Power used wisely is good. It is important to consider the dynamics of power because the powerful are often never conscious of their strength, but the weak are nearly always conscious of their weakness. Wise use of power, whether it be in a family or a nation, while promoting the common good, especially considers the most disadvantaged and respects the dignity of all involved, both human and non-human.

To many, power means domination. Domination occurs when one group knowingly or unconsciously exploits another for its own benefit. This is contrary to Christian belief.

Our society is structured in such a way that many people are pushed to the edges. There are numerous examples of this. The exclusion of people occurs at all levels and in different institutions – families, schools, Church, multinational corporations.

One effect of these structures of domination is that both the oppressor and the oppressed are dehumanised.

We must ask who is excluded and who is included? Why? Who decides priorities? Who benefits and who loses?

Those who dominate use fear. They rely upon blindness, ignorance and arrogance. In contrast, wise use of power reflects the desire to build relationships of mutual respect and encourages us “To act justly, to love tenderly, to walk humbly with God”. Micah 6:8

Source: Compendium of Social Doctrine of the Church

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"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

Nelson Mandela
Profile of a Peacemaker

Sr Susan Connelly is a Sister of St Joseph, who after many years of teaching became involved with the Mary MacKillop Institute, the work of the Josephites, in East Timor. Her role included supporting the Timorese people’s identity through the development of books in their major local language Tetun and the promotion of the vast and beautiful store of Timorese music.

Mindful of the implications of the Australian presence in Timor in 1942, the lack of Australian support when Timor was invaded and occupied, and the injustices concerning the resources of the Timor Sea, she continues to advocate for the Timorese people. She is also concerned about the treatment of asylum seekers and the people of West Papua. Susan is now studying the relationship between Australia and East Timor, using the theories of René Girard on violence, scapegoating, and the Christian imperative of forgiveness and non-retaliation.

Fact File

In Australia:

- 1 woman is killed by a current or former partner every week
- 1 in 3 women has experienced physical violence since the age of 15
- 1 in 5 women has been the victim of sexual violence

www.ourwatch.org.au

Children’s ‘witness’ or exposure to domestic violence has been increasingly recognised as a form of child abuse, both in Australia and internationally. aic.gov.au

In conflict zones, women are still the target of deliberate, systematic and brutal violence by soldiers as a weapon of war and a token of conquest. Caritas Australia, Fearless Voices Blogpost.

Malala Yousafzai stood before the United Nations as an act of defiance after she recovered from being shot in the head by a Taliban gunman for speaking out against the oppression of young Pakistani girls who were being denied an education.

Discuss:

What is the difference between “power over” and “power with”? What place does education have in making the difference?

What Can You Do?
The websites featured in The Way of Peace all have suggestions for action in which you can get involved.

Useful Links

Amnesty Australia: www.amnesty.org.au

Caritas Australia: www.caritas.org.au

Small Island Developing States: www.sidsnet.org

Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network: www.aftinet.org.au

Decalogue of Assisi for Peace: www.vatican.va

For further information: E: pej.cmi@columban.org.au or Ph: 02 9352 8001

“Courage is not the absence of fear — it is inspiring others to move beyond it.”
Nelson Mandela

“Do unto others as you would have them do to you.”
The Golden Rule