

# Power, Authority and Influence



**“I’m their leader, I’ve got to follow them.”**

Alexandre Ledru-Rollin

## **Purpose**

To help participants understand the dynamics of power, authority and influence in their congregations by conducting a power analysis and looking at dimensions of trust and agreement among those with formal and informal power.

## **Theological Understanding**

Power is a reality of life and is, in and of itself, a neutral force capable of being used for good or for evil. As Christians we are called upon to exercise our power to help bring God’s peace to a broken world – to, as our Baptismal covenant says, “proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ, seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves, strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.” We must engage in this enterprise with our eyes open to the power exerted around us in order to engage it with the love of God.

## **Special Instructions**

If you are facilitating a mixed clergy/lay session have the participants complete the various exercises individually then share within congregational teams. *A word of caution – if there is a high level of conflict in the congregation, do NOT use this module with a mixed clergy-lay group.*

## **Related Modules**

- Conflict Modules I and II
- Habits, Norms, and Expectations
- Leadership for Our Times
- Leading Planned Change
- Role Clarity
- Renegotiating Roles and Expectations

## **Bibliography**

Ammerman, Nancy T.; Carroll, Jackson W.; Dudley, Carol S., and McKinney, William, eds. Studying Congregations: A New Handbook. Nashville, TN, Abingdon Press, 1998 – contains a helpful discussion of authority vs. leadership (see pp. 170 – 173).

Block, Peter. The Empowered Manager: Positive Political Skills at Work. San Francisco, CA, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1987 – this classic work on leadership contains a helpful look at building support within organizations (see especially pp. 130 – 151).

Oswald, Roy M.; Heath, James M.; and Heath, Ann W. Beginning Ministry Together: The Alban Handbook for Clergy Transitions. Herndon, VA, The Alban Institute, 2003 – contains an alternate power analysis and some good descriptions of power dynamics (see pp. 132 – 141).

\_\_\_\_\_. Power Analysis of a Congregation, Revised and Updated Edition. Bethesda, MD, The Alban Institute, 2001 – a classic reference on power in the congregation; download as a PDF file from the Alban website ([www.alban.org](http://www.alban.org) – go to Publishing and under “Find a Book, Video or Download” browse by author’s name).

## General Outline of Session

1. Opening prayer and meditation (suggested reading Daniel 5)
2. Check-in
3. Introduction and discussion of power and authority in lesson from Daniel (PowerPoint 1, talking points)
4. Definition of power and types of authority (PowerPoint 2 – 4; Talking Points)
5. Formal authority (PowerPoint 5; Talking Points)
6. Analysis of formal authority (individual analysis followed by small or large group discussion (Handout 1)
7. Large group debrief, if applicable
8. Informal authority (PowerPoint 6 – 12; Talking Points)
9. Analysis of informal authority (PowerPoint 13; Talking Points; Handout 2; individual analysis followed by small or large group discussion)
10. Large group debrief, if applicable
11. Dealing with power dynamics (PowerPoint 14 – 15; Talking Points; Handout 3; individual analysis followed by small or large group discussion)
12. Large group debrief, if applicable
13. Strategies (PowerPoint 16 – 18; Talking Points; Handout 4)
14. Building trust (PowerPoint 17; Talking Points, large group discussion)
15. Wrap-up and ending prayer



# Power, Influence and Authority Handout 1

## *Who holds formal authority in your congregation?*

List all those people below, along with a brief description of their authority and where that authority is documented (e.g., in parish by-laws, canons).

After you have completed your list draw a line from any person whose authority overlaps with someone else's to the name of the person with the overlapping authority. How much overlap is there? Does this overlap cause confusion or problems or is it helpful? How?

