

Our Transylvanian Partners



1792 Unitarian church building in Csókfalva, Transylvania

Partner Church Program at First Unitarian Church of St. Louis



Partner ministry: The Rev. Lóránt Tokés welcomes a group of First Unitarian Church of St. Louis pilgrims who have just arrived in the village of Csókfalva

First Church's Partners

Our church has been partnered with the Unitarian congregation in the Transylvanian village of Csókfalva, Romania, since the early 1990s. Our partnership has brought us appreciation of the roots of Unitarianism in Europe, rewarding collaboration and warm friendships.

Transylvania: Birthplace of Unitarianism

Unitarianism in Transylvania dates from the sixteenth century, in the time of the Protestant Reformation. History's only Unitarian king, 21-year old Sigismund, opened a debate to decide the relative merits of the faiths competing for dominance in the country.

Francis David, formerly a Catholic monk who had studied in Wittenburg in the time of Martin Luther, converted to Lutheranism, then Calvinism, and ultimately adopted anti-Trinitarian beliefs. Francis David helped convert King Sigismund and most of

the population of Kolozsvár, Transylvania's capital, to Unitarianism before being imprisoned and martyred by the subsequent ruler of Transylvania.

Religious Toleration

In an era of bloody religious strife, Transylvania's King Sigismund, rather than banish competing faiths, proclaimed by the Edict of Torda in 1568 that the four competing Christian faiths – Catholicism, Lutheranism, Calvinism and Unitarianism – would all be tolerated.

Unitarianism in Transylvania Today

For four and a half centuries, Unitarianism has had a continuous presence in Transylvania. Today with about 130 Unitarian congregations and 60,000 members in an area about the size of Indiana, Transylvanian Unitarians are the second largest group of Unitarians in the world. The church is organized under a Unitarian bishop and operates a Unitarian seminary and two Unitarian high schools.



Religious and Ethnic Minority

Throughout the centuries, Transylvania has been a Roman province (Dacia), a semi-independent vassal of the Ottoman Empire, a center of Hungarian culture within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and a province of Romania from World War II to 1990 under Communist rule.



Transylvanian Unitarians are ethnic Hungarians. As a minority in Romania, they have hung on tightly to their religious faith, particularly during the Cold War, when the Transylvanian Unitarian Church was severely repressed by the Communist government of Romania. Our partner village of Csókfalva is predominantly Hungarian and predominantly Unitarian.

UU Partner Church Program

Since the fall of communism, the Unitarian Universalist Partner Church Council has been active in promoting partnerships between North American U-U churches and church in Transylvania as well as India, Africa, and the Philippines. The Council supports a staff in Boston and a travel service that arranges pilgrimages to our partner congregations, assisting small groups, choir tours and youth tours.

Background of Our Partnership

We have been partnered with the Csókfalva congregation since the early 1990's, and about two dozen of our members have visited there. Our first pilgrims were Barb and Les Schmeding. Following their two visits, other groups followed in 2007, 2009, 2011, and most recently, 2016. Each contingent returned having a new understanding of our partners and their physical and social settings. These face-to-face encounters have expanded the friendship bonds that have tied our churches together and also provided insight into ways our mutually beneficial relationship can be expanded.

Work of Two Decades

Contributions from First Church have contributed to the installation of gas heaters and repair of the organ in the church building. Projects in the vicarage have included rebuilding and expanding the porch, building a new gate, and installing better insulation. Finally, assistance has also included a new computer, Internet service and, in cooperation with other partners, the purchase and annual "weatherizing" of a reliable used car for the minister.

Scholarships and Salary Assistance

One of our on-going programs has been financial assistance to students from the congregation. Those who wish to continue their education beyond elementary school attend the Unitarian high school in another town that is too far for daily commutes. Our student scholarships assist with the costs of room and board. We have also given similar assistance to those continuing to the university and seminary. One of

those students has returned to the village as a teacher and another works for a nearby television station. Another on-going contribution is a monthly supplement to the partner minister's meager salary.

Rewards of Partnership

The rewards are many: deeper understanding of our Unitarian roots, international ties and warm personal connections. Our out-going partner minister expressed it well in saying, "Thank you that we could be connected, we could learn from each other, and we could develop not only a partner relationship, but we could be more than friends: we could be brothers and sisters."



Won't You Join Us?

Our Partner Church Committee promotes the partnership and works to connect our membership with our partners in Transylvania. Our main activities are participation in the annual Partner Church Sunday, putting on a Partner Church Benefit Dinner, raising funds through a bake sale, maintaining contact with our partners, and helping finance trips to and from Transylvania. Learn more at www.firstuustlouis.org.