

Essay Title: To Last the Ages

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THE MAJORITY OF UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS are “come-outers,” folks who join our congregations as adults. Most come to us on a personal journey, trying to find a better way of being human religiously.

It makes sense, then, that a lot of people in our congregations think in terms of getting their needs met. At canvass time it is very tempting to do an evaluation and ask: *Do the sermons feed me? Do my kids want to go to church school? Have I found the church of my dreams?* These are very rational, here-and-now concerns, and, as all fund raisers know, they lead to a rational sense of scarcity since no one’s needs are ever completely met. Individual generosity approached this way gives donors the idea that there ought to be more here and now. Patrick O’Neill’s in his award winning sermon, *The Shoemaker’s Window*, takes us on a journey out from ourselves and into the commonweal of community.

O’Neill writes about being ushered into the grandeur of Chartres Cathedral and focusing on the incredible stained glass windows. The guide comments: *These windows, many of them, were given one mosaic at a time, piece by piece, coin by coin, by people who wanted to contribute something beautiful to last the ages.*

To last the ages requires giving beyond our own needs into the times we shall never see. The work of generosity is not about checking the ledger of here-and-now, but rather about changing enough to see beyond ourselves into the possibility of more abundant times.

As O’Neill puts it so perfectly: *Here is what I know about communities of faith: they are precious and rare, life-changing institutions, these little churches of ours. They touch people, and they are meaningful in people’s lives in ways that most of us can only guess at, even those of us who have been active committed leaders ourselves for many years.*

This is the path that leads us toward the promised times of abundance.

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