in a group setting by:
 - Lay leader(s) or external facilitator



Today

Issues to be Addressed at Church ABC



- Confidentiality
 - Between pastor and congregation
 - Among members
 - PPRC
 - Section B
 - Ethics Committee
 - Section D
- Congregational Leadership

Issues to be Addressed at Church ABC



- Covenant
 - What is it?
 - Why is it important?
- Guidelines
 - Amorous Relationships
 - Ministerial Relationships
 - Current Pastors
 - Former Pastors
 - Congregational Behavior

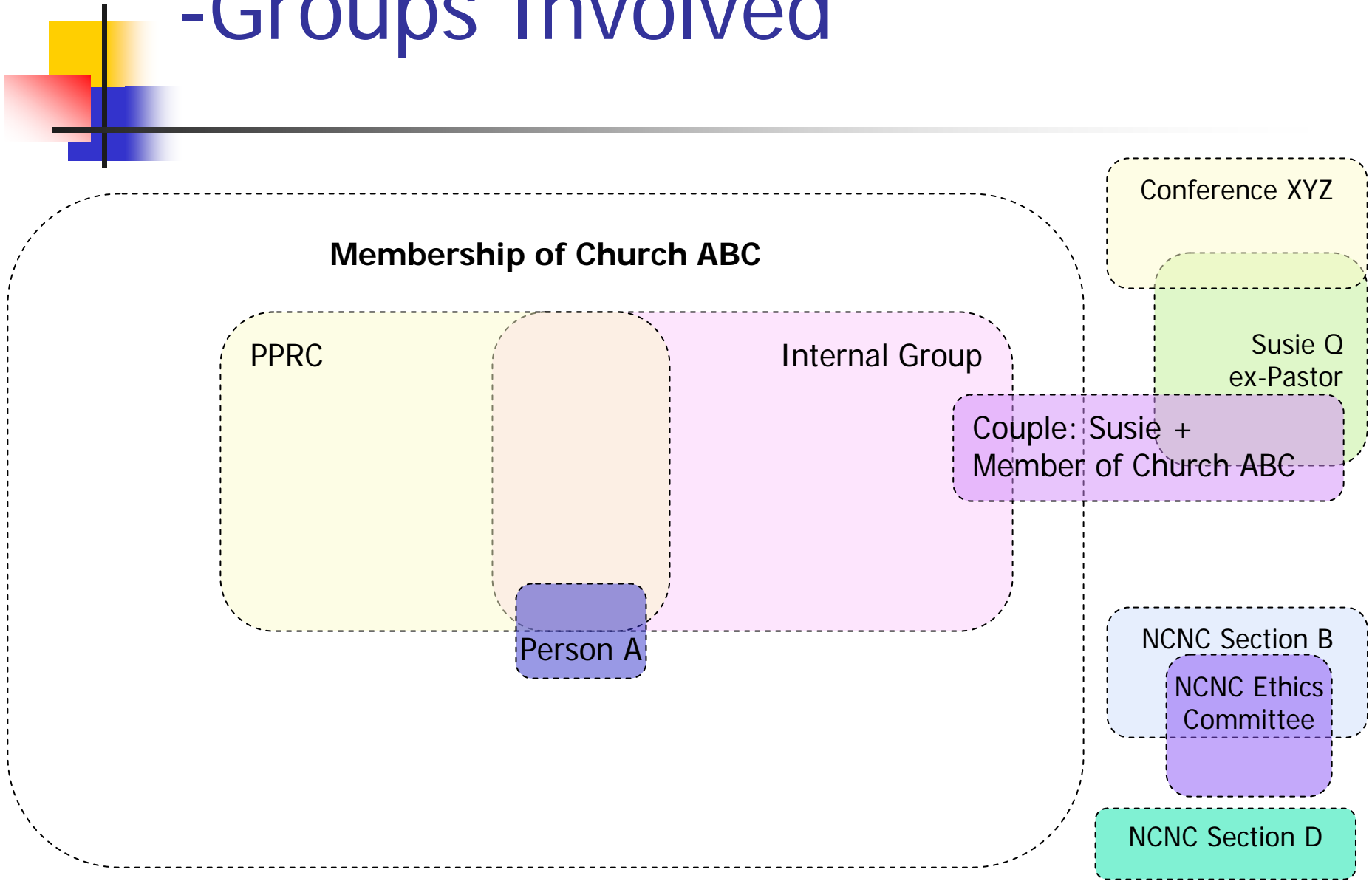
Power Exists in Groups and Individuals



- Formal boards
- Mens' or Women's Group
- Prayer Group
- Choir
- Sewing Club
- Team Sports
- Smokers
- Bridge Club

Generic

Discussion of Power at Church ABC -Groups Involved





Questions for the Scenarios

- Who uses power in the scenario?
- What types of power do they use?
 - Power based on reputation
 - Power based on ability to build and maintain coalitions
 - Power to communicate very well
 - Power of position
- How do they use their power?



Discussion Points for Use with Congregations

- Acknowledge the use and misuse of power in the congregation
- Decide what uses of power are not acceptable
- Agree to insure that abusers of power are:
 1. Identified
 2. Understood at a deep level
 3. Cared for
 4. Encouraged to redirect their energy in a positive manner
 5. Given opportunities for reconciliation
 6. Failing that, consider asking those that abuse power to leave



Closing

- *Gen 30:19-20 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.*
- **Power is a real force in our congregations**
- **It *will* be used, to build up or tear down the Body of Christ**
- **Guided by the Holy Spirit, you have the power to decide how it will be used**
- **Choose life!**