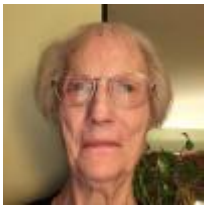
Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



(Unsplash/Dan Meyers)



by Nancy Westmeyer

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Pierre Teilhard de Chardin said, "Love is the most universal, the most tremendous and the most mysterious of the cosmic forces." Universal, tremendous and mysterious … love is the core of each person, yet this love at our core is vastly ignored. Love is the most unused power we possess. With this power, together, we could transform the world.

Today the misuse of power has run amok. The misuse of power is out of control. Perhaps it has always been so, but this misuse is becoming more and more public. The consequences of bullying, lies, sexual abuse, corporate mismanagement and greed, political gerrymandering, the use of inferior materials in construction, countries annexing land that belongs to other countries, the lack of respect for the innate dignity of each person — we read in the newspaper, hear it on the radio and tv, experience it in our neighborhoods, churches and our cities, and feel it in our hearts.

Taken as a whole this reality can overwhelm and paralyze us. Because of the complexity of this reality, we find it is easier to use tunnel vision, to turn a blind eye, and to believe that we are powerless.

There are a number of misconceptions about power that contribute to the sense of powerlessness that we may feel. First, some people view power as evil. In and of itself, power is neither good nor bad. It's our use of power that leads to evil or good.

Secondly, many people believe they have no power. Everyone has personal power. Beyond the power of love at our core we each possess personal gifts and characteristics that we can use to make a difference. We can choose to give our power away to another/others. Or we can freely choose not to use our power so that another might exercise power or because a greater good can be obtained. But everyone has power. In addition to personal power, some people also have positional power. Sometimes we confusedly think positional power is the only kind of power.

Thirdly, we often think that the only abuse of power is when another is coercive or controlling. When we give our power away inappropriately, or hoard it within ourselves when it is so evidently needed, we are also abusing power.

In Luke 8:43-48, we see the woman with the hemorrhage appropriately using personal power. To bring about healing she used up all of her resources. When this did not bring about good health, she did some very risky things. She went out in public alone, she touched Jesus, and she spoke with him. All of those things were against the law for a woman in her day. Those actions brought about the freedom of good health for her. With her good health she could be a contributing member in her community.

Sometimes we constrict ourselves. Out of fear we do not speak up for ourselves or another. We stay silent, and suffering is a result — sometimes our own suffering and sometimes the suffering of others. This is a misuse of our personal power.

We are all so interconnected. Today there are many opportunities to use our personal power for good. Even something as small as speaking up for someone being trashed by gossips can make a difference. Voting, becoming informed about issues, writing letters to our public officials on behalf of others or creation, can create an energy that is good and powerful. Advocating for someone in a health care facility or for a homeless person seeking housing; growing a garden and sharing the produce; responding to another with graciousness and kindness; noticing the distress of another and offering support — these things build up a loving force that counteracts the misuse of power in other circles.

When my mother reached the point where she could no longer be active in her parish and community, she sent "thinking of you" cards to friends and neighbors who were shut-ins or in distress. At her funeral many, many people came up and told us what that had meant to them, or to their relatives. Mom didn't only send one, but sent multiple cards as long as the person was in distress. She continued to use her personal power until her death.

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Recently I read of a young woman who loved her well-paying tech job. The work enabled her to entwine her two interests: technology and ethics, yet she resigned from the company she worked for. Before leaving she had a serious conversation with the CEO of the artificial intelligence company for which she worked. By speaking to coworkers, she came to realize that the project she worked on could be used to develop autonomous weapons for our government. She became the

spokesperson for a group of employees asking the company "to commit to a series of ethical measures," to ensure their work would not be used in this way (as reported by Samantha Maldonado at The Associated Press.) The CEO refused. Although sharing that the project supported the company's mission to accelerate human progress with continually improving AI, the CEO said they would likely provide help for the autonomous weapons. Since leaving the company, she works with others to push for more control over the uses of technologies.

Every appropriate use of power, personal or positional, is an expression of love. Love is the only antidote for the evil of misused power. Personally, as I reflect on my own life, I recognize so many moments when out of fear or a desire to promote myself I misused power. This reality propels me to be more aware of my own desire and need to be more human and respond with love … because I know that love is the most tremendous, universal and mysterious power in the world.

[Nancy Westmeyer is a Third Order Regular Franciscan from Tiffin, Ohio. She started a 501(c)(3) organization, Vision Time, to lead parish missions, priests' retreats and parish renewal workshops, and to provide leadership assistance with structural change for small businesses. Having established a Servant Leadership Center, she is now writing a book on servant leadership.]