

# Paul Simon (1928-2003) In memoriam: In memoriam

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [Dec 27, 2003](#) issue

This magazine lost a good friend and strong supporter when former U.S. Senator Paul Simon died on December 9. He was a member of the Century's board of trustees and he read each issue carefully. He regularly responded to its content in crisp notes to the editors, handwritten or typed on his manual typewriter.

Journalism was his first calling. At the age of 19 he dropped out of college, borrowed \$3,600, bought a weekly newspaper in Troy, Illinois, and immediately investigated, reported and editorialized about corruption in Illinois politics.

The *Chicago Tribune*, often critical of Simon's political positions, described him as "a quietly efficient champion of everything from literacy, hunger, foreign language instruction and missing children's programs to immigration, ethics and budget reforms." At a time when political winds blow to the right, and social programs are being down-sized or eliminated, Simon continued to believe that government is often the best way to serve and help people. He said repeatedly that government ought to appeal not to greed, but to whatever is noble in the human spirit. He made that stance credible by example.

Obituaries have mentioned little about his faith, apart from the fact that his parents were Lutheran missionaries. He was a man of faith. The first time I met him, he had stopped in the office of the church I serve to compliment us because there were three ordained women listed on the church staff. The last time I saw him he was speaking to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) about world hunger. We were in the midst of our annual battle over human sexuality, and he noted, gently, that in the New Testament Jesus seems to be far more interested in the issue of poverty.

Simon's politics and his simple decency and integrity grew out of his Christian faith. He had a strong sense of vocation—that God calls us to use what we have and who we are for the common good.

Just a few weeks ago he wrote to say that he couldn't make our December board meeting. He enclosed a copy of his most recent book, *Our Culture of Pandering*, about the need to resist the influence of money and power. He inscribed it: "Thanks for not pandering." We'll keep that close at hand as his legacy and challenge.