

Csokfalva, which means Kiss Village, is vulnerable; its viability is at stake.

1. Viability is measured by a sufficient number of leaders and networks in a community.
2. In rural areas that number is having a population of 5,000 people.
3. Other factors include wealth, education, and experience(s).

Csokfalva is in a commune.

A commune of hamlets and villages, that is an official administrative unit of government. This commune, known as Makfalva - Poppy Village - has a population of 3,250, fairly close to the desired population but at risk of losing more population as young people leave to find jobs.

Csokfalva has educated, experienced and wealthy leaders who are in networks that influence development in the village. Starting with those you may know:

- Levente Lazar, whose mother lives in Csokfalva, worked for years to strengthen the village; his mother is a business owner.

When he was 17 years old, after trying to escape communism with his friend and facing torture, Levente came back to Csokfalva and decided to study for the clergy.

- Erika Demeter, one of the first women to break into the Unitarian ministry set the example for young people to break into the Unitarian ministry set the local example for young women to after leadership jobs in the clergy.

When Erika was obstructed from entering the clergy because she was a woman, she asked if they wanted another man or the smartest person in the class - she got in

- Ibolya and Zoltan Farkas own a greenhouse that she started. It has grown into a major operation and now he has joined with his accounting expertise. They hire people year round. Zoltan treated us to a tour of the business and coffee afterwards at nearby Gerenda's restaurant that serves locals and tour busses passing through the

area. I was told later that he has helped the Unitarian church in a number of ways.

- Kalman Szoboszlai and his wife Ibolya are some of the other wealthy land owners in Csokfalva. They own a pig and chicken farm in town, send sheep to pasture with one of the local shepherders, and grow crops. His father lives with them. He retired from church leadership as the lay president. Now the son serves that role. He worked as a trucker all his life and now works for Malkfalva Commune Public Works as a supervisor. He is involved in making sure Csokfalva and the villages nearby have roads and utilities. He gave us a tour.

Csokfalva's leaders have education, have travelled outside of the area, and have experienced development elsewhere. They have ideas for developing the area, like tourism and forestry expansion.

They are getting older and watching young people struggle. They have hope in new, younger leaders like the newest minister in Csokfalva - Lorant Tokes and his wife, Csilla.

When we visited Csokfalva, Lorant and Csilla had just returned from escorting a group of dancers they trained who competed in Finland. They performed for us between wine tastings guided by Elek Kiss, a successful local vintner who also creates jobs and hires local residents.

We will share some of these experiences with you at the Partner Church dinner in January.

Mostly, I wanted to point out the vulnerability and strength of the people in our Partner Church in Csokfalva.

They have local, commune, county, state, country and even European Union networks they belong to that can aid them in keeping their community viable.

What they need from us is help with the foundations of their organizations, education, and even occasional travel experiences.