## Power, Influence and Authority Handout 2

### *Who holds informal authority in your congregation?*

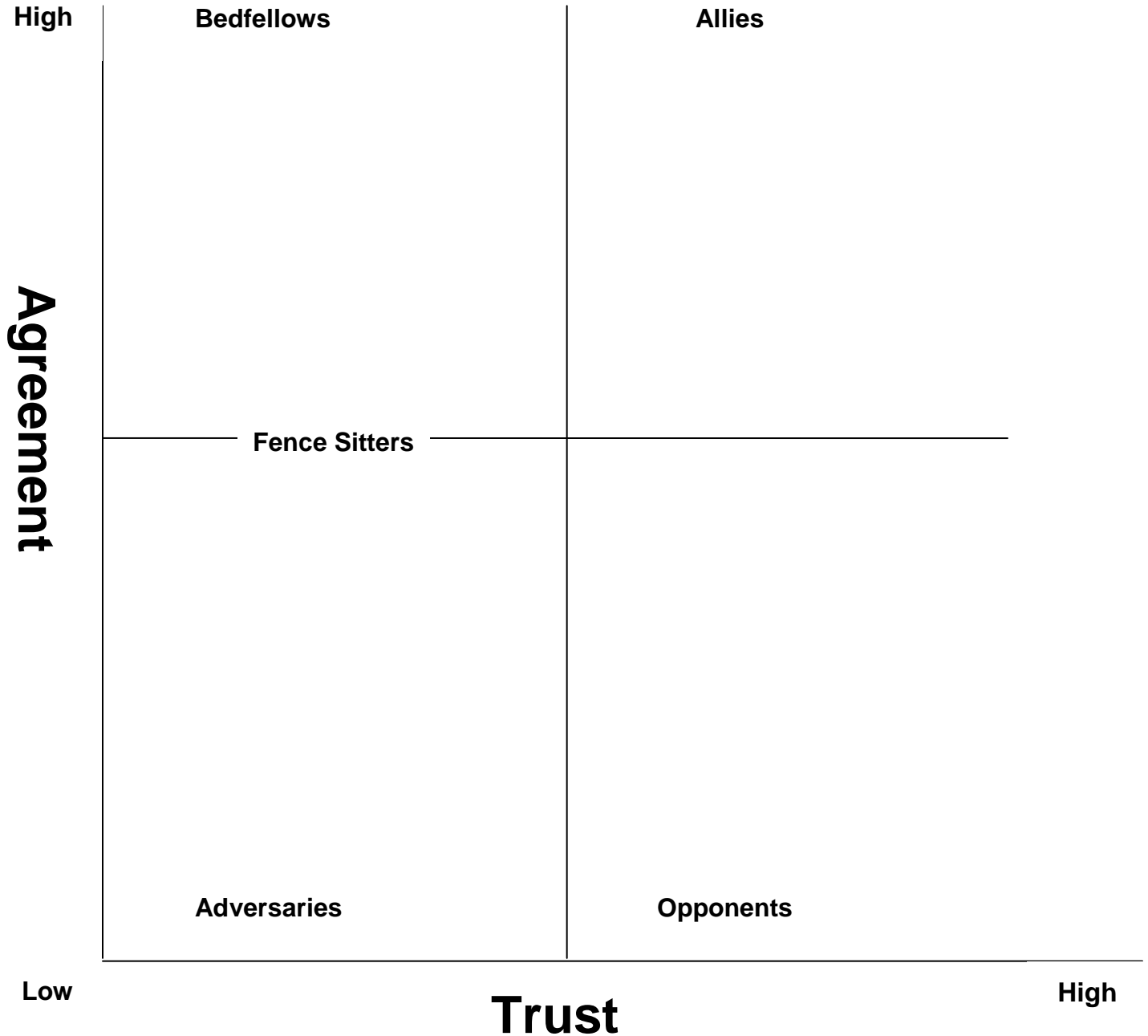
On the grid below write in the names of people who hold authority by virtue of their common interest, high profile, or information control. An individual's name may appear more than once.

Common Interest	High Profile	Information Control

When you are finished, circle any whose names appear in more than one column. Then compare this list to that on Handout 1 and draw a square around any whose names appear on both handouts.

# Power, Authority, and Influence Handout 3

Look at the people you have listed on Handouts 1 and 2. How high is the level of trust between you? To what extent are you in general agreement around vision and goals for the congregation? Place the names of those people on the grid below, which was developed by leadership theorist, Peter Block.



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## Handout 4

*Peter Block in his book, The Empowered Manager, discusses strategies for dealing with relationships (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1987; see especially pp. 130 – 151).*

### **Strategies for Dealing when Trust is High**

Strengthening the relationship with allies and engaging opponents should be the first order of business. Increasing the number and commitment of allies is the surest way to exercise power. Listening to opponents who openly share their concerns can prevent you from making major mistakes. Steps to take:

- Affirm the trust in the relationship.
- Affirm agreement, where there is some, and negotiate agreement where it is lacking.
- To allies acknowledge your own doubts and concerns.
- To opponents, demonstrate you understand their position.
- Look for alternatives (win/win solutions) that will make opponents allies.
- From allies, request support and seek advice.

### **Strategies for Dealing with Bedfellows**

Building trust can help move bedfellows into the allies' camp. You need to acknowledge past difficulties with the relationship and your own role in creating distrust. Steps to take:

- Reaffirm agreement on vision or goals.
- Acknowledge that the relationship has been rocky and express your sense of caution in engaging (use "I" statements).
- Be clear what you would like going forward.
- Ask what they would like.
- Negotiate an agreement for the future.

### **Strategies for Dealing with Fence Sitters**

Fence sitters are cautious and non-committal. Try to tease out their underlying issues or concerns, but don't expend a lot of energy on them. Steps to take:

- State your vision or goals.
- Probe for their interests.
- Express disappointment if they do not take a stance one way or the other.
- Ask them to "sleep on it" and let you know if you have their support.



## **Strategies for Dealing with Adversaries**

Someone becomes an adversary ONLY after attempts to negotiate an acceptable alternative have failed. So the first thing to do is to find out if they are, in fact, adversaries or merely opponents. If they are true adversaries, the more we try to pressure or convert them the stronger the commitment to their vision becomes. The goal then is to reduce the tension and let go either by dropping all contact or by helping them feel understood. Steps to the latter are:

- State your vision or goals.
- Paraphrase their position to indicate understanding (do so in a *neutral* way).
- Take responsibility for your own part in creating hostility and agree to stop.
- Tell them what you will do next, but make no demands – just leave.