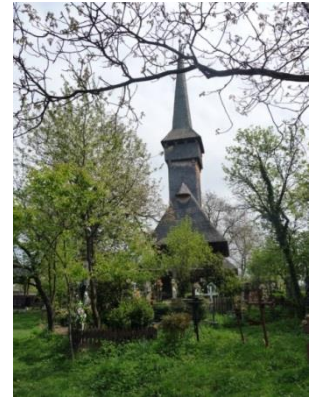


## Visit of 2015

The 2015 trip to Transylvania was actually two trips in one. A large part of the trip was traveling through northern Romania just north of the Carpathian Mountains, a natural border that separates Transylvania from the rest of the country. The trip began Kolozsvár where we visited the 1<sup>st</sup> Unitarian Church which houses the famous Francis David rock, which supposedly was used by him to preach about the Edict of Torda. The group, in the afternoon proceeded to the church where the synod was held that approved the Edict of Torda. Part of the group visited the Alabaster Church in Mesko, a historic church in the area while others visited friends we met at General Assembly.

The following day we drove north to visit some of the wooden churches of the Mara Valley. An example of the wooden churches is Saint Parascheva Church built in 1770, which is located Sudesti. This was one of the newer churches; a number of the churches were built in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.



We crossed over the Eastern Carpathians where we began the second part of our historical tour where we visited the famous painted monasteries.

One of the most beautiful monasteries was located at Suceava. This building was constructed in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century. The exterior walls were decorated with frescos that featured the life of early Christians along with biblical stories. As we drove from

Bucovina we traveled through the spectacular Bicz Gorge.



traditional garb.

That afternoon we finally arrived at the best destination of the trip, Szentgyhaza. Many of us saw friendly faces we recognized from past trips. There were hugs around and smiles on the faces of all of us. It had been too long between visits. Our hosts greeted us with home-made delicacies and a number of people were in Szekler

After a welcome reception, we headed off to be with the families who hosted us for the weekend. In some cases, people were meeting their hosts for the first time and others were greeted by old acquaintances.



That night we listened to the rehearsal of the Children Philharmonic. In 2017, the Children's Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus were invited to Canada to help celebrate Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. 121 children travelled there and 15 chaperones escorted the children to their performances in a number of cities in Ontario like Ottawa and Toronto.



On Saturday we went to a folk event, named 1000 Székely Girl Meeting that was held in Csikszereda, not far away from Szentegyhaza. The festival was a tribute to the Székely tradition that has continued for about eight hundred years. We walked up to the festival site next to people dressed in traditional garb. At the site a large stage was set up where people sang and danced to traditional Székely tunes. A lot of people from the village, some in traditional clothes, attended the gathering.

After lunch, we gathered at the Church gazebo where we learned about the Szekler folk tradition and dress. We were also taught how to dance a traditional Szekler dance.



On Sunday we attended services and presented the congregation with a glass chalice made by fellow First U member, Chris Belleau, and they presented us with a wooden candleholder made by woodcarvers from their congregation. Their women's Organization and our Women's Alliance exchanged gifts. Our gift to them was a hand-made quilt by Alliance members Nancy Libby-Fisher and Bobbi Fisler. Their



gift to our Alliance was a traditional embroidered pillow cover. After the service, we were treated to a wonderful goulash prepared by the women of the congregation but cooked by the men in a kettle over an open fire.

Later in the afternoon, most of us gathered at the cemetery where we held a memorial service for Janet's 2006 hosts, Erzsebet and her husband Janos who passed since our last visit. Sunday afternoon and evening were times for us to get to know our hosts a bit better and to prepare for our departure.



After the ceremony, we walked over to Ibolya's little plot of land on the outskirts of town and were amazed at the bountiful garden and the "summer" house that is used by her and her husband. They boasted smilingly that it even has AC when the doors and windows are open. We returned to the village. Sunday afternoon and evening were times for us to get to know our hosts a bit better and to prepare our departure.

That evening, those of us who stayed at the Minister's house had the opportunity to meet a number of congregants of the Church. We have now known Rev. Kelemen for almost ten years and understand that his home is always open to his congregation. We did get to feel the pulse of the congregation in Szentegyhaza. This is not a wealthy congregation but their cares and concerns about the world, however, are similar to ours. but with a different twist. World politics is a lot closer to them and the experience of living under a totalitarian regime is still in the back of their minds. Remaining true to their Szekely heritage is very important to them, and their church helps them to reinforce this through their Hungarian language and communal projects like building their wooden bell tower and ultimately their church.



On Monday morning, we had time for one last farewell picture. Most of the hosts and members of the church leadership team were there to wish us well and asked for a speedy return. Our time in Szentegyhaza was too short and we wished we could have stayed longer.

On Monday morning, after we departed Szentegyhaza we stopped at a craft village called Korund which is known for its pottery.

In the late afternoon we arrived at the walled Saxon town of Sighisoara. This city is one of the best-preserved medieval towns in Europe. The town has nine towers, cobblestone streets and is the birthplace of Vlad Dracul, also known as Vlad Tepes (Vlad the Impaler), ruler of the province of Walachia from 1456 to 1462.



The next day, after lunch, we headed for Marosvasarhely. In the morning we visited the many churches in the area, including the Romanian Orthodox Cathedral, a Unitarian and a Catholic church. We visited the Art Nouveau Cultural Palace which provided a good explanation of the early founding of the area by the Dacians, Romans and Hungarians. We arrived in Kolozsvar that afternoon where we shared a farewell dinner before our trip back to the states.

This was our third visit to Szentegyhaza and each time is different. Each trip is a learning experience and we come home with a better understanding of our partner church and their congregation. It is a rich experience and we would encourage anyone to take the challenge and let a little Transylvania get under your skin. It is a rewarding experience.