

Newsletter Article: Why Church?

for use in a print or email newsletter during campaign

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Recently I was asked "why church?" by someone who had grown up without organized religion and wanted to understand why someone would invest their time, talent and treasure within a faith community. My reflexive answer, borrowed from St. Augustine, was "because our hearts are restless until they rest in God."

Raising an eyebrow my friend replied, "Even if that was self-evidently true, it still does not answer the question. Clearly it is possible to encounter the Divine Presence outside of church."

In struggling to explain, I found myself using the needs-based language I've learned through the practice of Non-Violent Communication (NVC). NVC posits that all behavior is an attempt to meet universal human needs. Explicitly naming the needs we are seeking to meet through our actions creates greater understanding between us. So, here is an (abbreviated) list of the needs I told my friend are met for me through participation in Christian community.

Shared Reality: As a community we believe different things, but we share an understanding that there is 'Something More' that gives life meaning beyond our individual identities and experiences. We share a commitment to following in the way of Jesus.

Self-Expression & Contribution: Church was where my leadership skills were first named, noticed and nurtured and where I was encouraged to claim and use my voice.

Effectiveness: Through church I am part of a collective body that has the power, through our actions and advocacy, to bend the arc of the moral universe towards justice a little quicker and more effectively than my individual efforts alone.

Challenge: Church challenges me to align my behavior with my values and beliefs, holding me lovingly accountable to being my most authentic self.

The list goes on: compassion, celebration, belonging, beauty, inspiration, connection . . .

There is no community that will meet all my needs all the time. But during this season of stewardship as I reflect on what value the church has in my life, I am grateful for how many of my needs are met consistently through my engagement with the United Church of Christ. And, equally important, how investing my time, talent and treasure in this community of faith provides the opportunity to contribute to meeting the needs of others.